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The Materiality of the Self: A Multimodal, Communicative Approach to Identity

Sachi Sekimoto

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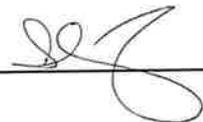
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**THE MATERIALITY OF THE SELF:
A MULTIMODAL, COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO
IDENTITY**

BY

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B.A., Communication Studies, California State University,
Northridge, 2003

M.A., Communication Studies, California State University,
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2011

DEDICATION

To my parents, Toshiro Sekimoto and Kazue Sekimoto. Their words of wisdom have always been part of my scholarly and personal journey.

To my partner, Christopher Brown. His love, support, and friendship enabled me to complete this dissertation.

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in continental philosophy taught by Dr. Adrian Johnston at the Department of Philosophy.

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**THE MATERIALITY OF THE SELF:
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to propose *a multimodal approach* as an alternative way of theorizing and researching identity. The multimodal approach utilizes four modes of interaction—multidirectional interpellation, spatiality, temporality, and corporeality—to explore the processes of interaction and engagement between an individual and his/her social worlds. The multimodal approach focuses on the *materiality of lived experience* and *the process of interaction and engagement* between an individual and his/her social worlds through which his or her identity materializes. I apply the multimodal approach to analyze two autobiographical texts in which the authors deal with Asian identity in different cultural and discursive contexts in Japan and Asian

America. I focus on the idea of Asia and explore how it translates into and interacts with personal experiences of the autobiographical subjects to constitute not only their identities but also Asia itself.

The primary focus of this dissertation is to shed light on the situated and embodied experiences of individual subjects whose identities and subjectivities materialize into existence through complex interactions among cultural significations, personal acts and interpretations, as well as multiple and competing ideological environments. With the emphasis on the lived and embodied experience, this study benefits from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Moreover, with the critique of totalizing social categories (race, gender, class, etc.) and the emphasis on the contested boundaries of discursively articulated differences, this study also takes a poststructuralist approach to identity theorizing. Combined together, what I propose as a multimodal approach takes into account both the subjectively lived experience (a living, thinking, acting, and intentional subject in the world) and the historically situated ideological and discursive environments (a subject as a contingent product of historical and discursive construction) in constituting one's identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Situated in my own transnational positionality, this study originates from my experiences of navigating in multiple discursive and geopolitical spaces of Japan, the United States, and “Asia.” Due to my extended stay in the United States and occasional trips home, I navigate across the logics of both Japanese culturalist national identities and racialized Asian American identities. From Japanese cultural nationalism to Asian American racial ethnogenesis (Kibria, 2002), “Asia”¹ seems to function as the largest common denominator in this process. However, when the modern landscape of Asia is seen at this particular intersection of multiple cultural and historical realities, Asia is not a static geography but an imaginary landscape (Appadurai, 1996) that is viewed and signified quite differently, yet equally crucially, for both Japanese and Asian American identities.

On a macro level, I participate in multiple realities and contradictory discourses that constitute what we call Asia—from the U.S. mainstream discourse on Asia with a deeply embedded Orientalist gaze to the oppositional and subcultural Asian American popular discourse on Asia to the nationalist or pan-Asianist discourse on Asia in Japan. Various groups deploy locally specific discursive strategies and contexts to construct Asia to orient and re-orient its cultural and historical location in relation to the rest of the world. A particular local construction of Asia is often so far away from the ways in which Asia is constructed and utilized in other discursive and geopolitical spaces. These

¹ The quotation marks suggest that Asia is a contested ideological space. The term Asia should be read in this way for the rest of the study. For the purpose of readability, I will discontinue the use of quotation marks.

multiple and contradictory discourses constitute the understanding of Asia in the form of what I call “dialogue without dialogue.” That is, although locally specific representations of Asia are heterogeneous and unique, they nonetheless depend on the existence of other Asias and other locally specific, yet historically interrelated, ideological embodiments of Asia.

For example, in the United States, the idea of the Asia-Pacific as a unified region was constructed through images and stories in order to advance the U.S. political and economic interests in the region since the late nineteenth century (Eperjesi, 2005). In Japan, the idea of Asia was highly politicized as a pan-ethnic collectivity and a rationale for imperialist expansion by the Japanese government in the early twentieth century because of the Orientalist and colonialist gaze of the West toward Asia (Sun, 2000a, 2000b). For Asians in the United States, Asian American as a collective identity locally in the United States is intricately related to, and shaped by, the U.S. historical discourses on Asia (Lee, 1999). Floating images and significations of Asia are utilized and appropriated across different social and historical contexts to achieve different political goals. These heterogeneous significations are in dialogue with each other without necessarily being mutually comprehensible or agreeable.

This study is motivated by my position at the intersection of my “being Japanese” and “becoming Asian” in the United States, where this “dialogue without dialogue” on Asia becomes even more visible and problematic. Since I am from a country in East Asia called Japan, it is reasonable to say that I am from the geographical region called Asia. There is a deep ontological divide, however, in claiming myself to be *from Asia* and calling myself *Asian*. What makes me Asian—rather than Japanese—is not necessarily

the geographical Asia I come from, but the particular ways in which the region is imagined and its people racialized. In other words, Asian American identities in the United States refer to racialized collectivities particular to the specific socio-historical and ethnoracial discourses of the United States, rather than the shared place of ancestral origin. While there are lived realities and heterogeneities in the vast geographical area called Asia, being Asian in the United States generates a particular racialized subjectivity through which I begin to see Asia much differently than as a mere geographical region.

On the micro and personal level, the entry point into this dissertation is my observation that despite the fact that the multiple discourses of Asia are social and historical inventions, they nonetheless impact the way I view myself and who I can be in a given context. A student from Ghana once told me that he never saw himself as Black until he came to the United States. He spoke about his experience of racialization that is particular to U.S. American contexts—an experience that forcibly and violently pulls him and makes him a “Black” man. Likewise, I became Asian as I found myself implicated in the images, discourses, and histories of Asian Americans in the United States. Although the hegemonic racial images, stereotypes, and representations are socially and historically invented, when I began to see myself as “Asian,” there was something irreversible in the process, something that cannot simply be undone through symbolic intervention or unlearning of internalized racism. In other words, I cannot simply be “de-Asianized” by learning that race is a social construction, that the historical discourses on Asia are mere Orientalist fabrications, or by simply leaving the United States.

In an effort to bridge the macro level observation (the multiple and contradictory discourses on Asia) and the micro level experience (becoming Asian, rather than simply

being labeled or categorized as such), I began to seek a way to rethink identity from an alternative point of view. The transnational discourses on Asia interact with my embodied experiences in complex ways, making it difficult to understand my identity formation only as a social construction based on race, gender, class, nationality, and so forth. As a scholar-in-training, I learned to politicize my identity and social location. To politicize my identity means to critically examine myself as a historically materialized subject within the larger relations of power. To politicize my identity also means to find my voice and agency in articulating and transforming such relations of power. As a scholar-in-training, I also learned that identities are socially and culturally constructed. I learned how to analyze, deconstruct, and critique discourses and representations that construct, objectify, and commodify the Other. I learned that the politics of representations is arbitrary and subject to change over time.

However, I came to realize that the process of politicization and deconstruction are deeply paradoxical. For instance, the process of politicizing my acquired “Asian” identity was integral to my experience of *becoming* Asian. Likewise, the process of politicizing my social location as a woman gave me a renewed sense of *being a woman* from a feminist standpoint, rather than liberating myself from the category as a social and oppressive construct. I could not simply shed my label “Asian” or “woman” to provide symbolic interventions for racism or sexism; there was something more real and material to the experience of becoming Asian than a mere symbolic labeling attached to my physical characteristics and national origin. That is, identity—as an ongoing product of both social, political, and symbolic constructions *and* a lived, embodied, and enacted subject—entails a sense of *materiality*. Although a geneticist will not find a new “Asian”

quality in my blood or DNA, the experience of becoming Asian in the United States is ontologically real and material in my experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to propose *a multimodal approach*² as an alternative way of theorizing and researching identity. The multimodal approach utilizes four modes of interaction—multidirectional interpellation, spatiality, temporality, and corporeality—to explore the processes of interaction and engagement between an individual and his/her social worlds. In this approach, I contest social categories of identity (i.e. race, class, and gender) as given, and shift my attention to the modes of interaction through which such identity categories become a material, lived reality not only for the individual subject but also as a historically materialized collective social reality. This is not to replace social categories of identity altogether; rather, my goal is to shift the object of inquiry to the tension between the phenomenological experience and the ideological structure, between the process of becoming and being made into a subject. In this dissertation, this *materiality of lived experience* is a central theme, because identity could not possibly function as a system of power in modern society without having an impact on not only what we know about ourselves (identity as epistemology), but also on how we experience who we are (identity as ontology). Additionally, I am interested in the process through which identity emerges and gains both epistemological and ontological realness in our lives. Thus, another central theme in this dissertation is *the process of interaction and engagement* between an individual and his/her social worlds through which his or her identity materializes.

² I explicate this approach in detail in Chapter 4.

The shift from a sociological theory of identity into a communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993) requires the politics of identity to be theorized beyond the terms of categorical intersections of various social positions. Identity must also be theorized in terms of the communicative processes of interaction and engagement between an individual and his or her social worlds within which identity materializes into existence. Thus, rather than using social categories and positions as the primary entry point, I utilize multiple modes of interaction and engagement as a way of exploring how an individual comes to identify her- or himself in the world. In accomplishing this task, I apply the multimodal approach to analyze two autobiographical texts in which the authors deal with Asian identity in different cultural and discursive contexts in Japan and Asian America. I focus on the idea of Asia and explore how it translates into and interacts with personal experiences of the autobiographical subjects to constitute not only their identities but also Asia itself.

The primary focus of this dissertation is to shed light on the situated and embodied experiences of individual subjects whose identities and subjectivities materialize into existence through complex interactions among cultural significations, personal acts and interpretations, as well as multiple and competing ideological environments. With the emphasis on the lived and embodied experience, this study benefits from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1970; Ihde, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Moreover, with the critique of totalizing social categories (race, gender, class, etc.) and the emphasis on the contested boundaries of discursively articulated differences, this study also takes a poststructuralist approach to identity theorizing (Alcoff, 1988; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1983; Lacan, 1966).

Combined together, what I propose as a multimodal approach takes into account both the subjectively lived experience (a living, thinking, acting, and intentional subject in the world) and the historically situated ideological and discursive environments (a subject as a contingent product of historical and discursive construction) in constituting one's identity. In the following, I critique the assumptions behind the way identity is predominantly theorized in order to highlight the broader context in which rethinking identity is required.

The Ideology of Identity

The term „identity“ has gained significant epistemological authority and visibility in public and intellectual discourses for the past decades. Identity continues to be not only an academic buzzword, but also the very ingredient of social reality and the force that drives social trans/formation (Hall & du Gay, 1996; Hall, 1994; Georgiou, 2006; Gergen, 1991). We are concerned about our (and other's) identity well beyond the chaotic period of adolescence; our lives are driven by the political machinery of identity that determines our lifestyle, consumer activity, career choices, relationships, political affiliations, and so on. Identity materializes in social life as a race between the desire for alternative modes of being and the capitalist force that simplifies, repackages, and commodifies them for the market (hooks, 1992). Identity materializes in social life as a resource for economic, political, and cultural maintenance as well as change (Davis, 2000). Simply put, we live in an identity-driven, identity-saturated, and identity-obsessed world. This reflects the continuing significance of the relationship between the individual and his/her belonging to the social/collective in cultural, political, and economic life.

In social and cultural theorizing, the nature of identity is constantly disputed, ranging from essentialist and deterministic views to anti-essentialist and social constructionist views (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lopez, 1994; Gould, 1981/1996; Marshall, 1994). The departure from Marxist class-based essentialism launched a number of approaches to identity politics, including gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and various systems of power that have historically produced different subject positions (Sarup, 1996). In other words, the analytical focus shifted from the politics of class struggle to the politics of difference, reflecting the historical and social context after World War II. Most notably, the concept of “intersectionality” emerged as a fundamental interpretive framework in approaching one’s identity (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). From an intersectional perspective, an individual’s subject position is not determined by a single category, but s/he finds her/himself at the intersection of various identity positions and experiences. Social constructionism as a theoretical approach to identity also emerged as a widely accepted assumption in understanding identity politics. That is, an individual’s identity is not innate or biological, but is constructed through the process of signification, socialization, and negotiation (Hall, 1997).

Based on the brief history of identity theorizing in the past several decades, it becomes evident that through various theoretical conversations, identity as an object of study emerged, in some way, as *a politics of categorization in context*. While the fluid and contextual nature of identity formation is recognized, the way identity is theorized nonetheless refers back to the complex, yet limited, number of categories and experiences associated with them: race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, age, physical ability, and so on. It is indisputable that these categories primarily determine one’s social

experience and sense of self. These categories of difference are the instrument of the machinery of identity that produces and maintains social relations and hierarchy. However, the question remains: if these categories themselves are social constructions, how do we know that these categories, combined together, constitute what we call „identity“? In other words, the understanding of what we call identity is necessarily shaped by the kind of entry point used to study identity as an object of study. If the politics of difference is engineered by its arbitrariness, it is not without epistemological consequence to limit the entry point to the “trinity” of identity politics (race, class, and gender) and other categories that are widely recognized as socially salient. When it comes to theorizing identity, are we subjects of our own categorization? In an effort to dispute biological determinism, have we become too comfortable with social determinism (Calhoun, 1994)? Can all experiences and subjectivities be reduced into these primary categories—or intersections of these variables—available at our disposal? How can identity be theorized differently if other dimensions were added to the picture? How would identity politics change if identities were theorized differently?

It has become increasingly important and relevant that communication scholars interrogate the foundational assumptions embedded in the ways we approach identity as an object of study. This means questioning the ideology of identity the academic community has come to accept as the norm, and rethinking the theoretical and methodological approaches to constructing knowledge about identity. Today, we find ourselves in a particular historical context in which this rethinking is urgently required. Rethinking identity is necessary due to the shifting conditions of what constitutes a modern society. Calhoun (1994) argues that “it is no accident that discourse about

identity seems in some important sense distinctively modern—seems, indeed, intrinsic to and partially defining the modern era” (p. 9). Over the past decades, identity as an object of study has come to include multiple categories to reflect and unravel the formation of modernity and its consequences. Race, class, and gender, for example, were instrumental in producing modern subjects, social institutions, and systems of domination integral in the spread of modernity (Winant, 2001). The way identity is constituted as an object of study, therefore, both critically reflects, and is largely confined by, the project of modernity.

There are two types of criticisms for using the instruments of modernity in theorizing identity in today’s globalized world. The first criticism refers to the complicity between the theories of identity and the logics of modernity. Grossberg (1996) critiques the complicit relations between the theories of identity in cultural studies and the logics of modernity. He argues that the mainstream theories of identity in cultural studies are “ultimately unable to contest the formations of modern power at their deepest levels because they remain within the strategic forms of modern logic: difference, individuality, and temporality” (p. 93). According to Grossberg, the underlying assumptions about identity reinforce, rather than challenge, the modern social structure that produces the systems of domination: “If identity is somehow constituted by and constitutive of modernity, then the current discourses of identity fail to challenge their own location within, and implication with, the formation of modern power” (p. 89).

How do we account for Grossberg’s critique when the focal point of identity politics has been to challenge the modern systems of domination and to claim the right to self-representation? The social constructionist approach to theorizing race, class, and

gender, for example, played a pivotal role in de-naturalizing these identity positions. However, we began to see its reverse effect when social constructionism became widely accepted as “true” in academic discourse. The theoretical attention paid to the social construction of identities seems to paradoxically result in naturalizing these identity categories as given across different cultures, places, and time periods. That is, we run the risk not only of social determinism but also global determinism of the relevance of the Western identity categories across the world. What needs to be de-naturalized is not only the category itself but the assumption that the semantic equivalence and comparable social realities of race, gender, and class exist cross-culturally and globally. For example, when we assume that race—as conceptualized and constructed historically by Western theorists—exists in non-Western societies, we are relying on the project of modernity that diffuses Western systems of thought across the world. Globally speaking, race exists not because it is socially constructed but because it is the outcome of the differential diffusion of colonial modernity in non-Western societies (Hesse, 2007). In short, in an effort to deconstruct the “constructed-ness” of identities, we must be attentive to the effect of modernity that makes such academic inquiries possible in the first place across different geographical and cultural locations.

The second criticism is about the changing contexts in which identities are theorized today. Whether the project of modernity is viewed as unfinished, failed, or transcended, the condition of the world has become much more complex due to the large-scale, accelerated flows of people, capital, images, and meaning across physical and cultural boundaries (Appadurai, 1990, 1996; Grewal, 2005; Iwabuchi, 2002; Chambers, 1994). Within the past several decades we have witnessed globally interconnected and

growing heterogeneities of experience, technologies, senses of belonging, subjectivities, and practices. At the historical intersections of globalization, neocolonialism, and postcolonialism, people create a global network of migration, resulting in de-territorialized and hybridized forms of cultural practices and experiences (Georgiou, 2006). Most importantly, what complicates the politics of identity at this historical juncture is that the disparate systems of meaning collide and merge into each other to construct a complex nexus of realities and identities. A particular system of meaning—often defined as culture—is de/territorialized and uprooted from a geographical territory or a particular body (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008). That is, not only do people inhabit multiple socially constructed categories, they also inhabit multiple systems of meaning. This results in a condition in which one’s subjectivity does not necessarily correspond to one’s subject position.

These critiques and questions of identity are not meant to deny the significance of traditional identity politics and the way it continues to shape social relations among different groups of people today. Rather, my goal is to rethink the ideology of identity and to seek alternative ways that identity as an object of study—as well as an instrument of social reality and social transformation—can be articulated. This means to theorize identity beyond a composition of existing social categories, to be attentive to the changing global context, and to imagine alternative ways in which social relations can be imagined and enacted.

Autobiographical Writing as Situated Expression of Self

In this dissertation, I analyze autobiographical writing by Japanese and Asian American writers. I select particular texts that centralize “Asia” or “Asian” as a theme

that grounds the personal narrative. I approach autobiography not as a literary genre but as a site of situated expression of the self, in which the autobiographical “I” is symbolically mediated by multiple cultural locations. Autobiography is chosen as a focus of my textual analysis because it exemplifies the characteristics of identity as “a process of mediation” rather than “a product of representation” (Meehan, 2008, p. 48). The act of writing and reading autobiography exemplifies the contested and interrelated nature of identity formation and negotiation. The autobiographical “I” fluctuates and is fragmented in the sea of intertextuality, shaped by the relational context between the author and the reader, the writer and the written, and the audience’s mode of reading. Because autobiographical writings foreground the personal voice and lived experience in the larger cultural and historical contexts, they provide a useful space to “test” the multimodal approach.

Overview of the Study

In Chapter 2, I provide an historical overview of discourses that shape the idea of Asia situated in the United States, Japan, and Asian America. I also provide an overview of several theoretical orientations that deal with the relationships between the East and the West, including Asiaticity, Orientalism, modernity, and transnationalism. Chapter 3 functions as a theoretical building block for the proposed methodological approach. I provide an overview of theories of identity in communication scholarship, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, poststructuralism, the notion of materiality, and the relationships between identity and autobiography.

In Chapter 4, I discuss my methodological approach, describe the autobiographical texts, and introduce my research questions. As stated earlier, developing

this methodological framework is one of the major purposes in this study. I introduce the multimodal approach and explicate the four modes of interaction and engagement that I will focus on in my analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to build a strong methodological foundation that enables alternative ways of reading identity in autobiographical texts. In Chapters 5 and 6, I provide my analysis of the two autobiographical texts chosen for analysis: *Asian Japanese* and *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey*. In Chapter 7, I conclude my study and discuss the theoretical and methodological implications that emerge through this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO
AN HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF DISCOURSES OF ASIA
AND EAST-WEST RELATIONS

What is Asia? How does it function to produce locally specific and globally situated cultural identities of Asian subjects? How does it function to construct the “imagined worlds” of these subjects? (Appadurai, 1990, p. 7). I problematize the notion of Asia beyond a geographical classification because, as Eperjesi (2005) points out, “regions are not natural givens. They take shape under specific historical conditions and in relation to particular sets of power relations” (p. 3). Dirlik (1992) argues that “in a fundamental sense, there is no Pacific region that is an „objective“ given, but only a competing set of ideational constructs that project upon a certain location on the globe the imperatives of interest, power, or vision of these historically produced relationships” (p. 56). Rather than a static geographical reality, Asia exists as a reflection of purposeful ideological efforts to inscribe the relations of difference on a physical as well as imaginative landscape of the world. As an imagined landscape and a product of ideological struggle particularly between the East and the West, Asia is a “perspectival construct” whose image changes depending on the location from which it is viewed (Appadurai, 1990, p. 7).

In this chapter, I review historical discourses of Asia from three discursive locations: the United States, Japan, and Asian America. I take this approach in order to illustrate the circulation of different ideas of Asia across these multiple locations and the locally differential adaptation and utility to produce and sustain cultural identities and

situated views of the world. Also, in order to understand how discourses of Asia are theoretically informed, I provide an overview of four selected theoretical approaches that problematize the relationships between the East and the West. The purpose is not to reify the binary, to assume its innate distinction, or to assume that “the East” equals “Asia.” Rather, I attempt to understand and critique the underlying assumptions and politics that normalize “East-West” as one of the overarching discursive structures through which identities are constituted.

The United States and Asia

As a political and historical invention, Asia has fed the Western “imaginary geographies” (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. xiv) and the Western “imaginary landscape” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 4) of the world as a land of abundant resources and exotic cultures, and as the frontier of modernization. Asia has been historically significant in the West for the past centuries because of the extraction of raw materials and labor from the region through colonialism and neoliberal globalization (Iriye, 1967; Takaki, 1989). Asia’s contribution to the Western civilization, however, is not only material but also symbolic. Asia has been a symbolic repertoire of images and meanings that fueled the imagination of identities of “the West.” Asia has provided and still provides the image of the ultimate Other who is yet to be incorporated into, or has failed to attain properly, the universal ethics of Western modernity. Asia, in this case, is not a static geographical label but a sign against which the meaning of the West is signified or a mirror upon which the face of the West is reflected.

What is the origin of Asia in the Western imagination? What functions has the idea of Asia served for the construction of the United States, American cultural identities,

and their situated views toward the rest of the world? The prevailing view among scholars who take a critical and anti-essentialist view of Asia is that Asia is an ideological embodiment of the Other that enables and stabilizes the hegemonic presence of the West (Iriye, 1967; Dirlik, 2005; Sun 2000a, 2000b; Sakai, 2000). Dirlik (2005), for example, argues that the idea of Asia “is...obviously a creation of modern Europeans” (p. 400). While the term itself traces its history back to the ancient Greeks or Mesopotamians, Asia was employed by Europeans as a territorial classification designated to the geographical and ideological counterpart of the West. Sun (2000a) argues that Asia exists as an ideological opposition to the West, which was produced in the context of European and U.S. colonialism. In the colonial mission to expand the visions of modernity across the world, Asia provided the West with a distinguished position as well as territorial and ideological unity.

Historically, while Asia carried symbolic weight in constructing the identity of the West in general, Asia was particularly important in the construction of the idea of modern America in the United States. The American image of Asia first began to be formed as explorers, travelers, and missionaries told their experiences in the Asian-Pacific region starting in the thirteenth century and solidifying its foundation by the 1820s (Leon W., 1994). It was during the nineteenth century that Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri proclaimed that “the movement toward Asia [is] America’s destiny” (as cited in Takaki, 1993, p. 191). The curiosity and fascination for Asia were driven by the colonial and capitalist interest in Asia as a land of abundant resources and markets as well as the commitment of the “White” race to bringing civilization to the “Yellow” race (Takaki, 1993).

Aside from the fact that the Asia-Pacific was a location of strategic importance for commercial trading, the idea of Asia fueled America's self-image as the youngest, most advanced country with the moral obligation to spread its blessing to the rest of the world. Iriye (1967) characterizes the America's initial encounter with East Asia as ideological: "Asia was an idea in America, and Americans took the initiative in responding to that image" (p. 3). Tracing the history of U.S-East Asian relations, Iriye shows how the idea of "despotic Asia" was the very ingredient of the image of the progressive America. As early as the late eighteenth century when direct contact with Asia was still rare, Asia was imagined in the United States as a place ruled by a backward, primitive, and repressive government. This image of Eastern despotism incited the idea of America's moral mission to bring to Asia material prosperity, democracy, and Christianity. This mission was closely tied to the cultivation of East Asia, primarily Japan and China, as markets for surplus products in the United States. As images of Asia traveled through stories of merchants and missionaries across the Pacific Ocean, Asia—the frontier of Americanization—established the ground for the modern American identity.

Palumbo-Liu (1999) provocatively claims that American modernity marked its beginning in the early twentieth century when the United States "projected" its presence into Asia while it "introjected" Asians into America (p. 19). He claims that "the formation of 'modern America' in the early twentieth century is so deeply and particularly attached to the Pacific region" (p. 17). As the United States expanded its influence over the Asia-Pacific, more Asian nations began to advance economically and technologically, and more Asians began to migrate into the United States. This posed the

“Asiatic question” in which the utopic universalization of American modernity in the Asia-Pacific region simultaneously created a threat to Western global hegemony, White racial order, and American national identity. America’s Asia, therefore, is an imaginary on which the desires for the expansion of global capitalism and the anxieties due to the diffusion of Western hegemony—or its takeover by Asia—are projected. Today, Asia is no longer a set of fluctuating images told as stories of distant places but is an integral part of the landscape of multicultural America. The question of “Asia within” and Asian American identity is addressed later in this chapter.

Japan and Asia

If Asia is an ideological construction by the West, how has it become a part of the social imagination in Japan? How has Japan come to establish self-awareness of, and its belonging to, Asia? What is its function in constructing modern Japanese identities and their situated views toward the West and the rest of Asia? Sakai (2000) argues that it is an “enduring historical truth that Asia arrived at its self-consciousness thanks to the West’s or Europe’s colonization” (p. 791). He further elaborates that “the historical colonization of Asia by the West is not something accidental to the essence of Asia; it is essential to the possibility called Asia. Insofar as the post of postcoloniality is not confused with „that which comes after“ in chronological ordering, Asia was a postcolonial entity from the outset” (p. 791). Sun (2000b) argues that Asia should be approached as an idea that enables Asian subjectivity: “the ideality of Asia as a region is the most valid precondition for the establishment of Asia as a category...Historically speaking, this idealistic category functions as the medium that pushes Asians into forming self-recognition” (p. 336).

Since the rise of Japan as a modern nation state, the triangle relationships among Japan, the West, and Asia are marked with ambiguity and tension. The question of Asia was integral to the development of Japan as a nation-state and its relationship to Western colonial modernity. The rise of Japanese nationalism and militarism in the late nineteenth century and the discursive and geopolitical formation of Asia in Japan were mutually constitutive and contested. Japan's encounter with Western modernity, marked by the arrival of the U.S. "black ships"³ in 1853, prompted the emergence of Asia as a discursive location of transnational oppositional subjectivity. Wang (2007) argues that "an Asian consciousness emerged with political urgency only when large areas of East, Southeast, and South Asia became subjected to Western colonialism in the nineteenth century" (p. 326). In the face of a growing threat of the Western powers, it was "necessary to count on Asia as the counterpoising sphere against Europe and America" (Sun, 2000a, p. 16). The formation of Asia in Japan is therefore postcolonial in the sense that it is oppositional to the colonial West.

The oppositional consciousness that emerged under the name of Asia, however, also generated Japan's colonial gaze toward the rest of Asia as a group of backward, uncivilized people who needed Japan's guidance to become modernized. What complicates the formation of Asia as a postcolonial counterpoising sphere is the intra-Asia power struggle, especially between China and Japan (Wang, 2007). As Sun (2000a) argues, "the discussion of Asia involved not only the question of Eurocentrism, but also the question of hegemony within the East" (p. 13). If a collective postcolonial subjectivity emerged over the geopolitical and imaginative entity called Asia in response

³ Black ships or *kurofune* refer to the Western vessels, particularly the ones led by U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry. They were symbolic of Western military power that led Japan to effectively end its isolationism.

to the Western colonial hegemony, it was in the very process of reconceptualizing “Asia” that Japan renegotiated its status to the West and assumed its role as a leader of Asia. In other words, Japan established its colonial and imperial status in relation to the West by discursively seizing the definition of Asia and re-colonizing its image. The question of Asia, therefore, highlights Japan’s ambiguous desire for associating with Western modernity as well as opposing Western universalism by situating itself as “Japan *with* the West and *within* Asia” (Ching, 2000, p. 234).

Two major bodies of historical thought underlie the contemporary intellectual and popular imagination of Asia in Japan. The first is *Datsu-A ron*, or the argument for disassociating from Asia, and the second is *Kō-A ron*, or the argument for reviving Asia. These views represent ideological opposites in Japan’s approach to Asia. *Datsu-A ron* is represented by Meiji intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi (Yonetani, 2006). Fukuzawa published *Datsu-A ron* in 1855 after the pro-modernization coup failed in Korea. He argued that in order to avoid invasion from the West, Japan should leave backward Asia and join the Western civilization. His discussion on Japan’s disassociation from Asia and integration with the West had a great impact on the political discourse and the understanding of modern Japanese history. His *Datsu-A ron* is criticized for its orientalist and colonialist approach to Asia in which Asia is viewed as backward and inferior to Japan (Yonetani, 2006).

The second body of thought is “unified Asia” or “Asia is one” (*Kō-A ron*) proposed by Okakura Tenshin, who stressed the regionalist unity of Asia beyond cultural and geographical heterogeneity (Ching, 2000; Wang, 2007; Sun, 2000a). In his book, *The Ideals of the East*, published in 1903 in London, Okakura positions the Japanese value

system as counterpoised with that of the West. Okakura attempted to establish “Asian value” by turning around the abstract idea of Asia posed by the West in the face of the destructive force of Western imperialism in China and India (Terashima, 2002). He emphasized “the return to Asian consciousness” in the search for identity as well as a recovery of self-confidence and pride in order to resist the wave of westernization. He was deeply suspicious of Western civilization that was infused with materialism and progress. Okakura’s “Asia is One,” which was fundamentally suspicious of Western colonial modernity, however, was appropriated as a slogan for Japan’s colonial expansionism in Asia. The contemporary discussion of Asianism and anti-Asianism revisit and re-appropriate these seemingly oppositional discourses of disassociating from Asia (*Datsu-A ron*) and revising Asia (*Kō-A ron*) to re-situate Japan in relation to Asia in the changing global context.

When scholars discuss the idea of Asia in Japanese intellectual discourse, there are two possible levels of analysis in this dialectic of *Datsu-A ron* and *Kō-A ron*. First of all, an analytical framework of “Japan versus the West” is embedded in the discourse on Asia. This approach views the question of “Asia” as Japan’s resistance to Western colonial modernity. While this approach criticizes the Orientalist construction of Asia by the West, it nonetheless operates within the binary construction of the advanced West and the backward East. The second level of analysis entails the struggles and contradictions within Asia that resulted from the East’s encounter with the West. Yonetani (2006) provides an alternative reading of the two opposing ideologies of *Datsu-A ron* and *Kō-A ron*. While the mainstream critics of Asianism have approached *Datsu-A ron* as Japan’s imperialist Orientalism within Asia, Yonetani argues that we must focus on the inherent

violence of colonial modernity in *Kō-A-ron* or the argument for reviving Asia. In other words, it was in the discourses of reviving, liberating, and co-existing with Asia that Japan's colonial modernity and civilizing mission were exercised and practiced. Yonetani shows how oppositional ideologies of *Datsu-A* and *Kō-A* share the fundamental problem of colonial modernity that shaped the construction of modern Japan.

The formation of Asia in Japan involves the process of entering into post/colonial subjectivity in which the struggle to resist Western colonial modernity nonetheless results in the incorporation of the Japanese subjects into both colonialism and modernity (Yonetani, 2006). That is, resistance itself never escapes the internalization of the principles of colonial modernity. It was the discourse that supported Asia's desire for liberation and independence—rather than leaving Asia to join the West—that necessarily deepened the relations of colonialism between Japan and neighboring East Asian countries. The discourse of liberating Asia from the West and bringing universal justice to the people of Asia drew an unintended parallel to the Western imperialist vision of universalizing its civilization. The geopolitical vision of unifying Asia in opposition to the West never escaped the configuration of intra-Asia power relations and its incorporation into Western colonial modernity.

The idea of Asia in Japan also posed the question of Japanese racial standing. When "Asian" became a distinguished racial category in the West, it became crucial for Japan to establish itself as a distinct racial group in order to assimilate into the West while maintaining Japan's cultural particularity and superiority over the rest of Asia. Sakamoto (2004) argues that when Western racial science was introduced to Japan in the 1860s, the notion of race was not connected to the nation. While the Western racial

taxonomy included the Japanese as part of the Mongol race, Fukuzawa revised it and omitted the Japanese from the category of the Mongol race. The Japanese version of the racial taxonomy depicted the Chinese in a negative fashion, while it remained ambiguous whether the Japanese people were considered part of the “yellow race.” As early as 1884, Takahashi Yoshio, an ex-student of Fukuzawa, advocated for the Europeanization of the Japanese race through intermarriage in order to improve the race and strengthen the nation-state (Sakamoto, 2004). His claim was based on eugenic ideology and evolutionary thought in which intermarriage between the Japanese and „inferior races“ was discouraged. Through this process Japan resisted and appropriated the Orientalist, racist gaze of the West by othering the “yellow race” and thereby created its own distinct subject position as a modern nation-state.

Asia and Asian America

What is the relationship between Asia and Asian American identities? How does the idea of Asia enable and/or complicate the construction of Asian American identities? If the discourse of Asia was crucial in the formation of modern Japanese identity, what is the cultural politics of “Asia within” in the formation of American modernity? In her pioneering book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe (1996) charts the theoretical terrain of Asian American studies. She lays out the gendered racialization of Asians, class formation, the legal construction of racialized citizenship, and U.S. involvements with Asia through colonialism and neocolonialism as the interrelated contexts that shape the politics of Asian American identities. While emphasizing heterogeneity and multiplicity within Asian American communities, she highlights how Asians have been made a homogeneous racial group systematically in the

United States for the purpose of economic exploitation and the construction of racialized and gendered American citizenship.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s used this shared experience of racialization for political emancipation and empowerment. Asian American culture is a site of both exploitation and empowerment due to the particular ways in which Asian Americans are historically included into and excluded from the narrative of American modernity. Lowe (1996) claims that Asian American culture is the site of remembering the contradictions and struggles resulting from U.S. capitalist/imperialist expansionism both within and outside of the United States. Asian American culture, therefore, is not an inevitable ancestral connection based on a shared place of origin but rather is an outcome of historical racial formation particular to the sociopolitical and legal construction of modern America.

As a site of both emancipation and exploitation, the cultural politics of Asian American identity poses a double bind in its quest for self-representation and pan-ethnic collectivity. Kibria (2002), for example, argues that Asian American is “itself an identity of assimilation” through which Asian Americans mediate the gaps between their weakening ties to their ethnic communities and the expectations posed by the dominant culture (p. 198). In this case, becoming Asian American—rather than claiming a particular ethnonational origin—serves to reinforce the fabric of multicultural America. Through in-depth interviews with second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans, Kibria shows how Asian American identities emerge through racial ethnogenesis and the racialization of ethnicity. Racial ethnogenesis takes place when immigrants and their children merge into existing racial categories in the United States and begin to self-

identify with its shared narratives of culture, history, and belonging. The racialization of ethnicity means that heterogeneous ethnonational origins are lumped into one racial category: Asian. Ma (2000) also addresses the politics of assimilation into multicultural America by focusing on the “deathly embrace” of stereotypes, exoticization, and essentialism by Asian Americans in their pursuit of self-representation and appeal to ethnic identity. That is, one of the ways in which Asian American ethnicity is established is through Orientalist images as “the nest for which the crusade for Asian American selfhood is launched” (p. xvi).

The formation of Asian American identity reflects global conditions—particularly the political and economic conditions in Asia-Pacific. The racialization of various ethnonational groups as “Asian” can be understood, therefore, as a translation of the global power relations between the United States and Asia into the nexus of local identities, interpersonal relationships, and institutional structure. When carefully examined, the formation of Asian American identity illuminates the double-edged nature of identity politics in which the quest for self-representation inevitably responds to, relies upon, and sometimes fulfills, existing racial stereotypes and social relations. Furthermore, the formation of Asian American identity elucidates the politics of assimilationism in which successful assimilation is narrowly available insofar as Asian Americans fulfill the dominant culture’s preconceived notion of ethnic pluralism, multiculturalism, and “authentic” ethnic identity.

Asian American culture is also a site that makes visible, and attempts to remedy, the contradictions of expansive and exploitative American modernity. Palumbo-Liu (1999) argues that “Asian/American” implies “both exclusion and inclusion” in which

“*sliding over* between two seemingly separate terms...is constituted” (p. 1, emphasis in original). He argues that “the distinctions installed between „Asian“ and “American“ might be best read within specific historical moments in which such a „great wall“ was constructed precisely because modern history had presented the occasion wherein these two entities threatened to merge” (p. 3). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Asia in the Western imagination was a site of colonial desire as well as a threat to Western modernity. Internally in the United States, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants literally built modern America by providing cheap physical labor. When the forces of modernity inevitably began to include the faces of nonwhites and generated alternative forms of modernity that threatened Western hegemony (i.e., Japan’s militarism and Chinese labor power), race became a visible marker of exclusion and protection of white privilege (Takaki, 1993).

Asian American identities are the product of racialization that has historically implicated their legal, economic, and political status in the United States. Racialization of Asian Americans, however, does not thoroughly rest upon their visible phenotypical differences within the U.S. racial system. The racial formation of Asians as the unassimilable Other requires the spatial imaginary of Asia as the opposite end of America—this exotic, uncivilized, yet abundant place with potential to be even more powerful than the West. Eperjesi (2005) unpacks the historical making of what he calls the “American Pacific,” the region produced through the practice of representation in order to promote the American imperialist agenda in the Asia-Pacific. Although the formation of Asian American identities is locally specific to the racialized experience of Asians in the United States, the imperialist construction of Asia substantiated the Asian

bodies as the ultimate evidence of their alterity to American modernity. The imperialist construction of Asia and racialized bodies of Asians worked dialectically to feed each other, which historically manifested in the United States in the discourses of Asians as the “yellow peril” and the “model minority.”

The racialization of Asian Americans is constructed around two opposing yet mutually sustaining ideologies of yellow peril and model minority. The image of Asia as the yellow peril began to be formed in the late nineteenth century and was solidified by the 1930s (Lee, 1999; Lye, 2005). Asia emerged as a threat in American political, economic, and cultural discourse due to Japan’s rapid modernization and its imperialist expansion into Asia. Furthermore, the United States feared that Japan would “awaken” China into industrial capitalism with its massive population and land (Lye, 2005). It is through Japan’s emergence into a colonial power—that is, showing its capability to modernity—that generated the racialization of the Japanese as the yellow peril. The construction of Asians as the yellow peril was a reflection of capitalism’s globalizing tendency which thus created a threat to Anglo-Saxon supremacy. When Japan proved itself to be capable of engaging modernity, particularly with a victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, the Japanese were depicted as dubious and dangerous to the maintenance of the Western world order. Lye (2005) points out that “ironically, a vision of the „yellow peril“ arises in the process of the universalization of the condition of modernity. Insofar as Japan constitutes that universalization, the dissolution of boundaries between Japan and modernity also generates a moment of racialization (p. 32).

Claiming that “the formation of „modern America“ in the early twentieth century is so deeply and particularly attached to the Pacific region,” (p. 17) Palumbo-Liu (1999) shows how the idea of Asia locally and globally had a significant impact on the construction of American modernity. There was a transnational double movement of “imagining a set of possible modes of introjecting Asian into America, and projecting onto East Asia a set of possible rearticulations of „western presence“” (p. 19). The colonial involvement with and capitalist expansion into Asia by the United States had a reverse effect: the United States encountered “Asia” in its own land due to the migration of people from Asian countries into the United States as laborers. During the period when the United States began to build a hegemonic presence in the Asia-Pacific region, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) suspended Chinese immigration to the United States followed by a number of immigration laws that virtually banned Asian immigration by the mid-1920s. Behind the Asian exclusion was the decline of the American economy in which Asian laborers were used as scapegoats of white unemployment and class conflict (Takaki, 1993). Furthermore, the anxiety over the degenerative aspect of modernization was projected on the increasing presence of Asian immigrants who persevered in harsh working conditions and were perceived to carry a machine-body that is capable of, yet controlled by, rapid industrialization of the nation (Lye, 2005).

Asian workers played an essential part in building the infrastructure of modern America, including gold mining, railroad, agriculture and other industrial work (Espiritu, 2008; Takaki, 1993). Thus, the Asiatic question was posed both internally and externally, creating a circular dilemma that necessitated the discourse of the yellow peril: Internally, the United States needed cheap labor from Asia, but the presence of Asians challenged

the idea of American national identity (Espiritu, 2008). Externally, Asia was imagined as a frontier of American modernity, while it also created the danger of a more powerful Asian modernity. The discourse of Asians as the yellow peril functioned to safeguard the privilege of the Whites by legally marginalizing Asians in the United States while justifying U.S. involvements with Asia in the name of a civilizing mission.

The origin of the model minority myth is traced back to the emergence of the United States as a superpower during the Cold War: “Although the deployment of Asian Americans as a model minority was made explicit in the mid 1960s, its origins lay in the triumph of liberalism and the racial logic of the Cold War” (Lee, 1999, pp. 145-146). In the fight against communism, Asia became a site of strategic importance and a battlefield. Japan became an important political ally and remained politically powerful and economically prosperous without a fundamental change in the government that led Japan’s imperialist mission in World War II. As the decolonizing liberation movements surged in the Third World countries after World War II, the United States faced international pressure to address its domestic issues of racial segregation and oppression. It became imperative that the United States present itself to the rest of the world as a nation of liberal democracy that countered communism. The discourse of successful Asian assimilation into American society was deployed as evidence of the United States as a liberal democratic state where people of color enjoyed equality and upward mobility. Such ethnic assimilationism “fit[s] the requirements of Cold War containment perfectly” (Lee, 1999, p. 146). Asian Americans became the paragon of Americanization that legitimized the battle for the universalization of American modernity as an alternative to communism.

Increasingly, in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, people of color demanded racial equality and social justice. The model minority myth was deployed in this context to contain the rising racial tensions and to shift attention from race to ethnicity (Lee, 1999). The assimilationist discourse co-opted the struggles in the civil rights movement by navigating anti-racism and anti-segregation into colorblind ideology and liberal multiculturalism. The portrayal of Asian Americans as disciplined, self-sufficient, and economically successful was used as a successful example of ethnic assimilationism. The containment of Asian differences into the mainstream society was used to prove the transcendental quality of American modernity. At the same time, the model minority myth perpetuated the historical legacy of using one minority group over others, particularly using Asians against African Americans to contain their resistance and maintain white racial privilege (Takaki, 1993).

During the 1970s, the global economy entered a new phase of what Harvey (1989) calls “flexible accumulation” through global restructuring and de-industrialization of the American economy. Neoconservative narratives in the increasingly unstable post-Fordist U.S. economy found hope of restoring U.S. hegemony in the representation of Asians as the model minority (Lee, 1999). They argued that Asian Americans epitomized the nation’s return to global hegemony through hard work, self-discipline, obedience, and family values. Asian America, in this case, projected a “nostalgic imagery of American society and culture that the model minority is mobilized to revivify” (Lee, 1999, p. 183). The idealized image of Asian America functioned as a depository of glorious memory and American tradition through which American supremacy was remembered and upheld.

By the 1980s, however, the rise of Japan as the second economic superpower and the “trade war” between the United States and Japan resulted in the resurgence of the yellow peril discourse in various political and popular representations (Lee, 1999). At the same time, the rise of Asia-Pacific economies in the 1990s posed another threat to American economic hegemony in the world. The expansive control over the U.S. economy by Asians and Asian Americans generated a fear of de-westernization of America by Asians. The yellow peril discourse reflected not only the anxiety over a globalized financial economy but also the burden of postmodern multiculturalism that fundamentally challenged the identity of modern America.

Theoretical Orientations for Discourses of Asia

This section is organized into four parts. First, I focus on Asiaticity as an alternative mode of theorizing Asian culture and communication, which seeks theoretical resources and wisdom in Asian cultural/spiritual practices and historical experiences particular to the people in the region. Second, I address Orientalism as a theoretical framework that critiques the Western construction of the East and problematizes the notion of the “authentic” natives. Thirdly, I focus on the notion of modernity as a condition that shapes how spatial and temporal realities are experienced and that defines the directionality of historical progress from the East (as backward, pre-modern) to the West (modern, developed, and a destination of the history). Lastly, I explicate the significance of transnationalism as a theoretical framework that addresses some of the problems inherent in theoretical orientations of Asiaticity, Orientalism and modernity.

Asiacentricity: Inside the East

Since the late 1980s, Asiaticity gained scholarly attention as a theoretical and methodological alternative to Eurocentric theorizing of culture and communication (Miike, 2003, 2004, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Dissanayake, 1988, 2003; Kim, 2002; Kincaid, 1987). Expanding on the philosophical assumptions of Afrocentricity (Asante, 1998), the Asiatic approach critiques the universalist assumption embedded in knowledge construction in the West and attempts to utilize Asian cultural, linguistic, religious-philosophical and historical contexts as primary resources for communication theorizing (Miike, 2003, 2006, 2007). Asiatic scholars pay attention to the role of Asian cultures in studying Asian communication and use Asian culture as resources for theoretical insight. In this case, they approach Asian cultures as a rich source of knowledge and wisdom rather than as a text of analysis. Asiatic perspectives challenge the epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions that underpin Eurocentric theory and methodology by redefining what constitutes theory, method, and ethics behind the pursuit of knowledge. In other words, in Asiatic scholarship, “Asia” is counterpoised to the West as a location for critiquing Western empiricism, objectivism, rationalism and universalism. Further, it attempts to imagine alternative understandings of human communication through the pursuit of the particular that enriches and problematizes the notion of the universal (Miike, 2003).

The humanistic approach in Asiaticity attempts to recover the cultural specificity and agency of Asian subjects. While scholars of Asiaticity are careful not to generalize or reify “Asian” culture, the question remains whether the assumption of the “native” culture and people is still viable, considering the centuries of Western

imperialism and contemporary forces of globalization (Chow, 1993). The focus on religious-spiritual practices and philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism (Miike, 2007; Ishii, 2004) is enlightening, yet it obscures the spread of Christianity in a number of postcolonial nation-states in Asia and their strong tie to Western cultural values as well as the creation of local hybrid cultural forms. Furthermore, the creation of another “center” does not necessarily challenge the dominant Eurocentrism. As Miike (2007) characterizes Asiaticity as a “multicultural turn” in communication theorizing, Asiaticity is ideologically aligned with the politics of U.S. multiculturalism in which the tension of cultural differences is remedied on a global scale without directly confronting or dismantling the problem of Eurocentrism. While the Asiatic emphasis on spirituality-based metaphysics provides alternative ways of being/knowing, it simultaneously fulfills the existing stereotypes of Eastern cultures as emotional and spiritual and Western cultures as rational, logical, and scientific. Asiatic ways of “returning to Asia”—while this is not their objective—appeal to the desire to restore the “authentic” and the “original” that have been erased and altered throughout history because of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization. Asiaticity within the prevailing context of multiculturalism bears the risk of mutual complicity between the West’s nostalgia for “uncontaminated” culture and the East’s desire for “authentic” identity.

The Asiatic perspective in communication theorizing faces another challenge in addressing the culture and communication of Asian American populations. Cross-cultural communication scholars have attempted to theorize the implications of East-West cultural differences on interpersonal communication (Gudykunst, 2001) and have applied

the dimensions of cultural variability (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) to different national groups to draw generalized boundaries between Eastern and Western cultures. Such an approach, however, has been critiqued for its apolitical treatment of Asian American identity (Ono & Nakayama, 2004). The label “Asian-American” historically reflects a political commitment to bringing justice to racism, classism, sexism, white privilege, and the overall invisibility of Asian American communities in the United States. The term “Asian” in this case is highly re-contextualized based on Asian immigrants’ experiences in different historical periods and the socio-political structure of the host society.

Despite its limitations, Asiaticity reflects a proactive stance of scholars who question the politics of knowledge construction. The epistemological “return” to Asia can be viewed as a reflection of disappointments, anxieties, and resistance to the conditions of modernity that shaped the nature and content of academic knowledge for the past centuries. Behind the shift toward Asiaticity is the concern that the Eurocentric approach in social science has resulted in dehumanized forms of knowledge and that Eastern thought can provide more “humanocentric science” (Gunaratne, 2008, p. 73). The foundation of social science has evolved based on the principles of objectivity, quantification, predictability, validity/reliability, categorical classification, and model-based understanding of human activities for the purpose of explaining human behavior, attitude, and interaction. In this approach, human diversity is reduced into fragmented variables and faceless labels. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Asiatic approach seeks insight from Asian spiritual practices and religious principles, emphasizes the ethical aspect of knowledge construction, and aims toward humanization and liberation

through communication (Miike, 2003). Furthermore, the return to Asia as “the land of intellectual treasure” (p. 17) indicates the limitation of, and dissatisfaction with, the modernist epistemology that renders heterogeneous human experiences into scientific categories. Asiaticity may be viewed, at times, as culturally essentialist, its theoretical insight remains useful in this study as a reminder to be attentive to local particularities and to be critical of Eurocentrism in theorizing cultural identity.

Orientalism: Between the Orient and the Occident

Asiaticity as an alternative to Eurocentric ways of being and knowing poses a question of whether “Asia” can be counterpoised to, or separated from, the West. In other words, the return to “Asia” as a rich reservoir of non-Western knowledge assumes that Asia exists (or existed) outside of the West. Said (1979) challenges this East-West separation by arguing that “the Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture” (p. 2, emphasis in original). Said makes a theoretical contribution to the understanding of the politics of power/knowledge embedded in the cultural, political, and geographical distinctions that divide the East and the West. More specifically, he problematizes the nature of cross-cultural discourses and power relations embedded in the representation of other cultures. In his analysis of colonial writing, he delineates the discursive formation of Orientalism in which the alterity is projected onto the colonized Other and is coded into social institutions and practices to create hegemonic relations of power between the Occident and its Other. Orientalism is the construction of the Western Self through the construction of the Eastern Other: “my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-

intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with „our“ world” (p. 12).

Said argues that Orientalism is systematic and diffused throughout political and economic institutions as well as cultural and moral practices. Orientalism is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between „the Orient“ and (most of the time) „the Occident.”” (p. 2). This style of thought has persisted historically as a foundation of the way Western intellectuals, artists and politicians write about the Orient. Said calls this phenomenon “a kind of willed human work” (p. 15). That is, Orientalism “*is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel)” (p. 12, emphasis in original). A particular imagery of global totality—dichotomous, mutually exclusive, and hierarchical—is willed into being and distributed as a normalized geopolitical awareness, which produces Western interests in maintaining and taking advantage of the Occident-Orient distinction.

Said utilizes a Foucauldian approach to discourse and power/knowledge, and at the same time underlies his analysis with a humanistic emphasis on human agency (Hussein, 2002). Said’s critique vacillates between Orientalism as an ideological distortion of “real” Eastern cultures and people and Orientalism as a self-containing and self-reproducing system of knowledge that exists solely in the Western self-consciousness and gaze (Clifford, 1988). This ambivalence with philosophical assumptions between existential humanism and Foucauldian poststructuralism reflects Said’s “self-implicated mode of knowledge” in which his particular experience of displacement is activated as an occasion of reflection and a site of critical consciousness

(Varadharajan, 1995 p. 234). Further, his conflicting assumptions reflect his struggles not to objectify the world and de-humanize the people he attempts to theorize while calling out the discursive fabrication of the Orient and the Orientals. In unfolding the mystery of the vast, complex and institutionalized simulacrum called the Orient, Said calls attention to the materiality of such a dehumanizing postmodern simulation that manifests in the West's engagement with the Middle East in forms of violence, war, racism, and religious and cultural marginalization (Hussein, 2002).

While the importance of Orientalism as an interpretive framework cannot be overstated, Orientalism poses an epistemological limitation due to its dichotomizing tendency to situate the Orient as a discursive fabrication of the Occident. The theoretical insight of Orientalism, however, is incorporated in this study in the fact that the process of discursive fabrication is no longer a one-way street in the transnational context. That is, the construction of the Other is complicated due to the emergence of multiple modernities that disrupt the boundaries between the East and the West.

Modernity: From the Pre-modern to the Modern

Said's *Orientalism* (1979), along with the work of theorists such as Spivak (1988; 1990; 2000) and Bhabha (1984; 1994), initiated the development of postcolonial scholarship that theorizes "geographical, geopolitical, and historical specificities of modernities *within* which other forms of power—such as race, sexuality, culture, class, and gender—are located" (Shome & Hegde, 2002a, p. 253, emphasis in original).

Modernity is another crucial concept that characterizes the politics of East-West ideology, as Morley and Robins (1995) claim: "Onto the geography of „East“ and „West“ is directly mapped the distinction between the „pre-modern“ and the „modern“" (pp. 159-

160). Modernity can be characterized as an attitude or as a particular mode of relating to and experiencing temporal and spatial realities, history, subjectivity, and what it means to be “human”; furthermore, modernity is deeply underscored by the Enlightenment ideology of science, reason, liberalism, individualism, progress, and capitalism (Foucault, 1984; Giddens, 1990). Hesse (2007) provides an alternative conceptualization of modernity by arguing that the construction of modernity is a racialized process in which “Europeanness” is constructed through racialization of non-Europeans. He argues that coloniality, modernity, and race cannot be separated in understanding the formation of hegemonic and Eurocentric epistemology and ontology that regulate the way we view the world today.

In his critique of the myth of modernity, Dussel (1993) echoes Said’s critique of Orientalism when he claims that modernity is “constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content” (p. 65). Dussel marks 1492—the year of the “discovery” of the New World—as the moment of modernity’s “birth” when “Europe was in a position to pose itself against an other, when, in other words, Europe could constitute itself as a united ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself” (p. 66). The construction of Europe as “center” and as the “end” of world history and non-Europe as “periphery” and “backward” was essential in materializing and legitimizing a unified European self-consciousness as an imperial power over the rest of the world. The myth that modernity is the driving force of progressive and emancipatory historical consciousness conceals the irrational violence of the global conquest of non-Europe as the very substance of Eurocentric subjectivity (Dussel, 1993).

While multiple and contested notions of modernity exist, the question remains: What was the role of “Asia” in the formation of racialized colonial modernity? Since the European inauguration of modernity, “Asia” was a land of imaginative resources that provided substance to the project of modernity and a Eurocentric imagination of the world. “Asia” played a crucial role in enabling a particular mode of Eurocentric spatial and temporal consciousness and a particular attitude toward historical development. Hegelian historicism is perhaps one of the most influential philosophical bodies of thought that deployed the idea of “Asia” in the formation of modernity. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel formulated an approach to world history as a linear development and a realization of human consciousness, freedom, reason, and Christian faith directed toward the ideal of the Enlightenment (Dussel, 1993). Hegelian historicism conceptualizes the West as realizing the fundamental destiny of humanity through free will, internal abstract thought, and spiritual maturity. In contrast, Hegel positions the East as a spatial/temporal world outside of the West. For him, Easterners are not aware of fundamental individual freedoms and thus maintain primitive forms of religion focused on serving nature rather than on self-actualization of the human spirit (Hoffheimer, 2005). Hegel critiques “Oriental despotism” in which Eastern societies continue to operate under feudalistic, backward, immature, and uncivilized social structures and government that limit individual freedom and spiritual liberation (Koyasu, 2003). The vision of Hegelian historicism is realized when Hegel deploys “Asia” as a necessary counterpart against which the West’s progressiveness is measured: “The movement of Universal History goes from the East to the West. Europe is the absolute end of Universal History. Asia is its beginning” (as cited in Dussel, 1993, p. 69).

Hegel's legacy has a tremendous impact on the way the global totality is imagined and experienced today in several important ways. First, Hegelian historicism shapes not only the way modernity is characterized, but also how historical consciousness and spatial/temporal realities are experienced and negotiated in the contemporary Western world—whether as a postmodern celebration of the end of grand narrative, the mourning for authenticity and order, and/or the realization of the Enlightenment as mass deception (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). Secondly, the definitive role of “Asia” in Hegelian historicism has impacted the narratives on global political economy, globalization of neo/liberalism, and how the relationships between different religions and civilizations are problematized.

Lastly, Hegelian historicism molded the politics of identity within the East. Koyasu (2003) argues that Hegel's philosophy of history had a definitive influence on Japanese modern thought and its relations to Asia. That is, the establishment of Japanese modern thought emerged as a struggle against Hegel's negative problematization of the East, which deeply influenced the way Japan elevated and/or negated “Asia” in their historical effort to define Japan as a modern civilization. Additionally, Koyasu argues that Hegel's critique of Oriental despotism shaped the way the cultural and sociological distinctiveness of Asia is narrated in intellectual discourses such as Weber's (1951) analysis of Chinese ethos and Benedict's (1946) analysis of Japanese culture. Today, the temporal and spatial externality of “the East” continues to be the object of modernization as well as a space of desire for “pre-modern” cultural life that provokes imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo, 1989). Modernity as a theoretical framework carries a limitation for the purpose of this study, particularly when it is conceptualized as a linear, rationalistic

and developmental model. The next theoretical framework, transnationalism, both contextualizes and problematizes the notion of modernity.

Transnationalism: Beyond the East and the West

As Said (1979) points out, the Orient is a significant source of Western modernity, both literally and figuratively. Another important aspect in the spread of Western modernity is the formation of the nation-state. The role of the nation-state, however, is increasingly challenged due to the globalization of political, economic, and cultural institutions and practices (Stiglitz, 2002; Shome & Hegde 2002b). The processes of globalization make the politics of identity and belonging ever more complex and interconnected, challenging the ways in which national belonging, cultural forms, and temporal and spatial sensibilities can be theorized. Globalization complicates the attempt to capture contemporary identity politics using 1) a critical, yet culturally essentialist approach of Asiaticity; 2) a binary positioning of the Orient as a discursive fabrication of the Occident in Orientalism; and 3) a linear, rationalistic and developmental model of modernity. Theorizing and unpacking the ideological system of East-West relations requires a framework that elucidates the historical details addressed in existing frameworks and is capable of accounting for the changing social relations in the context of globalization.

Since the early 1970s, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to transnationalism as an analytical model that challenges traditional comparative area studies and goes beyond national boundaries and essentialist assumptions about cultural differences (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1996; Hegde, 1998; Ong, 1993; Grewal, Gupta & Ong, 1999; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Grewal, 2005; Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2002).

Transnationalism is a conceptual framework that describes and critiques the emerging global phenomena resulting from diaspora and globalization. Transnationalism as an analytical model responds to the call for an alternative mode of inquiry in the world where culture, people, and capital are deterritorialized and identities can no longer be theorized under the assumption of one's situatedness in a singular social, cultural, geographical, and national location (Appadurai, 1990). As Hegde (1998) argues, transnational inquiry "directs attention to the interstices, the in-between. It is not solely about doing research „here“ about the „other“" (p. 287).

A question remains, however, as to *what* is moving beyond the national and geographical boundaries. Transnationalism does not suggest the complete collapse of a global structure that regulates the movement of people, culture, and capital; rather, transnationalism alludes to the fact that this structure is reconfigured and inhabited by people differently. In the book *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, Hannerz (1996) utilizes "global ecumene" to describe an open and networked landscape of globalization in which modernity is diffused and adapted differentially according to local needs and desires. He defines transnationalism as a global diffusion of modernity and an emergence of multiple modernities. He views transnationalism not as a movement of any cultural forms beyond the national boundaries but an uneven distribution of the culture of modernity and differential experiences and consequences that manifest locally. Influenced by the notion of a "global village" (McLuhan, 1964) and the conceptualization of modernity as an expansive civilization (Eisenstadt 1987, 1992), Hannerz's notion of "global ecumene" is critical of the structured directionality of cultural flow (from the West to the Rest), yet it carries the nuance of a colonialist conception of the world as an

open space for the expansion of the “civilizational” culture of modernity (Hannerz, 1996, p. 44).

Transnationalism is not a new epistemological paradigm that can separate itself from the way global totality and relationality have been theorized for decades.

Transnationalism still addresses the same questions: What is the nature, condition, and destiny of modernity? What happens when modernity is diffused across the world through globalization and meets local cultural particularities and differences?

Transnationalism as a theoretical terrain still carries over the dream of modernity and concern for universality while it is critically attentive to, and anxious about, the resistance to and appropriation of the culture of modernity by local subjects. Transnationalism seems to be more attuned with and better equipped, however, to articulate the contemporary cultural politics in which the production of a mass mediated images is intensified and interconnected with material consequences.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided an historical overview of the discourses of Asia from the U.S., Japan, and Asian American perspective. It is clear from these discursive locations that Asia is viewed quite differently with various political, economic, and cultural exigencies. Equally important in this discussion is the notion of American modernity that makes “Asia” a contested space of ideological negotiation. Although Japanese and Asian American subjects deploy a different set of discourses about Asia for their own local needs and demands, their identities are deeply influenced by how their particular subject positions are imagined by the United States. For example, the way the Japanese project the image of Asia and construct their national identity is deeply

influenced by how the United States imagines Asia. The way Asian Americans politicize their pan-ethnic solidarity is deeply influenced by how the United States projects the image of Asia externally as well as internally. I also reviewed the literature on the selected theoretical approaches that problematize the relationships between the East and the West, including Asiaticity, Orientalism, modernity, and transnationalism.

The overview of historical and theoretical perspectives shows the multiple sets of realities and structural totalities that converge in producing cultural and national identities. The formation of collective identity—whether American, Japanese, or Asian American identities—is mediated by multiple projections and introjections of different ideas about Asia. When focusing on Japanese and Asian American identities, “Asia” provides an effective entry point to explore how collective identity is constituted as a condition in which multiple discursive boundaries are mediated to situate individuals in particular subject positions. In the following chapter, I provide a review of literature on theories of identity in communication scholarship, phenomenological traditions, symbolic interactionism, the poststructuralist approach to identity, the notion of materiality, and identity and autobiography.

CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IDENTITY IN COMMUNICATION
SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter functions as a theoretical building block for my next chapter in which I propose my methodological approach. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a set of theoretical foundations for rethinking identity in communication scholarship. I begin my literature review by first providing an overview of theoretical approaches to identity in communication studies, paying particular attention to the theoretical debates in the field of intercultural communication. By highlighting the two primary approaches to identity theorizing, I illustrate the need for an alternative analytical framework to mediate the micro- and macro-level analysis of identity and to explicate identity realization as dynamic and multifaceted process.

Second, I address three major schools of thought (phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, poststructuralism) that are foundational to the development of my proposed methodology. I provide an overview of the phenomenological traditions starting with Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. I illustrate how their ideas have evolved and how their approaches are relevant in contemporary identity theorizing in the contexts of technological, global worlds. I also extend the assumptions of symbolic interactionism in foregrounding the role of communication in realizations of identity.⁴ I also discuss poststructuralist thought and its approach to identity. Combined together,

phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and poststructuralism allow me to shift the focus of theoretical inquiry from the *relationships* between self and society to the multiple *modes of interaction and engagement* not only with other people but also with the world⁵ itself.

I also challenge the assumptions of the social constructionist approach that reduces identities into the intersections of modern social institutions of power, primarily defined by race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. I conclude this chapter by addressing the relationships between identity and autobiography. I review the relevant literature that defines autobiography as a critical site of identity formation, negotiation, and transformation. I also focus on the significance of autobiographical writing in Japanese and Asian American communities. Through this literature review, I illustrate how, by focusing on the modes of interaction and engagement, identity can be conceptualized as a process of realization—or materialization—of the situatedness of the self.

Theories of Identity in Communication Studies

Theorizing Identity as a Communicative Phenomenon

Identity is perhaps one of the most important theoretical constructs in communication scholarship. Various scholars have approached identity as a uniquely communicative phenomenon (Carbaugh, 1996; Goffman, 1959; Habermas, 1987; Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Mokros, 2003). Communication perspectives contribute to

⁴ Following Mokros (2003), I use the term “realization” rather than “construction” and “negotiation.” In his discussion on the constitutive model of identity, he conceptualizes identity “not as attributes of an individual but as contingent realizations—always—and in all ways based in relational being” (p. 17).

⁵ The term “world” here refers to an organized set of realities that allow individuals to have a sense of situatedness in their lives, including but not limited to temporal/spatial structures, corporeal embodiment, natural environment, and the historical, geographical, and cultural frame of reference symbolically and materially available to them.

theories of identity by emphasizing the centrality of communication in identity theorizing. Moreover, communication perspectives enable scholars to conceptualize identity as a relational and dynamic process. Today, scholars continue to address the essential question of identity: What are the relationships between macro and micro contexts, self and society, as well as agency and structure? Regardless of the theoretical and methodological orientations, it remains consistent that communication perspectives contribute to addressing this essential question by providing a particular mode of explanation that accounts for dynamic, relational, and interactional nature of identity. Communication, in this case, is not merely a situation or context of identity theorizing; rather, communication is a dynamic force that enables a moment of realization of particular identity (Mokros, 1996).

Theories of Identity in Intercultural Communication

In the field of intercultural communication, scholars contributed to the evolution and transformation of various theories of identity over the past several decades in order to address changing intercultural relations, cultural experiences, and sociopolitical contexts. While it is impossible to generalize heterogeneous research interests and theoretical orientations, it appears that studies on identity can be broadly categorized into two approaches. I call the first approach the “relational approach.” The relational approach centers human interactions, behaviors, and practices that shape interpersonal or intergroup communication. In the relational approach, scholars are interested in explaining the role of culture in dynamic relationships between self and other. For example, researchers conducted studies to explain the relationships between cultural identification and communicative behaviors from the social scientific perspective (Gudykunst, 1994;

Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Hofstede, 1983; Ting-Toomey, 1993, 2005; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Other scholars have approached identity using an interpretive framework by focusing on the negotiated and co-constructed nature of avowed and ascribed identity and have argued that identity is emergent in shared symbolic practices and values (Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Orbe, 1998). While theoretical and methodological orientations vary, scholars focus on human-to-human interactions (both direct and mediated) as a site of their empirical observation.

The second approach is the “structural approach” proposed by scholars who engage in critical scholarship. In contrast with the relational approach, critical scholars emphasize historical, political, and institutional contexts that mold and determine an individual’s subject position (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1980). The structural approach interrogates the social institutions of power—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—that have historically perpetuated social injustice and oppression (Collier, 1998, 2005; Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 1997; Hegde, 1998; Martin & Nakayama, 2000; Nakayama, 1997; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). More recently, various scholars have incorporated this approach to investigate the question of identity in the globalized, transnational world (Collier, 2009; Young, 2009; Kawai, 2009; Demont-Heinrich, 2008). While diverse theoretical and methodological orientations exist in critically oriented intercultural communication scholarship, they generally focus on macro contexts and larger sociopolitical structures rather than human-to-human or inter-group interactions.

In order to address this polarization between the relational approach and the structural approach, scholars have proposed theoretical frameworks that bridge the micro and macro contexts as well as interpersonal dynamics and institutional structures. For

example, Martin and Nakayama (1997) propose a dialectical approach that emphasizes the “processual, relational, and contradictory nature of intercultural communication” (p. 43). In their six dialectics of intercultural communication, they highlight how micro aspects (personal, cultural, and individual) and macro aspects (historical, contextual, and structural) coexist with each other in intercultural communication encounters. Similarly, Drewiecka and Halualani (2002) employ the structural-cultural dialectic in approaching the politics of diasporic identity. Collier (1998, 2005) integrates both interpretive and critical perspectives in order to theorize identity as a relationship between cultural identifications and contextual/institutional forces. Finally, Mendoza, Halualani, and Drzewiecka (2002) revise identity theorizing in the field of intercultural communication by incorporating alternative communication-based concepts that highlight the interrelated workings of power in both micro-level interactions/enactments and macro-level structures. In various attempts to bridge two opposing approaches to identity theorizing, communication perspectives allow scholars to treat identity as a more fluid and multifaceted theoretical construct.

My goal in this dissertation is to articulate an alternative theoretical and methodological approach to identity in order to further reinforce the analytical model that bridges the relationships between micro and macro contexts, self and society, as well as agency and structure. It is my contention that in order to illuminate the complexity of identity realization, scholars must expand the way identity is conceptualized. In the following, I discuss phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, poststructuralism, the notion of materiality, and social constructionism as the major theoretical building blocks for my methodological approach that is described in the next chapter.

Phenomenology

Problematizing “Communication” in Identity Theorizing

Taking a step back, I would like to briefly address what it means to theorize identity as a communicative phenomenon. In communication scholarship, there are several approaches to the relationship between identity and communication: a.) Identity is communicated through symbolic practice, b.) Identity is constructed and negotiated through communication, and c.) Identity shapes communication process. More fundamentally, the relationship between identity and communication is paramount if we assume the following as true: One cannot speak intelligibly without assuming a position or location of enunciation. Identity, in this case, is a situated location from which one is able to communicate meaningfully with others. When identity is viewed as a communicative phenomenon, it deals with the process through which an individual comes to assume a position in the world that gives the legitimacy and meaning to him or her as a communicator. Thus, the question of identity as a communicative phenomenon is an existential one. Just as when a little child first learns the word “me” or “I,” the process of communicating and becoming are inseparable from each other. Moreover, the process of assuming a location of enunciation—becoming the “I” who speaks, thinks, acts, and exists—is not only symbolically enabled, but also experientially grounded.

Phenomenological Traditions

It is within this context that I employ phenomenology as one of the theoretical foundations in rethinking identity. Founded by Edmund Husserl (1970) in the early twentieth century, phenomenology is a philosophical movement that attempts to systematically understand and disclose the structure and fundamental nature of

consciousness and human experience (Kearney & Rainwater, 1996; Orbe, 2009; Welton, 1999). Over the course of his long philosophical career, Husserl was primarily interested in a systematic investigation of the complex relationships between the mental phenomena (perception, intentionality, conscious mind, etc.) and lived experience (temporality, embodiment, social reality, etc.). As a critique of psychologism, or the belief that the laws of logic can be found in human psychology, Husserl develops an investigative mode of thinking that is descriptive of the function of human intentionality and clarifies the “essence” of our practical and perceptual life (Crowell, 2006). As a mode of inquiry, phenomenology questions things we take for granted in everyday life. It treats consciousness not as a passive entity, but as a receptive surface that actively constitutes the element of experience. Moving beyond a purely mental activity, Husserlian phenomenology inquires the structure of content of experience from which our ontological existence arises.

Husserl lays the ground for a reflective and hermeneutic approach to experience (Crowell, 2006). It is reflective because he focuses on the *experience* of perceived reality, rather than the objective reality itself. It is hermeneutic because he pays attention to the directionality of intention—that is, our consciousness is always acting upon and towards something—and how a conscious and perceiving subject is constituted through this active reflection and interpretation of perceptual experience. Husserl’s phenomenological investigations into the essence of “the things themselves” foreground the tension between the active intentionality/perception of an individual’s subjectivity and the historically materialized reality:

But in the case of history, as in the case of embodiment and sociality, Husserl retained a sharp sense...of the twin demands made by the things themselves: meaning comes to us as a trace of sedimented constitutive activity, as something bound up with a specific historical genesis; but at the same time it is always and only understood in current intentional experience. (Crowell, 2006, p. 28)

By emphasizing the perceptual and experiential aspects of meaning and knowledge, Husserlian phenomenology bridges the purely psychological approach and the historical/ideological approach to knowledge. Furthermore, in Husserl's critique of scientific objectivism and empiricism, we can see a glimpse of postmodern thought that affirms the contingent nature of claims we make about reality, meaning, agency, and subjectivity.

Heidegger (1962) both revives and critiques Husserl's inquiry on the question of meaning and existence. His primary critique is on the notion of phenomenological reductionism, or *epoche*, in which Husserl argues that one can isolate (or "bracket") consciousness to a pure phenomenon. Heidegger claims that this is impossible because our self-reflexivity is always already part of the world. Rather than seeking the essence of mind and existence, Heidegger instead uses the notion of *Dasein* or "being-in-the-world" as an ontological basis of experience (Kearney & Rainwater, 1996). He emphasizes the ontological aspect of human experience ("being there" or how we are thrown into the world). Rather than being the author of our own being, the notion of *Dasein* implies the condition of being as that which is not entirely our own. Thus, Heidegger complicates the relationships between intentionality and material reality as well as consciousness and lived experience. Simply put, while Husserl attempted to bracket experiences into pure

phenomena, Heidegger argues that the ontological condition of being cannot be grasped separately from the world in which we inhabit, nor can we assume that active and mindful consciousness constitutes experience and transcendental subjectivity. Rather, we are immanently in the world, at the intersection of the mindfulness and mindlessness, the past and the present. In this way, Heidegger takes a distinctive shift from the epistemological question of the knower and the known to the ontological question of knowledge and ways of being in the world (Dreyfus, 1991).

Heidegger takes this shift from epistemology to ontology by arguing, essentially, that being is time. In his foundational work *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) argues that it is impossible to conceptualize “being” without temporality. Although it was Husserl who first focused on the stream of consciousness as a kind of temporal flow, Heidegger approaches temporality much differently. For Heidegger, time is not a linear flow from the past into the future; rather, we live in the constant “here” and “now” that are made present to us as a combination of the past, present, and future. In this case, the present moment manifests itself as an accumulation of the past that has already happened and the future that we anticipate to happen (Dreyfus, 1991).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) expands on Heidegger’s notion of “being-in-the-world” by taking an interrelated, multifaceted, and holistic approach to phenomenology. He argues that it is impossible to separate the self from the world, and he refuses the dualistic model of the perceiving mind and the perceived object. Rather, he explores how there is a continuum of mind-body interaction. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not abstract but always embodied. By focusing on “the role of lived-body in perception,” (Wrathall, 2006, p. 31) he radically challenges the notion of meaning and existence. In his favorite

example of the ashtray, he claims that the meaning of the ashtray is not in its idea, but in the way that the object enables a particular physical response through an individual's embodied perception (i.e. holding it, looking at it, moving it). In this case, the ashtray presents itself meaningfully through inviting our bodily perception and response. It is in the intertwined relations between the object and our bodily perception/engagement that Merleau-Ponty finds the ontological basis of knowledge and existence (Wrathall, 2006). In addressing the dialectic relations between the self and the world, he articulates how the condition of existence is situated not by abstract consciousness but by concrete, embodied, and lived bodies that actively perceive, feel, touch, and act. In this sense, the knowledge we gain through the practical, perceptual, and embodied life is never outside of the world we attempt to name.

Being-in-the-Technologized-World

For Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the question of being is always part of the kind of material and technological environment we live in. The phenomenological traditions are even more relevant and useful in today's technologically advanced society and the electronically wired world. In his writing on the philosophy of technology, Ihde (1990) brings together the aforementioned phenomenological traditions to explore the interactions among perception, embodiment, and the technological environment:

Phenomenology, in an initial and over-simple sense, may be characterized as a philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human experience and that, in particular, concerns *perception* and *bodily* activity (p. 21).

Through the phenomenological approach to the question of existence, knowledge, and meaning, Ihde is able to avoid either technologically deterministic or socially

deterministic conclusions. Rather, based on the phenomenological approach, he approaches our experience in the social, cultural, and technological world in its wholeness and interpenetrating complexity. Despite the common critique that phenomenology is purely subjective, uncritical, or unscientific, the value of phenomenological thought lies in the ability to provide a “*relativistic ontology* of human existence” (Ihde, 1990, p. 23, emphasis in original):

Here I would point out that a relativistic account is not necessarily a *relativism*.

Rather, a relativistic account is an account of *relations*. In Heidegger’s case, it was the dimensions of human existence (*Dasein*). *Being and Time* was an account of human spatiality within the World, of human temporality within the World, and of the various structures and dimensions of human-world relations. (p. 23)

Through the legacy of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, the world is envisioned as multidimensional, consisting of multiple relational structures. In this case, the purpose of inquiry is not to dissect the world into pieces and patterns, but to grasp the social, cultural and technological world in its wholeness, in its interpenetrating interactions between our embodied perception and the material world. Taken together, this enables a theoretical and methodological approach that targets the dynamic relations of interaction as a whole as the object of academic inquiry.

It is in its emphasis on interrelations and wholeness that phenomenology is useful in rearticulating the theory of identity. Ihde (1990) describes this dynamic wholeness using Husserl’s notion of *Lifeworld* which combines the dynamics of perceptual-bodily activity, actional praxis, and the relational structures within which humans and

technologies interrelate and interact. Ihde makes an important distinction between what he calls *microperception* and *macroperception*:

What is usually taken as sensory perception (what is immediate and focused bodily in actual seeing, hearing, etc.), I shall call microperception. But there is also what might be called a cultural, or hermeneutic, perception, which I shall call macroperception. Both belong equally to the lifeworld. And both dimensions of perception are closely linked and intertwined. There is no microperception (sensory-bodily) without its location within a field of macroperception and no macroperception without its microperceptual foci (p. 29).

By focusing on both micro- and macroperception, this approach enables a theoretical perspective that situates both subjective perception and a cultural framework as mutually constitutive of each other within the structures of relations. That is, while cultural contexts shape the subjective experience of the world, it takes the perceptual and active involvement of the subject for the cultural context to fulfill its possibility of existence.

Being-in-the-Globalized-World

From a phenomenological perspective, understanding identity in the increasingly globalized, transnational world poses a new challenge for scholars. Transnationalism speaks to the range of social practices, spaces, and institutions that emerge from the reconfiguration of global networks of people, capital, and culture (Vertovec, 2009). Transnationalism disrupts the “bounded-ness” of social reality and collective belonging by enabling cultural hybridization and communication beyond traditional place-based communities. What Husserl conceptualized as “lifeworld” has vastly changed in the contemporary context (Husserl, 1970). New subjectivities emerge as the self is situated—

and bounded—differently in relation to the cultural, spatial, and temporal boundaries of the world (Grewal, 2005; Appardurai, 1996; Ong & Nonini, 1997).

In his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (1994) defines identity as a search for, and the productive process of, the position of enunciation. He illustrates how Caribbean cultural identities are positioned through three “presences”: namely, *Presence Africaine*, *Presence Europeenne*, and *Presence Americain* (p. 398). He emphasizes that the diaspora identity of the Caribbean is produced through the historically specific, and imaginatively mediated, relationships to Africa, Europe, and the New World. In other words, Caribbean identity is positioned and renewed through representations and re-significations of these presences through which their “imaginary fullness or plentitude” is restored (p. 394). From Hall’s perspective, identity is not about the search for an authentic origin but is the re/positioning of collective belonging within the shifting relationships to historical narratives, colonial ideologies, and imagined communities. In this sense, diasporic identity is truly transnational because its positioning is staged in, and mediated through, multiple layers of realities and hybridity.

Defining cultural identities as “the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture,” Hall (1994) argues that “there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental „law of origin“” (p. 395). Grewal (2005) provides an alternative approach to theorizing this politics of position in transnational contexts by investigating the diffusion of U.S. neoliberalism among South Asians in India and the United States. The term “transnational connectivities” is used to describe the condition in which new subjectivities and identities are positioned through

individuals" differential access to and participation in transnationally circulating networks of neoliberal discourses and institutions. She points out that American hegemony remains powerful because of its ability to control the networks of knowledge and power through the expansion of the market and to produce the cosmopolitan subjects who actively participate in transnational networks.

The notion of lifeworld still matters in this transnationally interconnected identity politics. One major characteristic of the lifeworld today, however, is that it has become increasingly imaginative or imagined in nature (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996) through transnationally mediated images, mobility, and ways of being. Wilson and Dissanayake (1996) define the transnational imaginary as "the *as-yet-unfigured* horizon of contemporary cultural production by which national spaces/identities of political allegiance and economic regulation are being undone and imagined communities of modernity are being reshaped at the macropolitical (global) and micropolitical (cultural) levels of everyday existence" (p. 6). Transnationalism re-contextualizes the global arena in which cultural identities are produced as the field in which subjects enact or are denied their agency and mobility. In other words, transnationalism reconfigures what Said (1979) calls the "imaginative geography and history" that "help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (p. 55). Similarly, Appadurai (1996) argues that "the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (p. 31). According to Appadurai, the imaginary as "a constructed landscape of collective aspirations...[is] now mediated through the complex prism of modern media" (p. 31). The development of transnational networks—

whether as market, capital, culture, or communities—changes the sense of distance between “here” and “there,” self and other, and the past and the present. In this case, imaginative geography and history are viewed quite differently depending on one’s accessibility to, and participation in, the transnational network of meaning, practices, and ideologies. This radical change in the way we experience the modern world shows the utility of phenomenological thought in theorizing identity in contemporary contexts.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Goffman, 1959; Habermas, 1987; Mead, 1934; Strauss, 1959) has strongly influenced the development of communication theories on identity. Symbolic interactionism operates under the assumption that active, interacting individuals make up societies, and that the self emerges through the process of interaction with others within social structures in particular cultural and historical moments (Charon, 1979; Denzin, 1992). Symbolic interactionism explores the individual’s subjective experience of self and other by focusing on “the nature of interaction, the dynamic social activities taking place between persons” (Charon, 1979, p. 23). Precisely because symbolic interactionism foregrounds the active *meaning-making* process through *interactions* in the realization and enactment of the *self*, it serves as a powerful theoretical lens for a communication theory of identity.

The constitutive model of communication and identity, for example, is grounded in the symbolic interactionist approach (Mokros, 1996, 2003; Mokros & Deetz, 1996). Mokros (2003) develops an analytical model that theorizes identity as a system of interactional engagements. The constitutive model enables scholars to conceptualize identity “as an emergent property of communication and approaches identity as

relational, a property not of an individual but of interaction itself” (p. 12). Furthermore, he claims:

A constitutive perspective rejects the priority of events and objects and instead posits the priority of an interactional system within which events and objects are achievements (of identity), not as stable entities, but as contingent realizations. (Mokros, 1996, p. 6)

In the constitutive model of identity and communication, identity is conceptualized as contingent realizations of relational engagement between individual subjects and others in the social world that are instantiated within and through interactional engagements. While in his model Mokros (2003) identifies three interactive and interacting *levels* of identity constitution (discourse, interaction, and reflection), in the next chapter I will identify four *modes* of interaction between the self and the world that constitute the multimodal approach to identity.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism emerged as a critical response and revision to Saussurean linguistics and structuralist anthropology that dominated French intellectual thought in the late fifties and early sixties (Miller, 1998). Poststructuralism rejects the totalizing and generalized structures that structuralism seeks in the patterns of language and speech, culture, and social organization. Represented in the writings of Derrida (grammar), Foucault (the history of discourses), and Lacan (psychoanalysis), poststructuralist thought renounces the essentialist idea of human nature, autonomous subjectivity, and intentionality (Alcoff, 1988). Rather than biologically or naturally determined, human beings are overdetermined by social discourses and cultural practices. Cultural

differences and identities are the product of macro-level discursive articulations rather than innate characteristics or the result of personal will. This is an anti-humanist view that an individual does not have control over his or her identity or intentionality; rather, he or she is a product of social reality and historical discourse. Thus, the poststructuralist approach to identity rigorously seeks to deconstruct the categories of social positions (e.g., woman, mentally ill, or the oppressed) as discursive constructions and inventions.

On the surface, poststructuralism is greatly contrasted with the phenomenological approach to identity. On the one hand, phenomenology highlights the existential and ontological aspect of an individual's subjective experience of being. On the other hand, poststructuralism de-centers the human and focuses on the fluctuating yet overarching boundaries of "differences" that are constantly articulated and rearticulated through discourse. Poststructuralism can be situated, however, as an attempt to bridge structuralism and phenomenology. Derrida, for instance, focuses on the linguistic elements that mediate self-reflexive consciousness (Kearney & Rainwater, 1996). That is, self-consciousness is always mediated and de-centered by language whose meaning always escapes a decisive closure. Poststructuralism refines structuralism by rejecting the universal maxim or overarching patterns of reality; poststructuralism qualifies existential phenomenology by questioning authentic experience, essence, intentionality or free will. Taken together, poststructuralism politicizes and historicizes both the ideological structure and the subjectivity produced and contested through discourse (Storey, 1998). In order to avoid phenomenological essentialism or poststructuralist determinism, it is necessary to explore the phenomenological experience from a poststructuralist

perspective and examine the discursive and historical articulations of social reality from a phenomenological approach.

Materiality

The term materiality is used in a variety of ways by scholars from different academic disciplines and theoretical orientations. There are—at least—six major approaches or views of materiality: 1) archeological, 2) technological, 3) Marxist, 4) feminist, 5) philosophy of language, and 6) critical geography. Materiality occupies a central importance in archeological and anthropological studies in which scholars investigate the materialization of the human mind and its engagement with the environment through concrete forms such as cultural artifacts, rituals, monuments, and symbolic objects (Appadurai, 1986; DeMarrais, Castillo & Earle, 1996; DeMarrais, Gosden & Renfrew, 2004; Meskell, 2005; Schiffer, 1999). In the technological view of materiality, scholars use the notion of materiality to speak about the ways in which physical infrastructures and media technologies shape communication processes, effects, and outcomes (Cavell, 1999; Kittler, 1990, 1999; McLuhan, 1964). They focus on the technologies of communication media that are productive of effects, meanings, social structures, and ideological environments (Fuchs, 2009; Tang, 2006).

A Marxist approach emphasizes a “materialist” analysis of ideology and examines how particular social relations, social institutions, and subject positions are produced through ideology (Althusser, 1971; Artz, Macek, & Cloud, 2006; Coward & Ellis, 1977; Garnham, 1990). In feminist theories, the notion of materiality is elaborated in relation to performativity of discursive practice that constitutes gendered, sexed and raced bodies (Alaimo & Hekman, 2007; Alexander & Warren, 2002; Barad, 2003; Butler, 1993;

Haraway, 1991; Wood & Cox, 1993). Materiality also plays an important role in the philosophical investigations of language, which shift the conceptualization of language from a set of symbols and abstract ideas into an integral and constitutive part of everyday practices and realities (Bleich, 2001; Sanders, 1993). In particular, rhetorical scholars have debated the relationship between rhetoric and materiality (Asen, 2009; Cloud, 1994, 2006; Greene, 1998; McGee, 1982; McKerrow, 1989). The inquiry into the materiality of rhetoric ranges from those that separate materiality (as in material conditions) and language (as in symbolic abstraction) to the ones that challenge the boundary between particular linguistic arrangements of meaning and material/natural embodiments of such meaning. Finally, the notion of materiality is used by those who study the spatial production and regulation of power and ideology as they manifest in spaces such as urban landscape, borders, war memorials, and museums (Blair, 1999; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Crane, 2000; Dickinson, 1997; Lefebvre, 1991/1974; Shome, 2003; Soja, 1989; Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009).

Materiality and Communication

The notion of materiality is used in heterogeneous ways across various academic discourses; however, it remains consistent that the notion blurs the presupposed boundaries between material and immaterial, subject and object, real and symbolic, biological and social, as well as concrete and abstract. At the very least, the notion of materiality challenges the Cartesian mind/body dualism that haunted Western intellectual discourse for centuries. In the field of communication studies, the notion of materiality deserves particular attention for several reasons as materiality alters the way 1) communication is conceptualized, 2) meaning is conceptualized, and 3) interpretation as

a methodological approach is utilized. The notion of materiality may challenge how scholars conceptualize communication because the very substance of communication theorizing rests upon the tension between symbolic abstraction and the material world it names. From a perspective of materiality, communication can be understood as a process of materializing—and making present—what could have stayed absent, unrecognized or immaterial (see Gumbrecht, 2004). In this case, communication is not simply a cognitively orchestrated exchange of messages but the process of making meaningful—and therefore bringing into existence—both the material (physical objects, natural phenomena, etc.) and the immaterial (abstract ideas, principles, values, etc.) into human perception, interaction, and engagement (see also Barad, 2003 and Sanders, 1993).

The location of meaning is another crucial question in communication theorizing. In communication research, it is particularly important to address communication processes and phenomena in terms of what they mean or how meaning is constructed and shared. Scholars have worked under different assumptions about this—the meaning is in the material object, in the mind of the speaker, in the symbol, in the syntax of language, in the mind of interpreter, or in practices, uses and interactions. From the perspective of materiality, the meaning can be understood as effects rather than property of words or shared understanding. In his discussion on the materiality of communication, Pfeiffer (1994) argues that the power of symbolic expression is not in its ability to contain particular meaning but in its “felicity” or the efficacy to produce certain (material) effects (p. 5). Meaning is a performative effect⁶ of symbolic process—what it does, rather than what it is. Communication, in this case, is “envisaged less as an exchange of meanings, of

ideas about... , and more as performance propelled into movement by variously materialized signifiers” (p. 6). Thus, the theoretical focus is no longer on meaning as the content of communicative processes but on “the modalities⁷ of the emergence of meaning” (Gumbrecht, 1994, p. 411).

When the meaning of communicative process is studied in terms of what it does rather than what it is, communication theorists can no longer look for a pre-given meaning contained in the symbolic expression or interaction. It requires a methodological approach that moves away from interpretation as a decoding of successful, yet contested, agreement between signifier and signified. It urges communication scholars to develop methodological approaches that illuminate the conditions under which performativity of symbolic process and their “felicitous” effects are accomplished. This means to move away from a methodology of hermeneutic mediation of meaning to a methodology of performative effects that elucidates the on-going arrangement of meaning, of relationships between identities, and of engagement with the im/material world (see Gumbrecht & Pfeiffer, 1994).

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lopez, 1994; Searle, 1995) has established an anti-essentialist view of identity as one of the core assumptions in understanding identity politics. That is, an individual’s identity is not innate or biological, but is constructed through the processes of signification, socialization, and negotiation

⁶ The notion of performative effect emphasizes the material character of symbolic activities. From this view, the meaning is not attached to the signifier; rather, the meaning is what is accomplished as effects and functions of symbolic engagements.

⁷ Gumbrecht (1994) uses “modality” to refer to the material and technological medium of communication, including technological hardware and human sensory/bodily system which enables a particular effect of symbolic activity. In this case, the meaning is not an abstract idea contained in signifier, but a perceptual and experiential effect enabled by a particular mode of communication.

(Hall, 1997). According to this view, social constructs are both the product of symbolic interaction as well as the property of identity (that is, socially constructed differences). The social constructionist approach to identity resulted in investigations of social, discursive, and institutional practices that produce modern social institutions of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality. Moreover, the concept of “intersectionality” emerged as a fundamental interpretive framework in approaching one’s identity (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). From an intersectional perspective, an individual’s subject position is not determined by a single socially constructed category; rather, s/he finds her/himself at the intersection of various identity positions and experiences. Because communication scholarship primarily deals with *meaning* (i.e. production, mediation, and interpretation of meaning), it is relatively painless to incorporate social constructionism—with its emphasis on the use of language to construct social reality—into larger discourses on communication.

In the next chapter, I will develop a multimodal approach to identity as a critique of the limitations associated with social constructionist definitions of identity. The social constructionist view is applied primarily to deconstruct the complex, yet limited, number of identity categories: race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, age, physical ability, and so on. In other words, when it comes to the social construction of identity, scholars are primarily concerned with identity categories that are deemed not only salient in modern societies but also more fundamentally required as instruments of social hierarchy and control. While it is indisputable that these categories determine primarily one’s social experience and positionality, the overwhelming reliance on the “trinity” of identity (race, class, and gender) as an analytical model in identity theorizing can result in

a limited conceptualization of not only what identity is, but also how identity comes into being. It is conceptually limiting if heterogeneous experiences and discourses that construct identities ultimately return to and are reduced into the limited number of categories that constitute the modern social order. I remain skeptical that people's heterogeneous subjectivities and experiences can be fully articulated through the language and the very ingredient of modern social power (see Grossberg, 1996). In the multimodal approach, I shift my analytical focus from the socially constructed identity categories to the modes of interaction and engagement through which the "self" is materialized, activated, and situated in the globalized world.

Identity and Autobiography

In this study, I analyze what is broadly defined as autobiographical writing by Japanese and Asian American writers. My interest in examining this particular type of text is less about autobiography as a literary genre and more about the nature of autobiographical writing as a location of self-narration and the constitution of the self. Autobiography—as a "voluntary" expression of the self and a site of identity formation and negotiation—has served a significant part in shaping the discussions of identity in feminist scholarship, performance studies, critical race theory, and postcolonial studies (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Anzaldua & Keating, 2002; Minh-ha, 1989; Fanon, 1967; Du Bois, 1903/1973). Various scholars have approached autobiographical writing as a source of theoretical insight about identity and its relationship with larger systems of power and ideology. Zukic (2009) summarizes succinctly how autobiography contains great potential for theorizing identity. She approaches autobiography as "a practice that reveals itself within frameworks of power, ideology, and representation; inherent in this

practice is a perpetual struggle to perfect its scrutinizing efficaciousness in fixing subjectivities, and its compulsory failure in arresting the shifting positionalities of the autobiographical self” (p. 397). That is, the practice of writing autobiography is “an occasion for writing oneself into the cultural spaces of signification” (p. 403) through the process of which the notion of the autonomous “I” is called into question.

White (2001) argues that autobiography reveals the fluctuating and fragmented subjectivity in which multiple forms of “I”—ideological, temporal, personal, and cultural—compete for unity and visibility. If identity is viewed not as a social category or positioning but as a moment when mobile and multiple subjectivities are stabilized within countless possibilities of meaning, agency, and reality (Ferguson, 1993), then autobiography—the process of both writing and reading it—exemplifies the struggle to put a halt on the self in motion. Autobiography, therefore, is neither a pure self-expression nor a manifestation of false consciousness but a site in which the notion of self and its agency is produced, constrained, and enacted (Zukic, 2009). Autobiography is “an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation” (Eakin, 2001, p. 114). In this case, autobiography is not personal stories of one’s past, but “a mode of phenomenological and cognitive self-experience” (p. 115).

Autobiography thus can be understood as the enabling and constraining force of identity. Referring to the autobiographical writings of abolitionists such as Fredrick Douglass and Margaret Garner, Gilroy (1996) writes that “they express in the most powerful way a tradition of writing in which autobiography becomes an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation” (p. 69). He points out that the autobiographical voice is crucial in giving authority and autonomy to the history of

slavery told by the ex-slaves. In her analysis of autobiographies written by Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Drake (1997) argues that their autobiographies illustrate “the process in which the ex-slave writes his or her self into an existence recognized by dominant American society” (p. 91). In this case, a critical reading of autobiography requires the “shift from thinking of autobiography as a product of representation to reading autobiography as a process of mediation” (Meehan, 2008, p. 48). Ethnic autobiography allows for a conceptualization of the self as multifaceted, multidimensional, and pluralist, providing counter-hegemonic possibilities to the exploration of knowledge (Fischer, 1986).

In contrast to the enabling view of autobiography, de Man (1979) poses a question that challenges the agency of the author to freely express him/herself and to insert the autobiographical “I” into existing social relations and systems of meaning:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?” (p. 920, emphasis in original)

de Man points out that the attempt to reference the “self” in autobiography is not only limited by, but also shaped by, the kind of communicative medium and resources available for self-expression. Gilmore (1994) echoes this critique in what she calls the “technologies of autobiography” that constitute identity as “a network of representational practices” (p. 19).

In Asian American communities, autobiography has a century-long tradition since the beginning of the twentieth century (Li, 2004). Scholars of Asian American studies have approached autobiography as a site of cultural critique and the means through which Asian American voices are articulated (Han & Hsu, 2004; Hongo, 1995; Davis, 2006). Examining the convergence of interest in autobiographical and ethnic studies in the last twenty-five years, Bergland (1994) concludes that both autobiographical studies and ethnic studies “signify a larger and collective project of telling the people’s histories and stories, the collective narratives of those conquered, enslaved, occupied, excluded, discriminated against, marginalized” (p. 68). In other words, the development of ethnic studies since the 1960s—including Asian American studies—involved debates over multiculturalism, racism, and American cultural politics through the incorporation of personal narratives and collective resistance to prevailing national histories and memories. Among the variety of Asian American autobiographies, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* written by Maxine Hong Kingston (1975), epitomizes the politics of ethnic autobiographical writing in the United States. Her work exemplifies the intensity of the politics of self-representation in which her self-narration is charged by critics with stereotyping, misrepresentation of Chinese culture, and co-optation of progressive Western feminist discourse (Bergland, 1994).

In Japan, autobiography has also played a significant role in the formation of modern political, economic, and cultural systems. In his study of the socioeconomic aspects of autobiography in Japanese modern history, Tomonari (2008) shows how autobiographies “played a vital part in forging and transforming subjectivities, identities, and values during the formation of Japanese modernity” (p. xv). He argues that new

subjectivities emerged through autobiographies that promoted various economic, political, and social agendas toward the industrialization and modernization of Japan. Autobiographies became a medium through which marginalized voices gained authority and visibility to produce new subjectivities in the context of drastic social transformation. Whether in promoting industrialization, the socialist movement, or feminism, “the genre of autobiographies proved to be a vehicle that enabled them to develop the new perception of self that frequently transgressed earlier boundaries and social divisions” (p. xviii). Autobiographies, in this case, can be viewed as a social engine that actively shapes the narratives of nation and the identities of national subjects.

Approaches that situate the reading and writing of autobiography from a transnational perspective are still underdeveloped, however. Smith and Watson (2001) point out that “writers around the globe are proposing new concepts of subjectivity, as transcultural, diasporic, hybrid, and nomadic. Such autobiographical acts move the „I“ toward the collective and shift the focus of narration toward an as-yet virtual space of community, across and beyond the old boundaries of identification” (p. 132). From this perspective, the autobiographical “I” can be approached as a repository of newly emerging transnational subjectivities and the site from which scholars are able to engage in theorizing identities reflexively and to “reorganize global knowledge” (p. 132).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of theories of identity in communication scholarship, the foundation of phenomenological traditions, a brief illustration of symbolic interactionism, poststructuralism, the notion of materiality, and a critique of social constructionism. I also illustrated the relationships between identity and

autobiography and the significance of autobiography as cultural expression in Japan and Asian America. This chapter functioned as a theoretical building block for the following chapter, in which I introduce my methodological approach and describe the autobiographical texts used in my analysis. I will also discuss my relationship to the autobiographical texts and research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this study is broadly founded upon the following questions: how can we elucidate the complex ways in which the “world” and the “self” interact and are mutually constituted? How can we account for the changing contexts of transnational identity formation? How can we understand multidirectional influences that produce the embodied experiences of the self locally and globally? Rethinking identity today is not only a theoretical question but also a methodological one. It requires a methodology capable of illuminating the nexus of locally specific and globally interconnected articulatory practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). That is, theorizing identity is no longer about the direct mediation between the self and the world but is about the process through which the situatedness of the self and the sense of its closure are enabled in the nexus of ever-changing conditions and realities.

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a methodology that is reflexive of this contextual dynamic. More specifically for this study, this proposed methodology will be used to read how identities are constituted in and through two autobiographies written by Japanese and Asian American writers. I explicate a set of theoretical assumptions that constitute what I call *a multimodal approach* to identity. I introduce four modes of interaction and engagement through which individual subjects engage with the world, cultivate their socio-cultural locations, and activate their agency. These modes of interaction include: a.) multidirectional interpellation, b.) corporeality, c.) spatiality, and d.) temporality. I illustrate how these modes of engagement between the self and the

world are the salient features in the realizations of identity in the globalized, transnational world. I then describe the autobiographical texts I will analyze and explain my approach to the texts. The chapter concludes with my research questions.

Multimodal Approach as a Methodology

Multidirectional Interpellation

Extending Althusser's (1969, 1971) notion of interpellation and overdetermination, I argue that identity can be understood as a product of multidirectional interpellation of the subjects. Based on Lacanian psychoanalysis and Saussurean structural linguistics, Althusser elaborates on his notion of interpellation by distinguishing Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as education, religion, or the institution of marriage, and Repressive State Apparatuses (e.g., police, military). He emphasizes the symbolic function of ideology and argues that ideology exerts its power by producing individual subjects who are invested in their particular position within larger systems of meaning. It is through ideology that an individual emerges as a subject, being inserted into the always-already existing intertextual ideological universe. Through this process, the individuals locate themselves within the ideological universe through "misrecognition" of the self. Althusser argues that ideology is both the process of subjectification (to emerge as a subject) and subjectivization (to be subjected to ideology).

The current global condition complicates the notion of interpellation precisely because the conflicting and contradictory ISAs coexist and collide through globalization. Today, the forces of ideological interpellation are multidirectional rather than top-down or center-periphery. The cultural products, images, and meanings are mass-produced and

mediated transnationally, blurring the boundaries of ISAs and creating multidirectional forces that interpellate us into subjects. Gergen (1991) argues that our understanding of the self has changed tremendously due to the technological advancement that demands individuals occupy multiple subject positions simultaneously. He describes this social saturation of the self as a postmodern condition characterized by “a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality—to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good” (p. 7). This “saturated self” is exactly the product of multidirectional interpellation on a global scale.

Multidirectional interpellation on a global scale means, for example, that the Western culture can no longer assume the authoritative position to interpellate non-Western subjects—as in Orientalism—but Western subjects can be interpellated (back) by the images of themselves portrayed, copied, and/or appropriated by non-Western cultures. When multiple ISAs coexist and collide beyond national and cultural boundaries, the process of interpellation itself becomes saturated; the individuals are simultaneously hailed by multiple ideologies whose origin and authenticity are no longer rooted in a particular tradition or cultural memory. The formation of diasporic communities is another context in which interpellation becomes multifold and transcends spatial boundaries. As Georgiou (2006) shows, diasporic identities are constructed through mass-mediated images and the diasporic subjects’ differential relationships to space—both their homeland and their place of residence. Appadurai (1996) argues that the contemporary global condition is no longer homogenous and linear but is composed of multiple “scapes” with their own autonomy and constraints, influencing yet operating disjunctively with each other. Such disjunctive “scapes,” he argues, are imaginatively

mediated through transnational movements of migrants, travelers, and mass media. The multidirectional interpellation of subjects accounts for the fact that there is no closure to the process of interpellation, and anyone can unknowingly and unexpectedly be subjected to ideology—or a nexus of ideologies—and become its active participants.

Corporeality

When the notion of subjectivity is explored, a question emerges in terms of its relationship to the body. This is because the body is a site on which the singularity of the “I” rests. The body is generally viewed as the unit of the coherent “I”; the body is often considered a container of one’s mind. The body, in other words, is often viewed as that which draws the boundary between the self and other, and it enables the singular “I” by keeping external the pluralities of subjectivities. Drawing on Kristeva’s (1982) discussion of the body, Mansfield (2000) points out that “our very sense of selfhood at its simplest and most primitive level is connected with the separation and integrity of the body. This separation is flawed and questionable...because the unity of the body is never more than fragile and provisional” (p. 82). This notion of the body as the sanctuary of singular subjectivity, therefore, is challenged particularly when the boundary between the social and the biological is contested.

When the notion of the body is politicized, the body is not simply a site on which social differences are constructed, but is itself the machinery of difference without which it does not exist (Butler, 1993). In other words, on the one hand, the body (raced and gendered, for instance) becomes a productive and regulatory mechanism of difference through social practices and significations; and on the other hand, its existence is materialized only insofar as it embodies socially constructed differences. Far from being

biologically pure, Butler (1993) argues that the body is not a clean slate upon which socially constructed differences are marked, but the notion of the biological itself is conceived and constituted within the cultural and political regulatory framework that materializes the body. According to Butler, a social construction such as gender is a “constitutive constraint” of the body, without which the materiality of the body cannot be conceived (p. xi):

Always already a cultural sign, the body sets limits to the imaginary meanings it occasions, but is never free of an imaginary construction. The fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body as real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the „literal“ and the „real“. The limits of the „real“ are produced within the naturalized heterosexualization of bodies in which physical facts serve as causes and desires reflect the inexorable effects of that physicality. (Butler, 1990, p. 71)

Similarly, Foucault (1978) argues that the system of power/knowledge is materialized through discursive practices that discipline human bodies and produce subjectivities that are responsive to, and responsible for, the disciplinary practices placed on the body. McLaren (1999) utilizes the term “enfleshment” (p. 190) to describe the process in which the body enacts the ideology through muscle memory and physical responses to representations and other systems of meaning. By enfleshment McLaren means “the mutually constitutive enfolding of social structure and desire; that is, it is the dialectical relationship between the material organization of inferiority and the cultural modes of materiality we inhabit subjectively” (p. 190). The notion of enfleshment particularly speaks to the experience of racial interpellation and its impact on one’s

subjectivity (Leonardo, 2005). From these points of view, the situatedness of the “I” owes tremendously to how the body is culturally materialized and subjectively enacted within the nexus of social fantasies, ideologies, and imaginaries. As any experience is mediated through the experience of one’s physicality, corporeality is one of the fundamental elements that constitutes one’s identity.

Spatiality

The notion of the body leads to the question of its relation to, and interaction with, the space it inhabits. The corporeal experience is always situated within the spatial environment. As Lefebvre (1974/1991) argues in *The Production of Space*, ideologies are materialized not only through the body but also through space: “what is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?” (p. 44). Lefebvre sees the space as instrumental in reproducing the mode of production, maintaining social relations, and serving hegemony. Critiquing the poststructuralist approach that privileges the influence of mental structure over the physical/real space, Lefebvre attempts to mediate the gap between mental space and physical space and to construct a theoretical field that mediates and unifies multiple spatialities: “we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias (pp. 11-12). He argues that space is produced through the triad of social practice (perceived space), representation of space (conceived space), and representational spaces (lived space).

Based on Lefebvre's theorization of space, Soja (1989) calls for the spatialization of critical theorizing. He argues that it is space, rather than time, that produces and conceals the reproduction of the relations of production. Extending Soja's critical spatial theorizing, Allen (1999) addresses the relationship between the social production of space and our subjectivity and consciousness. He examines how space is imagined and lived through normative and hegemonic imaginaries and argues that we must interrogate "the subjective aspects of spatial thinking and practice that are related to the re/production of power" (p. 250). Similarly, Shome (2003) argues that space must be recognized as a central component in communication for the production and reproduction of culture, identity, and social power. Space is produced by, and is productive of, the subjectivity that yearns for situatedness and the body that materializes through interactions with the physical and symbolic environment.

Literal and metaphorical spatiality also plays a significant role in framing the analytical focus. Gilroy (1993), for example, argues that Black cultural politics should be theorized using the spatial metaphor of the Atlantic as a cultural and political system. He urges a paradigmatic shift from national and ethnic space to transnational spatiality: "in opposition to both of these nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (p. 15). Spatial framing—whether literal or metaphorical—shapes the ways in which space is lived, experienced, and its knowledge legitimized. Spatiality, therefore, mediates, and is mediated by, multidirectionally interpellated subjectivity and corporeality.

Temporality

It is often against the notion of space that time is conceptualized. While the intellectual trend to focus on spatiality over temporality became popular since the late 1980s, May and Thrift (2001) argue that such a dualism should be challenged in order to theorize the multidimensional networks of time-space: “the picture that emerges is less that of a singular or uniform social time stretching over a uniform space, than of various (and uneven) networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field” (p. 5). Furthermore, they draw attention to “the extent to which the imaginative realm is itself of considerable importance to our understanding of TimeSpace and hence, in turn, to how we subsequently act in TimeSpace” (p. 20). In conjunction with spatiality that situates the embodied experiences of the self, therefore, temporality is an integral part of one’s sense of belonging, experience, and agency.

Temporality is never neutral or universal; rather, it organizes the ways in which physical, cognitive, and emotional resources are distributed in social practices. In Western culture, for example, time is traditionally conceptualized as fluid and dynamic whereas space is conceptualized as static and stable (May & Thrift, 2001). This conceptualization of time is characteristic of modernity in which the progression of Western civilization is believed to materialize in the linear progression of history toward the future (Bauman, 2000). It was this shared sense of linear time that became the foundation of a nationalism that associated spatial territory with a particular temporality and temporal continuity (Anderson, 1991). This shared temporality entails not only the shared narratives of national history but also the shared practice of remembering in which national belonging is constituted through selective memory, oblivion, nostalgia, and

invented tradition (Renan, 1990; Billig, 1995; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). On a more personal level, Øian (2004) argues that the linearity of time plays a key part in shaping self-identity, subjective autonomy, and life planning underscored by individualism.

Through the technological advancement and globalization of capitalism, the linearity of time is experienced quite differently today. Harvey (1989) utilizes the concept of “time-space compression” to describe the postmodern condition in which temporal and spatial barriers are overcome through capitalism and telecommunication technologies. He argues that time-space compression speaks to the “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves” (p. 240). It has become increasingly difficult to specify and stabilize one’s cultural and historical location under the assumption of the linear continuity of time attached to a monolithic physical space. Furthermore, under the condition of transnational mass production and consumption, our relationship to the past has also changed. Appadurai (1991) argues that people consume what he calls “armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (p. 78). That is, “rather than expecting the consumer to supply memories while the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia, now the viewer need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered” (p. 78). The current condition of transnational temporality—in which time is compressed, commodified, and fabricated—elucidates how the constitution of the situated self has become increasingly complex and difficult.

Thus far, I have explicated the four modes of interaction and engagement that constitute the multimodal approach. In what follows, I introduce the autobiographical texts that I will use to apply my proposed methodology.

Autobiographical Texts

In order to explore the process of interaction and engagement between an individual and his/her social worlds, I focus on autobiography as a site of identity formation and contestation. Autobiographical writing exemplifies the struggle for the coherent “I”—or “we”—and its ultimate failure. In other words, autobiographical writing is a practice that inserts the agential self into existing social relations, while the self is forever intertwined with, and molded by, the existing flows of ideologies and the structures of discourse (Zukic, 2009; White, 2001). This process makes visible that the particularity of the “I” is never outside of its historical specificity. Autobiographical writing, therefore, serves as an exemplary text to theorize the transnationally mediated identity formation both as a subjective experience and as a microcosm of larger ideological systems.

Asian Japanese

For the purpose of my analysis, I chose two autobiographical texts written by a Japanese writer and an Asian American writer. The first autobiographical book, *Asian Japanese*, is a photo-travelogue written by Kisei Kobayashi (1995, 1996, 2000). Consisting of three volumes, the book was first published in 1995 and became a bestseller; the second and third volumes were published in 1996 and 2000 respectively. *Asian Japanese* is a collection of essays about the author’s first backpacking trip to Asian countries, focusing primarily on his encounter with Japanese backpackers, their life

stories, and their reflections on their life and the meaning of traveling through Asia. In Japan, taking a long-term backpacking trip to Asia became popular from the late 1980s to the 1990s when the Japanese economy went through a strong success followed by its immediate downturn. For each Japanese traveler Kobayashi encountered, there is a black-and-white portrait of the person. The detailed description of the traveler's life stories and narratives are closely intertwined with Kobayashi's personal reflections and feelings about his life as a 23-year old male who left his mundane yet stable job as a newspaper photographer to travel Asia. *Asian Japanese* became a "bible" for young Japanese backpackers who choose to leave behind the safe, yet highly controlled and bureaucratized, life in modern Japan.

The first volume of *Asian Japanese* includes Kobayashi's visit to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Nepal, and India; the second volume focuses on his trip to Hanoi, Vietnam, and then to its colonial metropolis Paris, France; the third volume includes his trip back "home" through the "internal Asia" of Okinawa to his hometown in Nagano located in the central region of Japan. Throughout the three volumes, "Asia" is juxtaposed with "Japan," serving an important function to both situate and destabilize the author's search for his identity. Remaining widely popular over a decade after its first publication, *Asian Japanese* is reflective of, if not representative of, the sentiment shared by its contemporary young Japanese audience. *Asian Japanese* is a rich autobiographical text that enables me to read how the situatedness of the self is negotiated and enabled between the locally and personally specific view of "Asia" and the larger ideological systems of "the West" and "the East" that shape the situatedness of being Asian/Japanese.

Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey

Written by Lydia Minatoya, *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey* was published in 1992. Minatoya provides an autobiographical account of her life as a second-generation Japanese American woman. She weaves the memories of her grandparents, childhood encounters, and adulthood transformations in her poetic and impressionistic writing. She incorporates the narratives of her grandparents and parents in the wartime relocation camp; she describes vivid memories of her childhood; she beautifully portrays the stories of friendship and belonging in Asia. Through a mosaic of multiple selves and voices, she navigates across multiple time periods, cultural contexts, and languages that constitute her multicultural selfhood. From her childhood to adulthood, Minatoya goes back and forth—both literary and in her multicultural experience—between Asia and America. Her hyphenated identity pulls her to one side of the globe as she gravitates to another. In this process, she becomes an Asian American.

Minatoya's autobiographical writing is more impressionistic and descriptive than explanatory and argumentative. She does not explicitly state her opinions or thoughts in her writing. She instead describes and highlights the moments—sceneries, conversations, and the state of mind—that stand out in her life experience. This narrative technique accentuates her ambivalence about her Asian American identity, always being pushed and pulled by two distinct categories and worlds. She provides a collection of vignettes of her life experience—not an analysis of her experience but “intensely minute and impressive elaborations” (Lee, 1998, p. 345) of selective memories that stand out in her

memory. Minatoya's narrative technique recreates the moments of her life as she experienced it.

The Researcher's Relationship to the Autobiographical Text

As a process of meaning making, the interpretation of text is shaped by the researcher's assumption about the nature of the text (Grossberg, 1984; Grossberg, et al., 2006). There are at least three different approaches researchers can take in interpreting cultural texts: 1) texts reflect; 2) texts make visible; and 3) texts constitute. In the first approach, the text is viewed as a direct reflection of an individual's mind. In this case, the author has a command over the text, in which her/his thoughts and feelings are mirrored and expressed in autobiographical writing. The researcher's task, therefore, is to pay attention to the meaning expressed explicitly in the text through language. This approach assumes that the meaning—and the intention of the author—is on the surface of the text only to be objectively recognized by the reader.

In the second approach, the text is viewed as a manifestation of the author's unconscious. In this case, an author's unconscious feelings or abstract thoughts are made visible through the practice of writing (or speaking). The researcher's task in this case is to reveal the author's unrecognized feelings and thoughts, biases, and ideologies communicated through his/her discursive strategies and linguistic choices. Furthermore, this approach assumes that autobiographical writing reveals the author's ways of thinking despite his/her intention and/or without his/her awareness.

In the third approach, the text is viewed as constitutive of the author/subject, rather than reflective of his/her conscious or unconscious mind. In this case, the autobiographical "I" is viewed as a textual construction. The autobiographical "I"

emerges through the textual practice and within the intertextuality of meaning. That is, there is no real self who can write about her/himself; rather, the author's self is constituted through the practice of writing about the self.

In my analysis, I take the third approach to the autobiographical texts. This means that I am not concerned about whether or not there is a direct correspondence between the author's "true" self and what is written in the text. This also means that my primary concern is not placed on revealing the author's false consciousness or unrecognized faith in certain ideologies. Rather, I approach the autobiographical texts as constitutive of the autobiographical subject and focus on how the situated sense of being-in-the-world materializes through the four modes of interaction and engagement. This is not a return to reductionistic individualism or a relativism that disregards historical contexts and ideologies. My goal, however, is to elucidate how individuals come to be positioned in the nexus of ideological forces and to grasp what they can see, do, and think from that particular position. In order to achieve this goal, I avoid attributing the autobiographical discourses to the socially deterministic and monolithic ideological system or practice (i.e. racism, sexism, classism, and nationalism). This is not because they no longer matter or do not exist; rather, it is precisely because I seek to account for the fact that there are interconnected yet different views and landscapes made visible and accessible from the particular location of the autobiographical "I." In other words, ideologies do matter in shaping one's identity, but they matter differently and enable different views, experiences, and agency in different contexts. Throughout this study, I develop, refine, and experiment with this alternative way of reading autobiographical texts in order to foreground the multi-perspectival nature of transnational identity formation.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide my analysis of the selected autobiographical texts. The questions will broadly direct my analytical focus in order to elucidate how the situated sense of the self is enabled, experienced, and negotiated through the four modes of interaction and engagement; and how the idea of Asia functions in materializing their identities:

1. How do the autobiographical subjects interact and engage with their social worlds through multidirectional interpellation, spatiality, temporality, and corporeality?
2. How are their identities materialized through the process of multimodal interactions and engagements?
3. How do the autobiographical subjects interact and engage with Asia, and what is the role of Asia in materializing their identities?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I delineated a proposed methodological approach that I will use to analyze two selected autobiographical texts. The methodology developed above is not a final product; rather, it is a set of theoretical concepts and philosophical assumptions that I will apply in order to address my research questions. The development of an appropriate methodology occupies a central focus of this study, through which I rethink and reconsider the ways in which identity can be theorized and researched. In the following chapter, I provide my analysis of the first autobiographical text, *Asian Japanese*.

CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS OF *ASIAN JAPANESE*

In this chapter, I analyze the autobiographical texts, *Asian Japanese* (Kobayashi, 1995, 1996), using the multimodal approach explicated in the previous chapter. *Asian Japanese* is a collection of essays about the author's backpacking trips to Asian countries, focusing primarily on his encounter with Japanese backpackers, their life stories, and their reflections on their lives and the meaning of traveling through Asia. In his writing, Kobayashi intertwines the detailed descriptions of the travelers' narratives with his own personal reflections and thoughts. The first volume of *Asian Japanese* includes Kobayashi's visit to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Nepal, and India; the second volume focuses on his trip to Hanoi, Vietnam, and then to its colonial metropolis Paris, France; the third volume includes his trip back "home" through the "internal Asia" of Okinawa to his hometown in Nagano located in the central region of Japan. In my analysis, I focus on the first two volumes in which the idea of Asia is most highlighted in his self-narratives.

Asian Japanese exemplifies the transnationally mediated formation of Japanese national identity. In his attempt to reinvent his selfhood, Kobayashi goes to Asia. For Kobayashi, Asia represents the opposite of Japan and a frontier of new subjectivity. His desire for Asia, however, reflects the larger political and economic trend during the 1990s in Japan to move away from the West and seek Asia as a next frontier of modernization. The task in my analysis is to understand how Kobayashi's situated sense of the self emerges, materializes, and transforms through the multiple modes of interactions between

Kobayashi and his social worlds—in this case Asia, Japan, and the West. In the following, I first apply the notion of multidirectional interpellation to understand how Kobayashi seeks a desirable self-image through taking photographs of other Japanese travelers in Asia. I illustrate how Asia emerges as a key context through which he seeks to interpellate his ideal self. I then focus on how Kobayashi's situated sense of the self is negotiated across different spatialities in Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. I highlight how Kobayashi's sense of self is negotiated through his relationships with different spaces. I also analyze how Kobayashi's attempt to reinvent his identity is enabled through different flows of time and through temporal structures in different spaces. Finally, I address how his "Asian Japanese" identity is materialized through his corporeal experience of the difference between the East and the West.

Multidirectional Interpellation

Interpellating Asian Japanese

In *Asian Japanese*, Kobayashi demonstrates the process of self-interpellation in which he actively seeks particular individuals who can call upon him and awaken his new self-recognition. In the confusing period of moving into adulthood, Kobayashi sets out for Asia to capture the images of Japanese backpackers and listen to their stories. In an interview, Kobayashi recalls his backpacking trip to Asia as a journey to find people like himself:

That journey was for me to find someone like myself. I wanted to see those who are grappling, in the midst of the chaotic life in Asia, with something "real" that cannot be found in the metropolitan, urban settings in Japan. (Kobayashi, 2007)

For Kobayashi, Asia is not merely the land of exotic cultures and thrilling encounters; rather, Asia is an enabling context for a particular kind of interpellation. He did not leave behind the mundane life in Tokyo desiring to see “Asia” per se. He sought Asia because it provides a spatiotemporal context in which a particular kind of self-exploration and self-interpellation is possible. As a site of self-exploration outside of the reach of modern Japanese life, Asia provides a space for those young Japanese travelers to disavow their social belonging, denounce cultural norms and values, and become “nobody.” Kobayashi writes that “I was nobody in Asia. Even more, I wanted to become nobody. I knew that Asia made it possible. That’s why I stuck to Asia” (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 65).

In his first destination, Bangkok, he experiences the collapse of his value system in front of the local people whose lives appear vastly different from his own: “My sense of values that I took for granted came tumbling down right in front of my eyes. And, I wanted to destroy it completely. I wanted to quit being me” (1995, p. 47). As a photographer, Kobayashi’s photographic subject in Asia is not the local people, cultural artifacts, or scenic landscapes. His photographic subjects are the individuals from Japan who, like Kobayashi himself, are in search of the directions and meaning in life. What he wanted to see in Asia was not necessarily tourist attractions or ancient ruins; he wanted to capture through photography those who took the risk of removing themselves from the spatiotemporal context of Japanese society. In his search for alternative ways of life outside of the rigid social norms and expectations of Japanese society, Asia is a context in which the possible images of himself can be captured through the photographic images of other Japanese individuals. He desires to see and listen to these individuals because they embody and enact the “real” that Kobayashi perceives is lacking in his life.

As an act of symbolic engagement with the world, photography plays a crucial role in Kobayashi's self-interpellation. The act of taking photographs provides him with opportunities to see himself in the images of his photographic subjects. His journey to Asia is driven by his desire to behold the individuals whose lives reflect Kobayashi's personal struggles as an aspiring photographer and provide a sense of assurance and guidance. Thus, the gaze placed upon his photographic subjects is the gaze placed upon himself, and the stories told by the photographic subjects are the stories of his own:

Every traveler I encountered in my journey in Asia was in some ways a reflection of my own image. [They were me and] at the same time, I was them. I was capturing an image of myself through taking photographs of them. Everybody was there, looking for something. They couldn't find the direction for the future, but they traveled Asia to find something. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 9)

In a series of black-and-white portraits, Kobayashi typically places the Japanese travelers at the center, most of them directly looking at the camera. The individuals in the photographs are mostly young and have stayed in parts of Asia for an extended period of time. Their unshaved faces, uncombed hair, and tired clothes speak to the length and the nature of their trip. Some of them are dressed in the clothes of the local culture.

Kobayashi describes his photographic approach:

What I wanted to express through taking photographs of them is their delicate fragility. The fragility because that they are alone in a foreign country, and obviously, the fact that this is not their everyday life. Also they cannot foresee their future, being always on the way to somewhere. I wanted to capture their fragility in the ephemeral moment. If I put it differently, it is beauty. They are so

beautiful. The beauty in the wind, on the verge of being destroyed. (Kobayashi 1995, pp. 9-10)

These individuals are in Asia not for commercialized tourism promoted in the mainstream. Their crude and unsophisticated appearance is placed seamlessly in the background of the photographic images—the unpaved streets, rundown buildings, cluttered hotel rooms, and shadowy alleys. The images are at the same time decadent yet full of energy, peaceful yet chaotic, and simple yet abundant.

In the images of those who are on the way to becoming someone and who choose to live outside of the ordinary life in Japan, Kobayashi sees the image of himself. Upon his return to Tokyo from the first trip to Asia, Kobayashi expresses a sense of freedom and comfort with his newly acquired Asianness that differentiates him from other Japanese people. In response to two Japanese women who mistook him for being Thai, he says:

I was wearing the shirt I bought in Bangkok right before I flew back to Japan, and even to my eyes, I did not look Japanese. For some reason, it made me feel very comfortable. When I moved closer to the center of the city, I saw a crowd of people for the first time [after my return]. It was a group of salaried-men on the street who were waiting for the traffic lights to change... They were dressed in suits in monotonous colors and they had absolutely no facial expression. I never saw anything like that in Asia—a group of people with numbness and boredom on their faces. (Kobayashi, 1995, p. 242)

Through his journey in Asia, he cultivates a new self-image in relation to other Japanese travelers living and breathing in “Asian” contexts. Asia, in this case, provides contextual

resources that enable him to engage in a self-interpellation for a more desired subjectivity and identity. In this sense, Asia is not only a place but also an enabling context—a context in which the boundary of life as a Japanese is disrupted and challenged to enable him to project and recognize a different self. Asia is a context in which Kobayashi is able to seek a particular kind of interpellation by Japanese travelers who rebel against the normative lifecycle and who, like Kobayashi, choose an unpredictable future over the safe and predictable life in Japan. Capturing the lives of Japanese travelers in Asia is not merely an act of aesthetic representation or creative expression; it is rather an act of self-interpellation in which Kobayashi seeks an image of himself in the photographic subjects that simultaneously hail and activate the photographer’s self-image.

Seeking an Alternative Source of Interpellation: From Asia to Europe

Kobayashi’s attitude toward Asia changes after taking several trips back and forth between Japan and other Asian countries. After the publication of the first volume of *Asian Japanese*, his career as a photographer and writer is more established. While he initially chose Asia to become “nobody,” he is now ready to become “somebody.” The second volume of *Asian Japanese* includes his transition from the moratorium of adolescence into adulthood. He describes this transition as follows:

I first went on a journey because I wanted to be nobody. But it has gradually changed as the time passed by. It was time, I realized, for me to draw a conclusion. More precisely, it meant bringing an end to my moratorium. I wanted to be nobody, but now I want to be somebody. (1996, pp. 7-8)

This transition necessitates him to seek an alternative space for self-exploration, growth, and photographic expression. For Kobayashi, Asia embodied chaos—no rigid social

order unlike Japan, underdeveloped cities and infrastructures, and simple ways of life. Initially, Asia was a space for him to liberate himself from the rigid social expectations, capitalist-driven values, and traditional norms in Japan. When Kobayashi is ready to move on to the next stage of his life, he seeks new destinations for his journey. When he grows out of Asia, he goes to the West.

The second volume of *Asian Japanese* begins with his first trip to Hanoi, Vietnam followed by Calcutta, India, then to Paris, France, and back to Vietnam. The night before he is scheduled to fly back home from Calcutta, he suffers from serious food poisoning. Lying in bed, looking outside the window at a full moon night, a desire develops in him to go to a place far away from Calcutta. Suffering from extreme pain and fatigue, he thinks to himself:

I want to go to a place farthest away from what I see here in India—men who explicitly show their emotions on their faces, the smell of ripened fruits, the boys who swim in the Ganges, gods painted in bright colors, the dust and sweat... This feeling is almost like an impulse. It's not that I don't like this city anymore. I want to go to a different place, a place where people have a different kind of values and perspectives. (1996, pp. 57-58)

He desires to see “the exact opposite” of what he has seen in Asia. By this, he means the place with absolute values, stability, and order. Paris comes to his mind as the place farthest away from Asia, as he describes in his recollection:

Suddenly the name of the city came up to my mind...the city, in my mind, was farthest away from Asia. Not the United States, not South America, but Europe. It is Paris...[In Paris] there must be something that cannot be found in Asia and

even Japan, something absolute that cannot be shaken. I couldn't imagine what it would be like for me to be [in Paris]. (1996, pp. 58-59)

He seeks an alternative source of interpellation in the place that is opposite of Asia. As his goals in his life—to be a professional and successful photographer—became clearer, he desires to capture through his photography the individuals who are pursuing their goals in a foreign land. He chooses Paris to see the images of himself in the lives of Japanese nationals who are persevering to achieve their goals and visions:

I cannot even imagine what is waiting for me in Paris. I just want to meet people who are trying to become somebody, just like I am right now...I'm certain that in Paris there are people who have found their goals but are still in the process [of achieving them]. [Their lives] exactly overlap with mine. The impulse for Paris boils down to this. I wonder this is my attempt to place my gaze directly upon myself. (1996, pp. 66-67)

Kobayashi seeks to activate a desirable self by capturing the images of others. In this case, Kobayashi associates risk and youthful rebellion with Asia, and maturity and adulthood with the West. This binary between the East and the West clearly reflects an Orientalist divide that has been historically significant in the Japanese imagination of the world. As a young aspiring photographer, however, Kobayashi's concern is to establish himself in the world that presents itself to be a mixture of chaos and order, tradition and innovation, as well as possibilities and disappointments. Kobayashi's decision to go to Paris resonates with the typical Eurocentric view of the world. However, it is important to understand the East-West binary in the context of his life experience. That is, as he tries to establish his life, an East-West binary emerges in the context of his effort to interact

with the world beyond his immediate social realities. Not only does he attempt to expand the parameter of his life by traveling abroad, he tries as well to become an autonomous subject in the ever-expanding and complex world presented to him. The Orientalist divide between the East and the West materializes in Kobayashi's life experience as he initiates an interaction with "the world," and the conditions and meanings attached to each hemisphere substantiate his personal struggle and growth. Put differently, the binary between the East and the West becomes "real" in Kobayashi's experience because Asia provides him with an opportunity to break away from tradition and the West demands of him maturity and self-discipline. His experience in the West is explicated further in the next section.

The Presence of the West and the Inferiority Complex

While Kobayashi goes to Paris in an attempt to reinvent his self-image from nobody to somebody, the act of self-interpellation is not easily accomplished in Paris. This is because he is unable to see the image of himself in the lives of Japanese people who reside in Paris. The presence of the West—as opposed to the absence of Asia—in Japan overwhelms him from the beginning. He recounts his feelings before the departure to Paris: "perhaps I was afraid of such a magnificent presence of Paris. [I was afraid of] not the size of the city itself, but the excessive amount of information about Paris in Japan" (1996, p. 64). Kobayashi's initial impression of Paris is characterized by confusion and disorientation. Landing at the airport in Paris in November, he feels disoriented by the lack of smell in the air, colorless landscapes, and gray sky. He struggles to find his location on the map, struggles to communicate with the local French people, and finds the streets of Paris inhospitable and cold. On the first night in Paris, he

wanders around the city to find a place to eat dinner. He hesitates to go into the restaurant because he cannot speak French. Unable to gather his courage to go into the restaurant, he comes to terms with the feeling that shapes his experiences of and the relationships to the West:

I found myself completely off balance, not knowing what to do. It was completely unexpected. It was undeniably the feeling that arises from inside, a kind of feeling that I had never felt during my trip in Asia, not for once. During my journey in Asia, there were times when I felt scared or overwhelmed, but I never felt this way before. Beyond any doubt, this is my inferiority complex toward the West. (1996, p. 77)

This sense of inferiority persists throughout his stay in Paris, especially when he meets Japanese people who reside in Paris. He constantly feels that he is out of place in Paris. Over the course of his stay in Paris, he interviews over ten individuals from Japan. Each of them is unique and has found their own niche in Paris. Kobayashi feels that they are all sophisticated and confident. Speaking with a young Japanese woman who studies French in Paris, Kobayashi writes:

I wonder if those who go to Asia and Europe have different qualities and traits. When I see her, I believe [there are differences]. She is well-suited in this city. I wonder how I look as a part of the landscape of the city. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I had the same feeling when I graduated from high school and went to Tokyo for the first time ten years ago. Behind that feeling, there was self-consciousness and inferiority complex. (1996, p. 93)

Kobayashi feels that Japanese people in Paris are a different type of Japanese. When he was in Asia, he never felt that he was inferior to other Japanese travelers in Asia. He actively initiated conversations with them in order to get to know them. In Paris, however, he is self-conscious about his lack of status in Paris. He suddenly becomes unsure about the meaning of his journey in one of the oldest cities in Europe. He writes that he is uncomfortable with meeting strangers in Paris, and that “a type of inferiority complex toward this city” is projected upon the Japanese people in Paris (1996, p. 124).

It is the presence of the West—and the weight of Western civilization—that makes it difficult for Kobayashi to see a desirable self-image in Paris. When he encounters Japanese nationals in Paris, he is simultaneously interpellated by the West. His self-image is reflected on the mirror of Western hegemony that shows the image of “Asian” or “Japanese” as contrasted with the West and White. When he meets a Japanese man who runs a flower shop in the heart of Paris, he writes:

To my eyes, he was full of confidence and it made me feel a little uncomfortable.

The feeling was something very close to inferiority complex. I knew it was related to the fact that I was in the West for the first time. (1996, p. 126)

In Paris, Kobayashi struggles to see an ideal self-image in the lives of other Japanese individuals. Behind the images of successful Japanese individuals in Paris is the absolute presence of the West. In his self-narratives, his initiation into adulthood is juxtaposed with his initiation into the Western world. In this way, the power relation between the East and the West is deeply ingrained in Kobayashi’s negotiation of his location in his life and his status in the world. When he tries to expand the parameter of the self through traveling overseas, he encounters and struggles with the global power relations embedded

in his Japanese identity. To put it differently, the East-West binary is made concrete in Kobayashi's personal experience because his struggle for personal growth is shaped and contextualized by the particular conditions of his travel destinations and his experience of the foreign cultural spaces. In the next section, therefore, I address Kobayashi's interactions with the spatial environment and how it shapes his situated sense of the self.

Spatiality

Tokyo as a Spatial Signpost

Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is the center of the institution of modern Japanese life. After the devastating destruction in WWII, Tokyo was rebuilt into one of the biggest and busiest cities in the world. Today, Tokyo continues to symbolize Asian hyper-modernity in the global imagination of Asia. For Kobayashi, his life in Tokyo was the catalyst to leave Japan for Asia. Originally from Nagano in the central region of Japan surrounded by mountains, he moved to Tokyo to study photography and then work in a newspaper company. Born in the late 1960s, Kobayashi moved to Tokyo when he was eighteen years old in the midst of the economic boom in the late 1980s. Young people from all over Japan moved to Tokyo, seeking job opportunities and taking advantage of the unprecedented economic prosperity that seemed to last forever. Kobayashi's journey to Asia is driven by the sense of frustration and doubt over the unhinged pursuit of material wealth and economic progress. He writes: "while everybody and everything in the world went on the spree, I felt as if I was the only one who couldn't go along with it" (1995, p. 61). As an aspiring photographer, he grew increasingly frustrated with his stable but mind-numbing job. While the festive mood of the society promoted the sense of progress, he found himself caged in the mechanical life of the modern city, repeating the

same activities every day. He survives the bombardment of information, traffic, and crowds by shutting off his sensory system to the extent that he begins to see the crowd of people in the train as “annoying objects” (1995, p. 58).

As Kobayashi moves through places in Asia, he also travels through and across cultural and ideological spaces. Because his journey is about self-discovery and growth, in his self-narratives he constantly looks back and forward to gauge his location both geographically and personally. As Kobayashi travels throughout Asia, he recounts his life in Tokyo as if the city of Tokyo functions as a reference point—a landmark of his memory and the metaphorical signpost through which he measures the distance he has traveled and the transformation he has gone through. In *Asian Japanese*, the landscape of Asia—its people, culture, and impact on Japanese travelers—is constantly compared to that of Tokyo. Throughout his autobiographical narratives, the practice of remembering Tokyo serves as a context for Kobayashi’s experience of Asia and allows him to orient his location both geographically and personally. In his first destination, Bangkok, Thailand, Kobayashi reflects on his life in Tokyo:

Until a little while ago, I used to go to work every day in the city called Tokyo in Japan. So many people were hurrying their ways. So many people would rush into the last train of the night, sometimes leaving a man’s tie caught between the sliding doors. I wonder where I was trying to go. Now I realize that there is a completely different world outside of the life I took for granted. (Kobayashi, 1995, pp. 46-47)

Through reflecting back on his life in Tokyo, he emphasizes the stark contrast between Japan and Asia. He recounts the days in Tokyo as if he reminds himself of the reason

why he left Japan and enjoys the freedom outside of the mechanical city. On the train ride from Bangkok to Butterworth, Malaysia, he recollects the images of Tokyo:

My mind drifted to the days leading up to leaving my job. After I began my journey, the thought never left my mind. Until just a few weeks ago, I was a salaried-man. The same image keeps coming to my mind. Outside of the window, I see the highway running at the same level as my eyes. [The highway] is always busy with traffic. Over the highway, there are a countless number of colorless buildings, fading in the smog, and the square-shaped sky. I look at this view from my desk on the third floor. For three and a half years, I was in this scenery. (1995, p. 56)

What is highlighted in his descriptions of Tokyo is the lifelessness of the city: the numbness and absence of sensory experience, emotion, or even struggle. From the tired look on the faces of people going home late at night in crowded trains, the mechanically organized and clean city streets and buildings, to the endless supply of commercial products and information, Kobayashi characterizes the life in Tokyo “mazelike” (1995, p. 60). In Kobayashi’s recollection, Tokyo is a postmodern space where information and commodities take over the real human experience. Everything is artificially constructed and virtually consumed. In the information-saturated society, his yearning for “experience” and “the real” deepens:

I think it is quite normal to feel some kind of “abnormality” in Japanese society. We have come to realize that happiness is not guaranteed by material wealth that blinds us all.

We are all turned into barcodes in this clean, safe, controlled, and abstract society. We all lose our individuality in the flood of information and begin to confuse the words spoken by others as our own... We know a lot without experiencing them. But there is nothing real... I wanted to speak in my own words and tell my own stories that only I am able to tell. (Kobayashi, 1995, pp. 366-367)

Kobayashi comes to realize the distance between Tokyo and “Asia” even more clearly upon his return from his first trip to Asia. He describes the view of the city from a shuttle bus as “the machine”:

Outside of the window, it is puzzling that I see nobody on the street... No cars on the street have a scratch, and they are all strangely clean, making me think that they are all plastic. The trains look as if they are all plastic models. Inside the trains, the shadows of people look like mannequins. The love hotel⁸ shaped like a castle doesn’t even look erotic at all.

“Tokyo is a machine.” Suddenly, it occurred to me. It is as if I am in some kind of switchboard. The area is too artificial. The place called Bay Area⁹ looked like the ruins of futuristic city. It was creepy. There was no smell of human beings. Where have all those people in Asia gone? (Kobayashi, 1995, p. 241)

For Kobayashi, leaving Tokyo meant to leave the mechanical and machine-like life. Kobayashi questions his spiritually and emotionally impoverished life in Tokyo and chooses Asia as a site where he explores and reclaims his humanity, individuality, and life. His desire to live a unique life of his own is expressed through various spatial metaphors where he tries to “pave the path” and figure out “where to go.” His personal

⁸ A love hotel is a short-stay motel targeting couples and providing privacy for sexual activities.

⁹ A waterfront development by Tokyo Bay.

struggle that catalyzed his departure to Asia is itself an act of orienting and re-orienting his location in the world. His reference to the spatial imaginary of Tokyo performs a crucial function not only in orienting his geographical location in Asia but also in contextualizing and substantiating his experience in Asia. In other words, for Kobayashi, Tokyo is an indispensable reservoir of information from which he draws upon cognitive, symbolic, and material resources for the self-articulation of what he calls Asian Japanese identity.

Asian Spatiality

For Kobayashi, Tokyo symbolizes the totalizing and fanatical rationality of modern Japanese life—from bureaucratized conventions to mechanical production and consumption of all things possible. If Tokyo is a machine—a faceless, soulless, and dehumanizing device of modern life—Asia is its opposite. In response to a Japanese teacher in Hanoi, Vietnam who expresses her dislike of Tokyo, Kobayashi writes:

When I was working as a salaried-man, I couldn't stand the city of Tokyo... I always questioned myself why I couldn't fit in while so many people live their lives without any doubt. I chose Asia as my destination after I quit my job as an impulsive reaction to such experiences. (1996, pp. 26-27)

Kobayashi seeks a way out of his predictable, socially predetermined life through his backpacking trip to Asia. For Kobayashi and other Japanese travelers, “Asia” is outside national territory and the reach of modern social life in Japan. In his narratives, there is almost an absolute absence of the awareness that Japan is part of Asia regionally, culturally, and historically. On the contrary, Japan is viewed as part of the West. Seeking

the land of the unfamiliar and unknown, Japanese travelers purposefully choose Asia over other more popular Western destinations. Kobayashi writes:

In the trips to developed nations, I somehow feel the presence of Japan. They have everything—television, telephone, the latest music, and everything I know as part of information. When it comes to Asia, I understand nothing, I know nothing. (Kobayashi, 1995, p. 8).

He says that he chose Asia as a destination of his trip due to an “impulsive reaction” to the frustration with his life in Tokyo (p. 27). Asia, therefore, is viewed as the antithesis of a Japan that has become too much like the West. Kobayashi and many other Japanese travelers in *Asian Japanese* seek to be displaced from modern Japan through traveling to Asia. Their cultural and spatial displacement in Asia serves to re-orient themselves in relation to the confined landscape of modern Japanese life. Reflecting upon his experience in Asia and the Japanese people he encountered, Kobayashi writes:

Whether they were permanent residents or travelers, wherever they were, every single one of them was trying to go somewhere, and at the same time they were running away from something. Underneath it all, undoubtedly each one of them confronted the presence of the country called Japan. Despite the fact we were in foreign countries, we were all traveling an invisible nation called Japan. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 401)

This statement illuminates the centrality of Japan and Japaneseness in Kobayashi’s experiences in and of Asia. Asia is a space in which he is able to renegotiate his relationships not only with Japan, but also with himself. Kobayashi’s sense of mobility is shaped by his movements across different places and his relationships to various spaces.

In other words, the sense of mobility and agency is molded by his relationships to and interactions with different spatial environments. Kobayashi chooses to leave Tokyo to establish his individuality as a young Japanese male; and he utilizes Asia as a site of reinventing his self-image and agency. He negotiates the location and the parameter of the self through moving across national borders and reestablishing the relationships between the self and its surrounding spatial environment.

Spatiality of Paris

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Kobayashi shifts the site of his self-exploration and reflection from Asia to Europe—more specifically, to Paris. The shift from Asia to Europe as a site of his personal reflection and growth is deeply intertwined with the larger spatial configurations of power inscribed in the geopolitical division between the East and the West. Kobayashi writes that Paris is like “a maze made of stone” (1996, p. 111) with landscapes that always move away from his reach. In Paris, unlike the streets in Asia, the images in his viewfinder always escape his effort to capture the city and make it his own. For Kobayashi, Paris is completely different from Asia in many ways:

This is not Asia, I thought to myself again. This is a city made of stone.

Compared to this, Asia is the red, burning earth...Paris is here, it exists here. It is full of heavy confidence. Paris is not running. It's not even walking. When I was traveling Asia, especially in Southeast Asia, every country was running [toward something]. It is the image of running and sweating...I myself was running and sweating [in Asia]. (1996, p. 110)

While Asia is open, chaotic, and full of energy, Paris is orderly, cold, and impersonal, according to Kobayashi. In Asia, it was easy to meet and talk to strangers, become friends, and feel part of the environment. In contrast, people in Paris are hidden in the maze, separated by multiple specialized networks and traditions. He compares the sense of orderliness and alienation in Paris to the feelings he experienced in Tokyo. He finds that the maturity of both cities stops people from having more open and honest encounters with each other.

Although Kobayashi experiences confusion and displacement in Paris, he gradually finds a way of situating himself in Paris through the work of modern photographers. One of Kobayashi's favorite photographers, Eugène Atget (1857-1927), is known for documenting the streets and landscapes of Paris in over 10,000 photographs. Atget's photographic approach paved the path of modern photography. Kobayashi begins to learn how to relate to the city of Paris through finding on the streets the images captured in Atget's photographs nearly a century ago. Interestingly, it is through Atget's photographs that Kobayashi is able to experience the city on a more personal level. Kobayashi relates to Paris through the work of the pioneer of modern photography. Through this, he solidifies his identity as a photographer and transforms his inferiority complex toward the West into his self-esteem grounded in professional interest and connection.

Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990) is another important figure in Kobayashi's life. Elsken lived and captured the lives of young people in Paris in the 1950s. In the late 1980s, Kobayashi met Elsken in Tokyo out of coincidence. Elsken's photography ended up having a huge impact on Kobayashi to approach photography as a

means of self-expression. Elsken's photography uses techniques that project his own image onto the photographic subject. In Paris, he remembers that his photographic career began with his encounter with Elsken's work. Kobayashi writes that what Elsken wanted "to see and to capture, in the end, was his own self, his life, and his image as a living being" (1996, p. 120). Through Elsken's work, Kobayashi learns to project his own state of mind and emotions in the images he captures in his photography. Kobayashi walks around the city of Paris through Elsken's depictions of Parisian lives with the kind of self-reflexivity Elsken demonstrated in his photographic work. Kobayashi cultivates his relationship to the spatial environment of Paris by tracing Elsken's viewpoint reflected in his photography. After coming back to Tokyo from Paris, he finds in his picture of the Jardin du Luxembourg a bench that is exactly the same as the one in the picture taken by Elsken. He is moved by the fact that Elsken and he stood at the same location and, forty years apart, captured the same image:

It is nothing special if you think about it. There just happen to be the same bench in the picture taken over forty years ago. But, it shook my heart at the core. It is certain that he pointed his camera to the same scenery as I did. The sceneries crossed each other over the viewfinder. (1996, p. 121-122)

While Kobayashi's initial experience in Paris is disorienting, confusing, and filled with his inferiority complex, he cultivates a proactive and positive relationship with the city through the work of renowned photographers. He learns how to relate to the spatial environment of Paris from how Atget, Elsken, and other photographers portrayed the city and related to the space. This way, Kobayashi incorporates the city of Paris—a piece of the West—into a part of his identity as a photographer.

Temporality

Tokyo and its Temporality

In *Asian Japanese*, the notion of time plays a significant role in shaping Kobayashi's relationships to places, his encounter with people, and his self-narratives. Kobayashi's experience of Asia is not only shaped by spatial interactions but also his navigation across different temporalities in Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. The temporality of Tokyo plays a significant role in pushing Kobayashi out of Japan for Asia. Kobayashi describes how he is trapped by the particular temporality of Tokyo that drives and restricts his life. Despite the fast-paced lifestyle of the big city, he finds himself trapped in the busy, yet stagnant, flow of time. From the train system that almost never fails to run on schedule, to the crowd of people who are dressed alike with the same tired look on their faces, to his senior coworkers who have repeated the same mundane work for over twenty years, for Kobayashi the temporality of Tokyo in the height of economic boom is surprisingly dull and painful. He describes his life in Tokyo:

Wake up at 7:50, leave my apartment at 8:20, arrive at the train station at 8:34. By the time I finish drinking a canned coffee I had bought at the vending machine on the way to the train station, the train comes right in. Every day, exactly at the same time, exactly at the same place, the train door opens.

The train is already full of people, leaving no space. I look at their pale faces. I sigh thinking that I have to squeeze myself into the walls of people again... From the window, I see streams of images with apartments and buildings—they all look the same. I stare at the empty view with my empty heart.

Flat days. Today, yesterday, the day before yesterday, nothing changes.

(Kobayashi, 1995, p. 58)

Kobayashi's frustration stems from the mechanical and systematic organization of time that leads to a predictable future controlled by the network of modern social institutions.

The convenience that the big city offers is exactly what controls his life. His life in Tokyo does not require the conscious effort to live his life to the fullest. Rather, life in the hyper-modernized city provides him with the convenience of the automated flow of time. His life is controlled to the extent that it is no longer necessary for him to control it.

Kobayashi's departure to Asia is catalyzed by his resistance to this normalized "path" paved in front of him:

It seemed that someone has already walked the path I will walk in my life, or something that is similar to mine. I think people can find happiness in such life. I myself thought I would live my life like that. But I couldn't suppress my desire to get out of here. In other words, I wanted to challenge myself. (Kobayashi, 1995, p. 61)

Kobayashi's departure for Asia is an escape from the highly rationalized, systematized, and conventionalized temporal structure in Tokyo. Feeling that his life in Tokyo is not his "real self," he yearns for a different kind of life—a life of his own, a life that nobody has lived before. He seeks to pave his own path and reclaim his individuality by leaving Japan for Asia and by meeting Japanese people who live in different temporalities outside of the hegemonic national temporality of Japanese society.

Kobayashi's description of Tokyo illustrates how his experience of place is shaped not only by the spatial construction of the city, but also by the particular flow of

time that is associated with, and is constitutive of, the metropolitan space called Tokyo. In grappling with his identity, Kobayashi's negotiation begins not necessarily with notions such as race, gender, class, or nationality. His quest for a better self begins with escaping a particular temporality that defines and limits his life. This does not mean that his self-awareness is not shaped by his racial, gender, class, and national positionality. It means, however, that his subjective engagement with the world is not always dictated by the pillars of identity politics. Insofar as temporality is a social and cultural product, it is one of the modes of interaction through which the individual's situatedness of the self is mediated and accomplished.

Asian Temporality

Asia is not only a geopolitical and ideological construction, but it is also a kind of temporality. It is the experience of being bounded in a particular flow of time that makes Asia a desirable destination for Kobayashi. For Kobayashi, the temporality of Asia is different from both Japan and Paris. Asia is viewed as uncontaminated by modernization and modernity's pragmatic rationality. In this case, the lack of direction in his own life—his uncertain future, his frustration with the status quo, and the desire to cultivate a new path—is paralleled with the socio-economic conditions of the countries he visited in Asia. In other words, Asian temporality affirms who he is and where he is with his life:

Right after I quit the job, I left for a journey in Asia. I didn't have Europe or America in my mind. I only thought about Asia. Of course there was a pure curiosity to see Asia, but it was deeply intertwined with my helpless feelings of not knowing what to do with my life. So, it can be said that Asia for me was a field of exploration. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 65)

Unlike Japan whose future direction has already been determined—that is, to rigorously pursue, profit, and also suffer from the consequences of modernization and economic progress—Asia’s future is still open to different possibilities and opportunities. Asia is developing, just like Kobayashi and other Japanese travelers are. This temporality is highly attractive for Kobayashi and other Japanese travelers in Asia.

Kobayashi attaches particular temporalities to the places he visits in Asia. He describes cities in Asia as youthful, future-oriented, moving forward, and under development. For instance, in describing the city of Shanghai, he focuses on the contrast between old streets and the new development of the city, calling the city “the futuristic city right by the rubbles of old streets” (1995, p. 4). In Bangkok, he is fascinated by the “erotic” view of the city, describing it as “the futuristic city of the decadence” (1995, p. 40). Kobayashi sees the sign of modernization in a number of major cities in Asia, but such cities have not yet reached its full maturity. Such landscapes are both innocent and plastic at the same time. Kobayashi describes the night view in Shanghai as follows:

From the park, I can see the new television tower across the Huangpu River...The tower looks like one of those illustrations in children’s books, subtitled “the future city of the twenty-first century.” It’s not realistic at all. The tower is lit up and it looks like a toy. (1995, p. 6)

In *Asian Japanese*, the temporality associated with Asia is characterized by a kind of nostalgia for the future of Asia in the making. Kobayashi sees in Asia a future in the process of creation—the future Japan has once dreamed of. In the mid-1990s, many countries in Asia were still beginning the process of establishing a capitalist economy to compete in the global market. The growing cities in Asia provide a particular temporality

that Japan has once experienced—the sense of moving forward, optimism for future, and innocence.

For Kobayashi and other Japanese travelers, Asian temporality resonates with the conditions of their lives. In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Kobayashi concurs with a twenty-seven-year old Japanese man, Yuji, who expresses his passionate support for Vietnam and its emerging economy. Fukuda tells Kobayashi:

For some reason, I want to cheer [Vietnam] up and encourage them...It's not because we [the Japanese] are economically privileged, but I honestly feel that way. When I see Vietnam, it makes me want to work and try harder. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 368)

On a taxi ride down the street, Kobayashi and Fukuda talk about the view of the developing city. Looking at the busy streets with vendors and food markets on the ground, they wonder if “Bangkok was like this ten years ago, and Japan must have been like this at one time in the past” (1996, p. 365). Also in Ho Chi Minh City, another young Japanese man, Watanabe, says that he knew intuitively that the country is the right place to be. He runs a small business in Vietnam and is attracted by the fact that the country is not fully developed and regulated and therefore has a lot of potential to grow. Kobayashi juxtaposes Watanabe and the city:

Just as we humans have age, so do countries and cities. In that sense, this city [Ho Chi Minh City] is a youth. This city is fragile but it is also full of energy because of its youthfulness. It is like the city is moving forward, sweating. He is twenty-five years old and he is so well suited in this city. I wonder it is because his youthfulness came together with that of this city. (1996, p. 51)

The political and economic conditions in Asia that are viewed as “pre-modern” synchronize with the sentiment of Kobayashi and other Japanese individuals who have not established their identities and social status. Asia is on its way to modernization and development, just as much as they are on the way to adulthood, individuality, and independence. The parallel between the “developing Asia” and “developing self” makes Asia a desirable travel destination. In the following statement, Kobayashi compares Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City:

In Hanoi, there is seriousness of socialist state. In contrast, Ho Chi Minh City looks like a capitalist country. They have foreign products in department stores and the billboards of multinational corporations are the face of the city...It feels good to be in this capitalist-like city...It makes me feel high. Hanoi is not bad either, but I like the heat that arises from human crowds. (1996, p. 43-44)

The energy that arises from a city moving toward the future of economic success and material prosperity resonates with Kobayashi’s desire to move forward with his life. For Kobayashi and Asia, the future is not here yet, but it is certainly coming. Kobayashi romanticizes Asia as a place that will seize and direct the future.

Parisian Temporality

In contrast with the cities in Asia, Kobayashi feels the weight of time and history in Paris. If the temporality of Asia is viewed in terms of future and change, the temporality of Paris is in the past. On the second day in Paris, Kobayashi goes to the *Palais Garnier* to meet his former coworker who studies at a language school in Paris. When he first sees the building of the *Palais Garnier*, he remembers seeing the replica of this building back in Hanoi. Looking at the original *Palais Garnier*, which is grander and

more magnificent than the one in Hanoi, he stands before “the undeniable difference between the colonizer and the colonized” (1996, p. 91). Despite their long historical relationships, Hanoi and Paris appear to be two completely different spaces for Kobayashi. He describes the distance between Paris and Hanoi in temporal terms: “...I cannot conceptualize in my mind that Vietnam and Paris are spaces that exist in the same temporal axis of the present. It makes me feel as if I am traveling beyond time and space” (1996, p. 92). If Asia is full of youthful energy and rapidly growing, Paris has not changed its face since a century ago. He compares different experiences of time in Asia, Japan, and Paris:

Consciously or unconsciously, I approach Asia and Paris as completely different things. Somehow, the flow of time in Paris is similar to that of Japan. As I head back to Vietnam now, I realize that there is a different flow of time there... The one [in Paris] is static, and the other [in Asia] is in a rapid movement. (1996, p. 331)

Kobayashi’s interactions with the world are shaped not only by geographical or cultural differences marked on different countries. His experience of the world across the East to the West is mediated also by different flows of time and different experiences of being bounded in time.

Kobayashi’s relationship to Paris is clearly shaped by his awareness of the particular flow of time attached to the city. His sense of cultural displacement is caused partly by this temporality of the city that belongs to the past rather than the present or future. In Paris, Kobayashi finds the same sceneries of urban landscape that photographer

Eugène Atget documented in his photography back in the late nineteenth century. He writes:

I think to myself that this city is mature. The cities in Asia are like the biological cells that endlessly reproduce. Just like the streets and walls made of stones, this city does not go back or move forward. This city is filled with calmness, maturity, and confidence... These thoughts come to my mind as I see people with blue eyes and white skin, walking down the street in the reddish street lights. There certainly is confidence and calmness that cannot be found in Asia. (1996, p. 96)

In facing the city that maintains the historical legacies over centuries, Kobayashi wonders if there is anything that has not changed over a century in Tokyo. He writes: “we, the Japanese, live our lives in historical amnesia” (1996, p. 113). In Paris, the flow of time is stopped, making it difficult for the outsiders to seek cultural belonging in the present. He also compares temporalities of Paris and Vietnam:

It was as if the entire area of Ho Chi Minh City was a construction zone. As they demolish old buildings, new buildings are being built right next to them... [In the city, there are] huge billboards of multinational corporations and the increased presence of foreigners. A boy who was selling products on the street couldn't tell if I was Japanese. „Are you from the West?” The word sounded unfamiliar to me. I certainly belong to the West. When I go to communist regions, I realize that I am a product of capitalism. And then, there is Paris. This city won't change its face in ten years. Even in a hundred years I'm certain that it won't change. The world is so different. I cannot help but think about it. This city does not change. (1996, p. 111)

For Kobayashi, Paris and Vietnam are two completely opposite worlds defined by different flows of time. The temporal gap between Paris and Vietnam is directly translated to Kobayashi's personal flow of time. On the one hand, he desires to move forward and keep changing just like Asia; on the other hand, he wants to establish something absolute and unchangeable in his life, particularly in terms of his career as a photographer. The flow of time in Paris represents the glimpse of his life with stability, confidence, and unshakable history. Kobayashi's sense of self vacillates between the freedom to be nobody in the open, changing flow of time and the desire to be somebody in the more regulated, established flow of time.

Corporeality

In addition to spatiality and temporality associated with Asia and the West, Kobayashi describes the differences between the East and the West in terms of his bodily experience. For instance, he writes that Asia is a place for physical experiences while Paris is a place for abstract thinking and mind:

To me, Paris was a place to think. In contrast, Vietnam and also Asia are the place to act according to my physical senses. This does not mean, however, that people do not act in Paris and think in Asia.

As I look back that day in Calcutta, now I realize the part of me that belongs to my mind and the body came clashing into each other. That day, lying on the bed, the impulsive reaction [to this clash] pushed me to go to Paris. In other words, it was a reaction to and impulse against Asia. At that time, I was deeply immersed in the journey where I experience and feel everything through my body. For a long time [in Asia], I was always part of these bodily experiences. (p. 395)

In Asia, his experiences are directly connected to his body—from eating food with bare hands, walking around in the rising heat, to traveling for hundreds of miles on a bumpy bus ride and suffering from the excruciating pain of food poisoning. For Kobayashi, Asia is a place for physical survival through which he seeks spiritual renewal. When he comes back to Vietnam after visiting Paris, Kobayashi writes how the significance of sophisticated cultural activities he engaged in Paris disappears in the face of more simple yet real struggles of life in Asia. Kobayashi writes that the only thing he can trust in Asia is his body:

When I come here [to Asia], I realize that the only thing I can believe and trust is my body. This is not a closed room [like Paris] but an open road. To be in Asia means to be in touch with my own body, follow my own senses and values, and find my own view from the chaos. It is tough that I have to walk through the chaos, but at the same time there is freedom to go anywhere I want to. That is what it means to stand on my own feet in Vietnam and also Asia. (1996, p. 394)

Kobayashi reflects that, in Vietnam, the only thing that matters is what is in front of his own eyes. Unlike cities such as Paris, no complex value system or established social networks prevent him from having a more raw experience of the place and people. He finds comfort in the simplicity of life that is directly connected to his physical existence.

In Paris, on the other hand, Kobayashi sees the weight of Western civilization and the legacy of colonial power. He meets with a number of sophisticated Japanese people whose survival in the city is not dependent on their physical strength but on their intelligence, education, and social class. While he cultivates personal relationships with people and culture in Paris, he realizes that Asia suits him better. He describes this

identification with Asia as a bodily experience rather than an abstract idea. After his disorienting experience in Paris, he goes back to Vietnam. When he first sees the view of the city of Hong Kong on the way to Vietnam, he writes:

A few hours after leaving Narita Airport, I saw the landscape of Hong Kong...Masses of buildings crowded in on either side of the runway. For some reason, as I saw this landscape, I felt my heart glow and gradually expand within me. „This is Asia,“ I thought. The feeling penetrated to the core of my body. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 333)¹⁰

In this statement, Kobayashi describes his identification with Asia as a physical and emotional response. He writes that the same kind of feeling is evoked when he sees old friends with whom he can be his true self. Similarly, a Japanese woman in Kathmandu explains the reason why she chose to travel in Asia: “My body and heart directed me to Asia, as if I could smell it out” (1995, p. 132). She describes her interest in Asia—rather than Europe or the United States—as an intuitive choice directed by her bodily senses.

Kobayashi also experiences his cultural displacement in Paris as a bodily experience. On the street of Paris, he feels racially conscious and aware that his (Asian) body is out of place. He recounts his sense of racial displacement in a crowd of people in Paris as follows:

The majority of people were Westerners, but I also found Easterners [in the crowd]. As I walked toward them, it became even clearer in my mind that this is a place called the West, and in this scenery Easterners appear odd and out of place. The difference between Westerners and Easterners is not just height, but the overall proportion of the body. I carefully observed as I stood in the crowd and

¹⁰ Japanese translation is partially quoted from Morris-Suzuki, 1998, p. 5.

realized that Easterners have larger heads in proportion to their bodies. Of course I am one of them. My eyes kept following the Easterners. Somehow it relieved my nervousness. (1996, p. 124-125)

In Paris, Kobayashi's self-awareness is racialized for the first time in his journey. He compares the bodies of White Europeans and Asians. He observes that Asian bodies do not blend into the historic landscape of the city. As a "maze of stone," Paris stands still and is unshakable and unchangeable despite his desire to incorporate the city into part of his selfhood. Paris even dictates his photographic gaze to famous architectures and historic locations. Kobayashi struggles to make Paris his own, not only because of the cultural sophistication of the former colonial metropolis, but also because he knows that his body is out of place in the crowd of "people with blue eyes and white skin" (1996, p. 96). In this sense, racialization taints Kobayashi's self-understanding and self-esteem by altering his relationship to his own body. His inability to find a sense of connection with Paris is not simply due to cultural differences. Rather, he struggles to belong in Paris because of the perceived incommensurability between his Eastern body and their Western bodies. Insofar as it is impossible to separate himself from his own body, his body becomes the source of the difference between the East and the West. Because racialization molds Kobayashi's relationship to his body within the larger East-West power relations, corporeality—or the sense of one's bodily existence—is a contested site of identity realization.

In contrast with his experience in Paris, in his "homecoming" to Asia he finds comfort with his own body and the environment. Unlike Paris where he strongly felt his racial difference and otherness, in Hong Kong he feels the comfort of dissolving into the

environment and becoming part of the landscape. Kobayashi describes this feeling as follows:

I found myself in the midst of many people. The great majority were people of Asian origin...It seemed as though their nationality should be apparent, but it was not precisely recognizable: people from Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thais or Japanese...As soon as I found myself among them, I had a strange feeling—a sense of comfort...I had the illusion that my body was dissolving. As I felt this, I thought of my time in Paris. In Paris, I had never had a sense that I was dissolving. I always felt that I was floating amidst some foreign substance. Whether you float or dissolve—that is the difference between West and East, I thought. (Kobayashi, 1996, p. 334)¹¹

As shown above, Kobayashi explains the difference between the West and the East in terms of his experience in and of the body. While the dichotomous divide between the East and the West is ideological, Kobayashi experiences such divide through the materiality of his “Asian body”—the one that floats in Paris and the one that dissolves in Asia. In this case, his body is not simply the object of social and symbolic labeling that produces racial differences; rather, once racialization alters his relationship to his own body, the body becomes the source of such differences. In Kobayashi’s experience, the divide between the East and the West is experienced, embodied, and materialized through his body. He is “Asian” not simply because his body is labeled as such, but because his Asianness is substantiated and materialized through his embodied experiences of racial difference in Asia and Paris. Such embodied experience of difference can be much more

¹¹ Japanese translation is partially quoted from Morris-Suzuki, 1998, p. 16.

powerful and influential in reifying social differences than mere symbolic labeling, categorization, or even discourse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided my analysis of *Asian Japanese* using the multimodal approach. The analysis showed how Kobayashi seeks a desirable self in the images of his photographic subjects and how the spatiotemporal environment of Asia and the West functions as key contexts of his self-interpellation. I also illustrated how his sense of the self is shaped and negotiated through his relationships to and interactions with different spaces in Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. Temporality was also an important aspect in Kobayashi's experience of his journey and self-transformation. Kobayashi juxtaposed the temporality associated with the East and the West with the conditions and directions of his own life. In this case, the East-West framework is used not only to understand the structure of the world, but also to grasp the conditions of his own life. Lastly, I discussed how Kobayashi's view toward Asia and the West emerges through his racialized and embodied experience of the differences between the two.

Throughout my analysis, I emphasized how the idea of Asia—a social and ideological construction—gains its material existence through Kobayashi's subjective experiences in Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. For Kobayashi, Asia exists not because it is labeled as such on the world map; rather, it exists because he experienced it as such. In Asia, he had a glimpse of his possible self; he experienced the space of freedom and transformation; he found himself living in different flows of time; and he felt his Asianness through his body. Needless to say, Kobayashi's personal and subjective experiences are shaped by the discourses and ideologies that have historically constituted

Asia. In the larger political and economic climate of the time, his desire for Asia can be viewed as a backlash against Westernization in Japan and a yearning to return to its Asian root. In the history of Eurocentrism that has shaped Japanese national identity, his inferiority complex in Paris and admiration for French culture are nothing surprising. However, as much as social discourses shape Kobayashi's personal choice and ways of thinking, it is his embodied experiences of Asia and his interactions with the spatiotemporal environment—situated in his own body—that render the idea of Asia real and material for him.

The analysis also focused on how what Kobayashi calls his new “Asian Japanese” identity is constituted through the multiple modes of interaction. In his attempt to chart a new terrain of his selfhood, his experiences and expressions certainly reflect his national, racial, gender, and class positionality. However, Kobayashi does not negotiate his identity by reinventing or rearticulating his national, gender, class, or racial identity. Instead, his Asian Japanese identity is constituted—in other words, he *becomes* an Asian Japanese in his own definition—by reinventing the ways in which he interacts with the world and by initiating different types of relationships with the world. He establishes his Asian Japanese identity by choosing to leave home and travel to Asia, by growing out of Asia for the West, and by developing different relationships with Tokyo, Asia, and the West. It is through this process of interactive experience with the world that Kobayashi is interpellated, challenged, and transformed. It is this process of interactive experience that gives social meanings attached to Asia a material significance in shaping Kobayashi's selfhood.

Kobayashi's autobiographical travelogue provides insights into understanding the mutually constitutive relationship between the making of the self and the making of the world. As a young man with dreams and aspirations, he sets out to see the world so that he can find his mobile, autonomous, and independent self in the world. In his attempt to reinvent his selfhood, he tries to incorporate Asia and the West into the field of his subjectivity. In Kobayashi's autobiographical narratives, the making of the self is mutually constitutive of a larger world—the world that contains different continents and social realities, including Asia, Japan, and the West. As he reinvents his relationships with multiple social worlds he inhabits, Kobayashi develops his consciousness that transgresses the conventional identity categories. In the next chapter, I utilize the multimodal approach to analyze Asian American identity through another autobiographical text, *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey*, written by Lydia Minatoya (1992).

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS OF *TALKING TO HIGH MONKS IN THE SNOW: AN ASIAN AMERICAN ODYSSEY*

In this chapter, I illustrate how the multimodal approach may be used to analyze the formation and realization of Asian American identity. I analyze an autobiographical text, *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey*, written by Lydia Minatoya (1992). In this text, Minatoya provides an autobiographical account of her life as a second-generation Japanese American woman. Lee (1998) characterizes Minatoya's autobiography as: "Committed to American possibilities and Asian wisdom, Minatoya's global self is a mosaic of the numerous selves she meets in America and Asia" (p. 356). Minatoya's autobiographical text is a politicized site of self-reflection as well as self-realization. Asian American identity—like other hyphenated identities—is transnationally mediated by both local contexts of the United States and their "homeland" back in Asia. Asian American identities are the product of the history of diaspora, globalization, and trans-pacific communication as well as imagination. Such transnationally mediated identity formation is articulated in Minatoya's autobiography through the collection of childhood memories, stories, and travelogue-style vignettes.

The task in my analysis is to understand Minatoya's transnational identity formation through the multimodal approach. I illuminate how Minatoya's Asian American subjectivity emerges, materializes, and transforms through the modes of interaction between her self and the multiple social worlds she inhabits. Throughout the analysis, I focus on how the idea of Asia (and its counterpart America) constitutes

Minatoya's subjectivity. In the following, I first address how Minatoya is interpellated by opposing ideologies of Asia and America, which bring her identity in conflict. I then discuss how her experience of being in-between Asia and America is mediated and remedied spatially. The analysis on spatiality is followed by discussions on the function of past memories and temporal experience in the formation of her situated sense of self. Finally, I address corporeality as a mode of interaction that materializes and transforms her Asian American identity.

Multidirectional Interpellation

In-between Asia and America

Minatoya describes herself as “pieces of East, pieces of West forming their own odd integrity” (p. 131). Her hyphenated identity poses a challenge to her sense of self because she lives in-between two different worlds—Asia and America—as she tries to find the location of her selfhood. If interpellation functions by activating an individual's self-awareness and thereby invoking his/her response to the ideology, Minatoya is unable to become an autonomous subject in the multiple worlds she inhabits. This is not only because a different set of ideologies simultaneously hail her as an Asian/American subject, but also because she is aware of the shortcomings, contradictions, and nuances of each cultural system. As a second-generation Japanese American woman, she is hailed by both Japanese values (through her parents, family narratives, and historical memories) and American ways of thinking (through her education and socialization). Unlike her parents who are able to maintain a strong sense of connection with their homeland *and* believe in the American dream, Minatoya is more ambivalent about the glory of the homeland as well as the promises of the new world. Growing up in the United States, she

is equipped with the qualities of being “direct, assertive, [and] American” (p. 5). In many ways, her life is driven by the promises of American dream, including the principles of equality, progress, and future-oriented thinking. At the same time, however, she is aware that the American dream is a broken promise for the majority of ethnic minorities including her parents. Minatoya struggles to situate her subjectivity in-between “Asia” and “America” that push and pull her simultaneously.

For instance, she writes about the story behind her name—Lydia—given by her parents who hoped that an American name would help her blend into American society:

Call it adaptive behavior. Coming from a land swept by savage typhoons, ravaged by earthquakes and volcanoes, the Japanese have evolved a view of the world: a cooperative, stoic, almost magical way of thinking. Get along, work hard, and never quite see the things that can bring you pain. Against the tyranny of nature, of feudal lords, of wartime hysteria, the charm works equally well. And so my parents gave me an American name and hoped that I could pass. They nourished me with the American dream: Opportunity, Will, Transformation. (p. 33)

She expresses the bitter irony of the quintessentially “Japanese” ethos that allowed her parents and other Japanese Americans to survive the racial hostility and discrimination as immigrants in the United States. Minatoya is ambivalent about her American upbringing because of the history of racism against Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities. Such ambivalence arises from witnessing the trauma of the wartime internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, housing discriminations her family encountered when she was little, racial belittling by her school peers, and the perpetual sense of alienation and cultural displacement in the United States. Paradoxically,

however, it is her American ethos that provokes her rage against racial injustice and inequality in the way that does not resonate with her first-generation Japanese American parents. When her father, a researcher with a doctoral degree, finds out that he was underpaid for decades by his employer, he chooses to protect his dignity and loyalty for the company rather than fighting the mistreatment. When Minatoya and her sister insist that their father sue the company, his response highlights the irreconcilable difference between American daughters and their Japanese parent:

My father studied his American daughters. He gently smiled. “Before I could sue, I would have to review my life. I would have to doubt the wisdom of loyalty. I would have to call myself a victim and fill myself with bitterness.” He searched our faces for signs of comprehension. “I cannot bear so great a loss.” (p. 21)

Minatoya’s parents embody what she understands as a Japanese—and Asian—ethos that defines harmony, loyalty, and silence as a foundation of one’s dignity rather than victimhood. Such orientations to life are antithetical to the mainstream American ethos that emphasizes individual liberty, justice, and battle against oppression.

To complicate matters more, it is this nuanced approach to dignity and self-respect as well as the virtue in subtlety and silence that shaped the memories of struggles and hardships experienced by Japanese Americans. Not only does Minatoya have to grapple with the Japanese values handed down by her parents, she must come to terms with American racism and the ways in which Japanese Americans responded to racial injustice in the United States. Armed with the ethical principles of American ideology—liberty and justice for all—Minatoya is struck by the seemingly innocent yet

uncompromising morality of her Japanese ancestors who persevered under the extremely harsh conditions during World War II. She writes with a hint of irony:

Call it denial, but many Japanese Americans never quite understood that the promise of America was not truly meant for them. They lived in horse stalls at the Santa Anita racetrack and said the Pledge of Allegiance daily. They rode to Relocation Camps under armed guard, labeled with numbered tags, and sang “The Star-Spangled Banner.” They lived in deserts or swamps, ludicrously imprisoned—where would they run if they ever escaped—and formed garden clubs, and yearbook staffs, and citizen town meetings. They even elected beauty queens. (pp. 32-33)

From Minatoya’s point of view, Japanese American communities responded to the racist imprisonment during World War II in the same way that her father responded to his company’s mismanagement of his salary. To her American eyes, their loyalty and coping strategy appear as benign conformity and naïve faith in collectivism. Knowing the depth of the psychological trauma experienced by Japanese Americans in the internment camps, Minatoya is unable to openly accept their honorable yet painful responses to hardship and oppression. Based on the historical memories and family narratives, for Minatoya the virtue of being Japanese is to bear the hardships rather than fight the obstacle or the system of social oppression.

Being Japanese in America

Whether or not she agrees with Japanese values taught by her parents and Japanese American communities, she is a person of Japanese descent in the United States. Minatoya is interpellated as Japanese by multiple histories, including the family

narratives told by her parents, the narratives of immigration and struggle, as well as the tragic memories of the Japanese American internment camps. In the following depiction of her childhood memory, Minatoya portrays the incident at school when she learned about the “true” reason why Japanese Americans were sent to the internment camps during World War II:

I have returned from school and stand in anger before my mother. “Liar, liar!” I shriek. “You made me look stupid in front of the whole class!” “*Nani*, Yuri-chan¹²? What is it?” asks my mother with concern. “You told me you were sent to camp because America made a mistake. Teacher says no. You were sent because you are a traitor.” My mother pulls me close to her, she kisses and soothes my brow. “I am so sorry Yuri-chan,” she says, “for all the sadness like this that you will face.” I tear free. “Liar,” I sob. “Lousy Jap traitor.” (pp. 56-57)

She was eight years old when she learned that her parents and grandparents were viewed as “enemy aliens” of the United States. At a very young age, she learned to internalize American racism. This painful childhood memory shows the gulf between being American and being Japanese in the United States. In-between “American history” and “Japanese American history,” Minatoya experiences the impossibility of occupying one subject position without negating the other: if she chooses to be American, she must negate her Japanese background, and vice versa.

When she moves to Boston as a college professor, Minatoya encounters a similar incident that highlights the distance between those who are American and Japanese American. She provides an elaborate description of what she saw at the Day of Remembrance Ceremony that commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the wartime

¹² Yuri is Minatoya’s middle name and *chan* is a term of endearment for young girls.

Japanese Relocation Act. In the large Japanese American audience, she sees a Japanese American wife and her White American husband sitting together and listening to a woman read her mother's letter from internment camp:

A young white husband sits next to his Japanese American wife....His glance swerves, in panic, from her profile to the stage and back again. His posture strains crazily both toward her and away from her. His wife leans forward, like an alert student enrapt in a lecture. Her expression is composed. Her shoulders slightly shake. Tears roll steadily down her cheeks, and her husband does not know what to do...He has never seen her like this before. Never knew that this was important. What will this mean in their marriage? His wife is oblivious. She crosses her arms. Enfolded in her own embrace, she shifts forward and away. (p. 57)

In the description of the scene, she inserts the feelings and thoughts that she imagines are going through the husband's mind. She portrays the striking difference between the American husband and his Japanese American wife when it comes to the significance of the historical event. Minatoya's observation of the couple reflects her understanding of the irreconcilable distance between being an American and being a Japanese American, which can potentially alter the nature of the married couple's relationship.

Becoming American in Asia

As one of the first Asian women with a doctoral degree in counseling psychology, Minatoya's personal accomplishment exemplifies the American dream. Growing up in the United States, however, she continually struggles with cultural displacement and the lack of the sense of belonging. For this reason, she does not see herself as fully

American. At the same time, she is aware of her twisted relationship to her Japanese heritage. When “Japan” or “Japaneseness” calls upon her to activate her Japanese subjectivity, she faces the burden of tradition, subtlety of emotions, and nuanced communication style. After losing a job at a university, she plans a trip to Japan to visit her mother’s home village. Her mother worries that her young American daughter will be ridiculed behind her back for violating Japanese cultural norms for young women. Minatoya responds to her reluctant mother: “They know I am an American. They will expect uncivilized behaviors. If I acted like a proper Japanese, how disappointed they would be: no wonder, no glee, no gossip value in that!” (p. 89). As much as she is drawn to her cultural root to search for the place she belongs, she knows that she will be viewed as American by her relatives in Japan.

Interestingly, it is through traveling and teaching in Asia that she comes to terms with her American identity. When she travels to Nepal, Minatoya expresses her indignation after witnessing the severe poverty and malnourished children who gather around Western tourists:

I am an American. I have no patience with fatalism, no regard for the gift of forbearance. Often Asia disconcerts me. She has lured me back. She has willed me into the investment of my time and caring. And again and again, she shows me scenes that I am powerless to change. (p. 236)

Saddened and frustrated by the plight of local people in Kathmandu, she claims that she is an American who is invested in solving problems, making progress toward the future, and a happy ending. When she witnesses the challenging political and social circumstances in Asia, her American self is evoked to respond: the self that wants to

change the situation, solve the problem, and *do something about it*. Minatoya's American self is also called upon by the local people whom she encounters in Asia. In the eyes of local Asians, Minatoya becomes a symbol of the American dream. In China where Minatoya teaches English language and American culture to college students, a Chinese woman, Dr. Auntie Liu, speaks to Minatoya about how she is impressed by racial harmony in the United States. Referring to both racial unity and oppression in the United States, the woman says:

“And can you guess, Dearest Teacher, what else I see? I see *you*. I see that Dr. Lydia, a Japanese American, is sent as representative of American culture, as an equal to Mr. Stone, and when I see these things, I think. Perhaps small house, small *cabin* of Uncle Tom is true, but these other things, I know, also are true.”
(p. 238, emphasis in original)

To the eyes of the local Chinese students, Minatoya embodies the promise of America that allows anyone of any background to have the opportunity to succeed. Similarly, Dr. Kinjo, a professor in Okinawa, praises the American spirit represented in Minatoya's personal accomplishment:

“In America,” says Dr. Kinjo, “the young daughter of immigrant parents can hope for such a thing [to be a professor]”...“It is this willingness,” he explains, “the willingness to allow the unexpected, that is *America's* greatness.” (p. 148, emphasis in original)

Dr. Auntie and Dr. Kinjo see the potential of American spirit that they do not find in their respective home countries. Minatoya does not explicitly respond to these remarks in her writing. However, she highlights these conversations as one of the memorable moments

in her stay in Asia. While Minatoya sometimes feels embarrassed by her fellow “loud, jocular, well-meaning Americans” (p. 238) and her own Americanized behaviors, she gradually begins to develop a sense of belonging with other Americans in Asia:

America is about vitality, about heartiness, and about great undaunted spectacle. America is the land of Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon—not of the reflection of the moon upon a pool of water....But I watched Americans in Asia: loud, jocular, well-meaning Americans. I saw the broad waves of delight that they cast, like cement blocks hurled heavily into those moonlit pools of water. And, over time I grew to claim them as my kin. (p. 238)

Through traveling in Japan, China, and Nepal, Minatoya comes to accept both the virtue of her Asian heritage and her American spirit. In the subtitle of her autobiography, Minatoya calls her journey “an Asian American Odyssey.” Consciously or unconsciously, she went to Asia as an attempt to seek balance and harmony in the paradoxes and contradictions that exist in being Asian American. Her autobiographical narratives show the possibility of Asian American subjectivity that emerges through self-reflexivity toward the multiple sources of interpellations that constantly split and divide her identity. Minatoya overcomes the continual divide between America and Asia in her own ways. This point is elaborated further in the following discussions on spatiality, temporality, and corporeality.

Spatiality

Spatiality of the Split Self

In understanding Minatoya’s Asian American subjectivity, it is useful to approach her bicultural identity from a spatial point of view. Minatoya’s struggle over her cultural

dislocation and a lack of situated sense of self is closely linked to the duality between the East and the West in her spatial imagination of the world. Despite the fact that she has lived in the United States all her life, the presence of “Japan” lurks upon her life through the traditions and beliefs instilled by her mother. In the following, she describes how her mother continues to live in feudal Japan after moving to the United States, which governs Minatoya’s gender identity:

My mother was raised in a world such as this, in a house of tradition and myth. And although she has traveled across continents, oceans, and time, although she considers herself a modern woman—a believer in the sunlight of science—it is a world that surrounds her still. Feudal Japan floats around my mother. Like an unwanted pool of ectoplasm, it quivers with supernatural might. It followed her into our American home and governed my girlhood life. (pp. 102-103)

What she calls Feudal Japan—the country at the time of her mother’s migration to the United States before World War II—follows her mother and surrounds Minatoya in her American home. Minatoya has a conflicted relationship between the Japanese emphasis on traditional femininity and American value on gender equality. On the one hand, Japanese culture—as it was taught by her parents—values silence, deference, and subordination not only to males and elders, but also to her personal belongings and objects. On the other hand, American culture—as she was socialized by her friends and education—values independence, ownership, and self-control. In the memory of her childhood, she describes how she was “haunted” by her belongings that, if mistreated, could “spring into life and complaint” (p. 103):

In that feudal code, all females were silent and yielding. Even their possessions were accorded more rights...I was haunted. If I left my clothes on the floor, or my bicycle in the rain; if I yanked on my comb with roughness; if it splintered and lost its teeth (and I did these things often and deliberately, trying to challenge their spell); then my misdeeds pursued me in dreams. (p. 103)

The “feudal code” shapes her interactions with the physical environment and inanimate objects, as if she still lives in Feudal Japan. In Feudal Japan, she yields power to other people and objects. Through living in the Japanese code of conduct taught by her parents, she cultivates the image of “the East” as the opposite of American life. She grows increasingly conflicted with what she perceives as the irreconcilable difference and distance between the East and the West. Minatoya expresses this dilemma of living between two different worlds as follows:

I am a woman who apologizes to her furniture. “Excuse me,” I say when I bump into a chair. My voice resonates with solicitude. In America, such behavior is viewed as slightly loony.

I am a woman caught between standards of East and West. “I disagree,” I say to elders, to the men in my life. My voice rises and cracks with shame. “Razor-tongue,” relatives say with the pleasure of knowing. “No wonder she is still unmarried.” (p. 104)

For Minatoya, here (America) and there (Japan) are the two distinct worlds that bring her bicultural identity in conflict. Minatoya inhabits these two worlds simultaneously, feeling awkward and displaced in both. She is torn between Japan and America and experiences

her cultural displacement as a divide between the East and the West in the larger geographical and geopolitical imagination of the world.

Asian Spatiality and the Transformation of the Self

When Minatoya is on her journey to Asia, there are several important moments when her sense of the self is transformed by the spatiotemporal environment in Asia. That is, there are moments when the spatiotemporal context—whether the location, time, or situation—resonates with her subjectivity and transforms her conflicted positionality between America and Asia, between the East and the West. In her first destination, Hong Kong, she visits Victoria Peak that overlooks the Victoria Harbor and central Hong Kong. At dawn, she arrives on the summit of Victoria Peak and observes the activities of men and women who engage in t'ai chi exercises like “a phalanx of ghost warriors” (p. 83). She is awed by the serene view of the city with the “famous harbor...sleeping beneath quilts of mist” (p. 83). It is in this moment when Minatoya finds herself in a unique spatiotemporal environment that alters the way she experiences the flow of time:

The past reigned in stately supremacy. No future existed. Time flowed backward, unevenly stopping here and there like a branch in a stream catching on rocks and eddies. It carried me through generations. Insects whirred and chirped in primordial supremacy. “You may be right, Moe,” I called to my memory of the San Francisco taxi driver as he spun past me in the rush of time. “Perhaps, somehow, I am changing” (p. 83)

In Hong Kong, on the summit of Victoria Peak, as the Sun begins to shine on the world, she experiences the beginning of her transformation. In the space that is reigned by the past, where time flows backward, Minatoya opens herself to the possibility of self-

transformation. She expresses this experience as being carried through generations. “Asia” or “the East” represented in her mother’s feudal Japan appears right in front of her eyes. While she is physically present in the place called Asia, she is brought “home” through this spatiotemporal experience that blurs the boundary between the past and the present. For Minatoya, her “homeland” always existed in the stories and memories told by her parents. In other words, her homeland was always a space of the past. On Victoria Peak, where the linear flow of time breaks down, she is able to begin her journey back home in a more metaphysical sense. Not only does she visit the geographical locations of her ancestral origin, but also she begins to situate her life within the spatiotemporal contexts of the place. As a second-generation Japanese American, Minatoya’s “coming home” is mediated by her spatiotemporal experience of places she visits in Asia.

In Kathmandu, Nepal, Minatoya experiences another moment when the spatial environment resonates with her sense of the self. Staying at the Guest House by the Himalayas, she finds a deep sense of comfort in the middle of different groups of people who gathered together at night to play music and sing:

I, who have always felt discomfort with being in-between, stand in perfect peace in a cobbled crossroad on the roof of the world at the edge of a new year. I stand amidst Christians and Hindus, among Anglo-Saxons and Asians. Perhaps this is why I have come to this place. (p. 212)

All her life, she has been looking for a sense of belonging. When Minatoya writes about her childhood memory, she says: “my differences dislocated me, made me simpering or sullen” (p. 40). By the Himalayan Mountains—what she calls the roof of the world—she no longer feels conflicted with her Asian American identity. In Asia, she begins to affirm

and accept the unsettling and often painful paradox of living in-between cultures and countries. In Dakshinkali, a small village in central Nepal, Minatoya witnesses a ritual of blood sacrifices to the Hindu goddess Kali. As tourists and worshippers observe the ritual in which one man “deftly slash the throat of animal after animal” (p. 234), Minatoya thinks about karma, a view that human life is the result of an endless cycle of cause and effect:

It is not death that is being worshipped. Asians do not rejoice in destruction. They believe that life, no matter how joyous, includes pain and loss and sorrow. From endings come beginnings. From separation comes joining. From wrenching pain comes fulfilling pleasure. Think of childbirth and perhaps you will understand. (p. 234)

Minatoya explains that Asians seek harmony in the contradictions of life. This is reminiscent of her view toward Japanese Americans who created highly organized communities and social activities out of their wartime internment; her father who values his loyalty and dignity over justice and equality; and her grandmothers and aunt who turned their pain and sorrow into hopes and dreams for their children. When she was growing up, it was difficult for her to seek balance between American values and Asian virtues. Through her experience in Asia, she comes to appreciate Asian morality over Western ethical principles. She reflects on her experience in Asia where she was supposed to educate and enlighten students:

Like a missionary, I was sent to light a candle deep in the wilderness. But the wilderness lit a candle deep in me. In a hemisphere honoring tradition and faith, I was sent to educate: to advance progress and skepticism and debate. I came armed

with my ethical principles. Do no harm. Avoid dual relationships. Solid, external, impersonal: they were rules to base actions on. But I was disarmed by morality.

With its rich and shining grace...And gently, I was educated. In time, I learned to see. Morality is a warm and breathing thing that dwells within the soul. (p. 263)

Through traveling in Asia, Minatoya transforms her contentious relationships with the values, memories, and histories that have shaped her Japanese/Asian American identity. Such transformation was enabled partly by the spatiotemporal contexts of Asia where contradictions and paradoxes coexist in chaotic harmony.

Minatoya's relationship to her Japanese cultural background and Asian American heritage changes as she begins to appreciate Asia as her homeland. For her, Asia is no longer a distant and unknown place that traps her mother in archaic feudal code and haunts Minatoya's life. She writes that "in Asia I had found acceptance" (p. 265), something she longed for since her childhood. Upon leaving Asia to move back to the United States, she reflects on how Asia has transformed her and wonders how her American fatherland would respond to her homecoming:

While I had been living in Asia, Asia had begun living in me. She pulsed through my heart. She traveled through my bloodstream. She changed my perceptions, my thoughts, and my dreams. Like a mother who kisses her bruised daughter and shoos her back to play, Asia had transformed the ache of my lapsed career. But, O America—my stern, beloved fatherland—would I be worthy in your eyes? (p. 264)

Minatoya expresses how her negotiation between Asia and America continues to shape her sense of self. For her, Asia was a nurturing, maternal space where she was able to

experience acceptance by other people and appreciate their cultural values. Before moving back home, she is concerned how she would be accepted in the United States: “Change unnerves me. Behind every opportunity lurks the possibility of my undoing. Was I now Asian? Was I still American? Would I have to choose between the two?” (p. 264). In the modernist notion of American individualism, the ontology of the self is based on the idea that that you have an identity, a unified self. In Asia, on the other hand, Minatoya is able to seek harmony in contradictions and appreciate the nuances, subtleties, and multiplicities of being that constitute her self. In the United States, to seek balance in being Asian *and* American is close to impossible, while in Asia she learns that there are both gains and losses, joy and pain, as well as wonderful success and broken promises in being Asian American. Most importantly, Minatoya learns from Asian people that the beauty of life lies in contradictions. Such contradictions are the source of confusion in American life; in Minatoya’s Asia, such contradictions are the key for accepting and appreciating the beauty of life.

Temporality

The Self and Memory

It is perhaps fair to argue that what scholars call a “sense of self”—an elusive idea that is the foundation of identity—is impossible without memory. One’s identity is shaped by social forces, such as legal documents, social status, interpersonal relationships, and institutional affiliations. Still, if an individual loses his/her personal memories—due to some type of brain damage, for example—none of these social forces can entirely rebuild her/his senses of the self. Autobiography, as a collection of selective memories, is a prime example of how the sense of self is constituted through

remembering past experiences and mobilizing an autonomous subject in these recollections of past events. Through writing autobiography, authors are able not only to relive the past memories but also to rewrite them in ways that highlight and solidify certain aspects of the self. Through memory, individuals exercise control over socio-temporal structures and move through cultural spaces as a subject with mobility and autonomy. As Mitchell (1994) argues:

Memory is a technology for gaining freedom of movement in and mastery over the subjective temporality of consciousness and the objective temporality of discursive performance. To lack memory is to be a slave of time, confined to space; to have memory is to use space as an instrument in the control of time and language. (p. 194)

As a collection of impressionistic and short descriptions of personal experiences, Minatoya's autobiography exemplifies the centrality of memory in the construction of the mobile self. In Minatoya's self-narratives, she traces her self-transformation through descriptions of moments and encounters that are curved into her memory. In her remembrances of past events and emotions, multiple selves emerge that ultimately crystallize into the autobiographical self—the self that tells the story with the authorial voice in the narrative. Thus, memory is a technology of the self and a medium of agency that grants Minatoya the access to the past—or the making of personal history—in a way that is subjective and self-reflexive. Based on the premise that the self is constituted within the dynamic interactions with memories, in this section I focus on the functions of memories and temporalities in Minatoya's personal narratives as it relates to the realization of her situated sense of the self.

In Minatoya's autobiographical writing, memories play a significant part in constituting and materializing her Japanese American and Asian American identity. In fact, she utilizes a narrative style that is full of visual descriptions of significant moments in her life without fully explaining her emotions. She skillfully portrays the multiplicity of her self as a mosaic of unforgettable moments, vivid impressions, and important encounters in her life. Lee (1998) characterizes Minatoya's narrative strategy as follows:

From the beginning through the end of her narrative indeed, Minatoya tries to minimize explanations and to maximize the tales that stand out in her memory, repainting, in crisp, lyrical words, the pictures etched in her selective memory. (p. 345)

In this case, Minatoya's sense of self is not a set of dimensions of socially constructed categories but a collection of fragmented memories through which she gains access to her personal history and understands her location in the present. For instance, the memory of her grandmother is highly influential in shaping Minatoya's self-understanding. Minatoya begins her autobiography with a description of memories of memories: as a small girl, she is listening to the stories of her mother's childhood memory. Minatoya describes the story told by her mother about her grandmother who was banished from the respectable family in Japan because of her extramarital affair with another man. Minatoya imagines the life of her grandmother—a woman whom she never met—who rebelled against the traditional gender norms in a rural Japanese village by purchasing a set of encyclopedia and educated her small children. From the stories told by her mother, she feels the pain of the separation between the grandmother and her mother years before Minatoya was born. She feels the courage and sorrow of the grandmother who had to leave her children and

live under the shadow of her disgrace. Through her mother's poetic storytelling, the image of Minatoya's grandmother is vividly curved into her memory as a young girl. In the following dialogue, Minatoya describes the exchange with her mother about her grandmother. The mother tells Minatoya about the grandmother:

“She was a romantic, an adventurer. In Japan, she caused scandal when she bought a set of encyclopedia.”

[Minatoya responds] “A scandal?”

“You must understand these were country people. A young wife wasting her time on reading, spending her money on frivolous facts, people must have thought, What nonsense!...She would tell us about science and foreign countries. I think she liked to dream about possibilities.” (p. 5)

After being divorced by the husband, her grandmother lost everything, moved to Manchuria, and never saw her children again. The image of her grandmother—a curious and adventurous woman who rebelled against tradition and paid its cost—holds a strong presence in shaping Minatoya's sense of self. In addition to her grandmother, Minatoya's aunt (her mother's sister) has a similar kind of influence on Minatoya's selfhood. Her aunt, Naomi, was a beautiful woman like the grandmother, and lived her tumultuous life with dignity and confidence. Naomi left her abusive husband and raised her two daughters by working as a hostess in Japanese community. She was a proud and happy woman who purchased a house and saved money for her daughters' college education. From her mother's stories, Minatoya internalizes the image of the women who rise up from struggles and turn their great suffering and pain into joy and grace. In the following, Minatoya compares her life with those of her grandmother and aunt:

I have always frightened my mother. In my eagerness to abandon tradition, in my struggle to become Americanized, she catches glimpses of her mother and sister. I am the daughter who has wanted to fly, who has picked the wrong men to love, who has started and stopped careers. In my mother's experience, such behavior leads to loss: to hardship, and exile, and to an early death. (p. 115)

She writes that her mother, although concerned about her risk-taking behaviors, always portrayed the grandmother and aunt as "heroines," filling her "timorous soul with flight dreams" (p. 115). Through the stories of two brave women, her mother encourages Minatoya to pursue her dreams and trust the possibilities of life: "Soar as high as you can. Go as far as you want. *Never let anyone stop you*" (p. 115). The images of strong and compassionate women in her family are central in shaping Minatoya's understanding of her own life. Through her journey back "home" to Japan, Minatoya comes to terms with the legacy of her grandmothers who paved the path for their granddaughter's success and happiness:

I think about my grandmothers. One challenging her husband—offering to work the railroads like a man—so that her son can leave for college. The other reading from an encyclopedia—busily filling her children with possibilities—before she is sent away. I too have come to this place because of their best intentions. (p. 155)

In the above statement, she expresses the appreciation for her grandmothers who entrusted their dreams in the lives of their children and grandchildren. This revelation is one of the key moments in shaping Minatoya's sense of the self: she sees herself as a consequence of historical circumstances and personal choices made by women in her family in the past. Through connecting with the past, she comes to understand who she is

in the present. Through memories, the past and the present come together in Minatoya's situated sense of the self; she establishes relationships with important women in her life; and the parameter of Minatoya's self expands beyond her immediate lifetime.

Temporalities between Past and Future, Modern and Pre-modern

When Minatoya travels from the United States to Asia across the Pacific Ocean, she experiences different temporalities. Minatoya's journey to Asia reflects what she perceives as an immigrant spirit that makes up her America. She explains the reason why she left her home as follows:

Teachers go overseas for many reasons: some for adventure, some for romance.

Some go for solitude, for the opportunity to think and write. Others go in haste, in flight from a loveless marriage, a financial ruin, or a life that failed to take. I went because I am an American. Like our immigrant ancestors, I was seeking a new land, some shining future. (p. 140)

She sees a parallel between the lives of immigrant ancestors and her choice to leave her home country to find a brighter future. The past memories intersect with Minatoya's present experience in shaping the meaning of her action. While she leaves her home in search of a better and brighter future in a new land, the act of going to Asia is simultaneously a return to the past. Through an awkward yet heartfelt family reunion, she comes face-to-face with the past that shaped her life even before her birth. As discussed earlier, Minatoya's grandmother was banished from the family because of her extramarital affair, which remained a family secret for decades. Her grandmother's brother is the "patriarch" of the family who holds a bitter feeling toward his sister who disgraced the family name. When Minatoya pays a visit to him with her relatives from

her grandfather's family, she realizes the weight of the family secret that has caused tremendous pain to this day:

I am a wicked troublesome creature, I thought. I have intruded on the aesthetic refuge of an old man. I have evoked painful memories of a sister he could not save. I have forced together two families, once close, who had learned to live with disgrace. I have returned like a joke of fate: the foolish granddaughter of foolish grandparents, a self-indulgent simpleton whose impulsiveness could cause pain.
(p. 100)

Minatoya's presence evokes the memories of the painful past in a supposedly joyous family reunion. She only knows about the past through the stories of her mother; yet, she realizes how she carries the weight of the past without her knowledge and intention. The memory of her grandmother is no longer a fairytale in Minatoya's imagination. The old patriarch shows Minatoya a collection of artifacts that represent family epochs that go back over six hundred years. After telling Minatoya "a narrative of national history and family honor" (p. 101), the patriarch finally speaks directly to her:

For the first time, the old man looked at me. He turned and studied my face. For a long and breathless time, his keen eyes seized and held me. "This is who you are," he said. "Remember and be proud." (p. 101)

During her visit to her parents' hometown, Minatoya experiences the weight of family history and tradition. She meets people who tell her the stories of her parents and reconnect her with the family history. As the past intersects with the present, her journey across the Pacific Ocean (back) to Japan provides her with a particular temporality that is unique as a second-generation Asian American woman.

In addition to her reconnecting with the family history, Minatoya describes different temporalities between the United States and Asia. In Nepal, she experiences the difference between American and Nepali culture in terms of the orientation to time:

Cultures make virtues out of necessities. Americans—immigrants from distant lands, fleeing the past, setting sail from the familiar, from the beloved—built a national ethos based on the future. Based on belief in the goodness of going it alone, on the need for an ultimate happy ending. But Nepalis live in a land-locked country. With mountain avalanches on one end and jungle tiger on the other.

From poverty and sadness, they cannot sail away. (p. 233)

In Nepal, Minatoya finds a temporality quite different from that of the United States. In the United States, she learns the cultural value that looks forward to the future. She describes the temporal experience in the United States as follows:

In the world I knew, the future had always been an important part of reality. It loomed ahead of every action. It pressed upon me, brimming with possibilities, urging me to make of it what I could. Time moved toward me in small even man-made steps of minutes, hours, years (p. 77)

In Nepal, Minatoya witnesses the harsh living conditions of people whose lives are very different from her experience of time and mobility in the United States. In this case, Minatoya understands the difference between the first and the third world countries in terms of their temporal environment that shapes the mobility and agency of local subjects.

What Minatoya sees in the temporality of Asia is not simply the sense of backwardness or a lack of modernization. In China, she learns the virtue of finding

wisdom and truth in the past rather than the future. Through meeting Chinese people, she comes to accept a dialectical approach to life that embraces paradoxes and contradictions of life:

The Chinese have learned to discern beauty in moments ephemeral and eternal. It is an ancient skill: honed by hardship, codified by Confucius, spread with trade throughout all Southeast Asia. They have taught themselves to search for unexpected wisdom in their past, in their pleasures and their pain. And as I grew to appreciate China, I found I could look back—to my family and country—and see the bounty they offered as well. (p. 187-188)

It is through transforming her orientations to time—from the emphasis on moving toward the future to the appreciation of the past and paradoxical moments—that Minatoya transforms her relationship to her family, country, and the memories of the past. She realizes that there is virtue in looking back and appreciating the past, including the pain and suffering of her ancestors. In this way, she reconciles her contentious relationships with the values, memories, and histories that have shaped her Japanese/Asian American identity.

To the eyes of local people in China and Nepal, Minatoya embodies a particular temporality between the modern and pre-modern, between the past and the future. In China, a friend of Minatoya, Mr. Zhou, asks her: “Your grandfather went to America to find fortune...but why he did not come home?” (p. 190). As they prepare to study in the United States, Mr. Zhou and other students are “keen to forecast their fates” (p. 190). To the eyes of her students, Minatoya embodies their possible future—to go to the United States and become successful. Minatoya is viewed by her students as the symbol of the

American dream—the promise of the West and the modern world, as well as the price of cultural assimilation in the modern world. Minatoya finds herself feeling uncomfortable with this question:

I am a little self-conscious. I long to return to the levity. But then I see the earnestness. I see the hope and dread. “What are the costs?” my students are asking. “Between continents, between generations, what is gained and what is lost?” (p. 190)

As a Japanese American woman, Minatoya stands in-between Japan and America, the past and the future, and tradition and innovation. To her students, Minatoya symbolizes the American dream; yet the ambition and success of immigration come with its price and loss, including the loss of tradition and family ties. Her students see in Minatoya the ambivalence between the possibilities and risks of leaving home.

Similarly in Nepal, Minatoya comes to see herself as an embodiment of the local people’s hopes and doubts toward modernization. The process of modernization has brought a number of changes to the lives of Nepali people. Minatoya witnesses the country in such transition. She also realizes that the local people in Nepal treat Minatoya differently from other tourists. She thinks that they treat her with a sense of affinity because they see in her both hopes and doubts about modernization and westernization:

I am traveling with a face that could belong to a Nepali tribeswoman, through a corridor having its first contact with an outside world. It is a world about which Nepal feels ambivalent. This new world is beckoning; it is a world where people have food, enough to throw away, and useful belongings, like glass bottles for storage and carrying. Yet it also is a world that lures husbands and sons to their

deaths on alien mountain terrains and children into a strange impatience and a frightening distance from tradition. I am traveling this corridor wearing Western clothes, accompanied by tall, white companions. I am welcomed with tenderness and compassion. Perhaps I am the personification of barely conscious doubts. I am a cheerful child, traveling in carefree luxury, away from her people, away from her soul. I am who the Nepali people may become, and they console me for losses they will sustain. (p. 216)

As a woman of Japanese descent raised in the United States, Minatoya embodies the past—traditions, histories, and the homeland that she left behind—as well as the future—the promise of the American dream and material wealth of modern life. She describes herself as a child who left behind her home and tradition without knowing its true cost. Because “mobility has its costs” (p. 216), as an American woman back in her Asian home territory, Minatoya provides a glimpse of their future including the promise and the cost of modernization.

Corporeality

Asian Body and the Self

As discussed earlier, Minatoya’s selfhood is deeply rooted in her awareness that she is a descendent of immigrants. As a second generation Japanese American, she only knows about the history of Asian immigration through the tales of her parents, grandparents, and other Asian immigrants. However, her Asian American identity is not accomplished merely through her *knowledge of* racialized and gendered experiences of immigrants in the past. Rather, the history of immigration matters in Minatoya’s self-understanding because she relives the experiences of immigrants through her gendered

and racialized body. She connects and identifies with the stories of the women who first crossed the Pacific Ocean at the turn of the century, not because she knows about this piece of American history as part of information about her racial group. Rather, she identifies with them because *her* body—the racialized and gendered Asian body—reminds her of their struggle and of their immigrant spirit. Growing up on the East Coast in the late 1950s, she relives, if partially, the immigrant tales as she herself grapples with racial discrimination and the desire for finding home in the United States. Her Asian body—and how it is marked and treated by American society—is the undeniable evidence of the pain and struggle curved in the history of Asian immigration. Such pain is not a kind of knowledge she acquires through reading books and having abstract historical connections to the past. Her pain is the *material* evidence that her life is inseparable from the lives of those who came before her. Her pain is the pain felt by all Asian immigrant bodies. In the following, I explore using specific examples how Minatoya’s Asian American identity materializes at the corporeal level. I illustrate how her Asian Americanness cannot be constituted outside of her body that provokes, often unexpectedly, the memories of survival, the weight of history, and the consequence of being Asian in the United States.

Materializing Asian Bodies

Minatoya writes on several occasions how the spirit of immigrant women characterizes her life. For example, she describes an incident where a Chinese American actress and talk-show hostess tells her that she lacks a “contemporary face” and is “oddly old-fashioned,” reminding the actress of an old picture of her grandmother (p. 74).

Minatoya responds by writing:

The actress attributed my old-fashionedness to my timid use of cosmetics; but I had a different idea. Those pioneer women—awkward and game in the Gibson Girl blouses—were immigrants. Each lived within a kaleidoscope where familiar shapes lay shattered in shards of color: dazzling, fascinating, infinitely varying. They waited for their worlds to reassemble in understandable patterns, with more hope than faith and with twinges of gladness for the wondrousness of unknowing. Photographers caught the glaze and glitter in their eyes. And so it was that shortly before dessert a California talk-show hostess looked at me and saw her grandmother’s face. She had glimpsed my immigrant soul. (Minatoya, 1992, p. 74)

Minatoya holds close an image of brave women who paved the path for spiritual and cultural survival in the United States almost a century ago. As she struggles to find peace between her “alienation from the dominant culture and her gravitation toward her roots” (Lee, 1998, p. 348), she relives the awkwardness, confusion, hope, and brave innocence of those women who found beauty and thrill in living the unknown. Minatoya embodies immigrant women’s lives and their spirit by reliving and retelling the tales of immigration: in her case, however, she traces the lives of immigrant women through her voyage back to their homeland, Asia.

In Minatoya’s autobiography, the bodies matter not only as the evidence of historical (and continuing) struggle of Asian America, but also as a site of self-awareness in everyday life. In a section titled “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall,” Minatoya describes exchanges at a consciousness-raising session held in 1983 for Asian American women in the East Coast:

Gathering together is a new experience, and the conference hums with the confessional excitement of a consciousness-raising session.

“Sometimes I catch sight of my reflection in a store window,” hesitantly says a forty-year-old from New Jersey, “and I am shocked to see that I am Oriental.”

“Asian American,” corrects a college student.

“Pardon me?”

“Oriental is a label given to us by Europeans; it connotes someplace mysterious and forever foreign. It is considered derogatory.”

“Gosh I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“No, no, it’s okay.” The student is embarrassed by the embarrassment she has stirred.

“I know what you mean, though,” interrupts a Rhode Island woman. “Now and then, I see another—eer—Asian American in a shopping mall or in some other crowd. I find myself maneuvering to get closer. I try to be inconspicuous. I pretend to be looking at something in their general direction, but really I’m wondering, Do we really look alike? What parts of me belong to me and what parts are just common to my race?” (p. 58)

The notion of performativity is important because it points out that the practice of signification cannot be separated from the object that is being named (Butler, 1993). In this case, the body that is signified through specific social relations and practices such as race cannot be separated from the material body itself. In the above exchanges, when Asian American women disjointedly come to terms with their racialized bodies, such

signification already constitutes their bodies. They can reclaim their bodies, but it is against or in relation to the racialized body that is always already a particular cultural sign in U.S. racial imagination. The confession by Asian American women shows how the experience of racialization takes place as a process of the modification of their subjective relationships to their bodies. In the above conversational exchanges, the women confess the strange sensation and dissonance they experience when they begin to see their phenotypically “Asian” bodies as a de facto membership to Asian race. They are always already *Asians* in America while their racialized bodies await their “consciousness” to catch up.

In addition to experiencing her own body as a site of racialization as an Asian American woman, Minatoya sees her cultural displacement as embodied through, and triggered by, her material body. As a woman who grew up being taught traditional Japanese values by her parents, yet is trained by American liberal arts education, Minatoya questions who she really is. She is neither fully Japanese nor fully American. The weight of cultural history that shapes Minatoya’s selfhood goes back to her family history way before her parents’ immigration to the United States. Descending from an affluent samurai family in a small village in Japan where intermarriage among relatives was a way of life, Minatoya calls herself “the product of eight hundred years of inbreeding” (p. 87). Her feeling of being out of place socially and culturally is described as her biological trait and an outcome of the history of inbreeding:

Of course, such genetic tinkering has marked the family character. Culture and chromosomes have conspired to produce a people who are respectful and loyal and endowed with dignity and decorum. And in the midst of all this engineering

have come the quirks of nature, like the temperamental weakness that plague some pedigree dogs. Tendencies—undesirable, embarrassing, and enduring—have repeatedly emerged. Not within each member, to be sure, but certainly within every generation: a hidden vein of arrogance, an anxious need for approval, a constitutional fragility, a mild hypochondria. I am a bearer of these legacies. (p. 88)

This is another example of how identity is not simply a symbolic entity. It is possible to dismiss the above quote as a metaphoric use of biology to describe a sense of cultural displacement. In Minatoya's autobiography, however, cultural displacement is experienced not as a symbolic and abstract problem, but as a deeply-felt and real experience in which cultural displacement is embodied through her body. Her family history is mediated by her body and her sense of alienation is explained through her relationship to her body (as a product of inbreeding and genetic tinkering). Minatoya's identity is corporeally materialized, in the sense that her body reminds her of the simple fact of life: she is a product of relationships, choices, and events that involved numerous other individuals including immigrants from Asia, her family ancestors, and social meanings attached to her kind of body.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided my analysis of *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey*, written by Minatoya (1992). The notion of multidirectional interpellation allowed me to illustrate how Minatoya's sense of the self vacillates between Asia and America that interpellate multiple selves. She struggles between traditional Japanese values and American cultural principles. It was through traveling in

Asia that Minatoya gradually reconciled the conflicted relationship with her bicultural identity. In the section on spatiality, I focused on how her bicultural positionality in-between the East and the West is experienced spatially. I illustrated how her sense of the self is shaped and transformed through her interactions with particular spaces. In the section on temporality, I highlighted how Minatoya's second-generation Asian American identity is shaped through memories of the past. She remembers and interacts with the past memories, through the process of which she understands who she is and who she has become in the present. In addition, I addressed how Minatoya's Asian American self represents a particular temporality between the past and the future as well as modern and pre-modern to the eyes of local people in Asia. In the section on corporeality, I discussed how Minatoya juxtaposes her life with other immigrant women in the past. I illustrated how she imagines and relives the lives of immigrant women in the past through her body. She also experiences her cultural displacement as an outcome of her Japanese biological roots.

Minatoya's autobiography is a collection of memorable moments and episodes through which she weaves a mosaic of multiple selves in fluid and intersecting spatiotemporal contexts. The analysis I provided in this chapter is an attempt to illuminate the complexity of her Asian American identity and subjectivity. In other words, my goal was to unpack her multiple selves as she experienced them. Her poetic and impressionistic writing, however, escapes definitive interpretation and categorization. As much as the multimodal approach illuminates the different dimensions of her identity, Minatoya shows—without explicitly showing—the complexity of human experience that cannot be reduced into analytical categories or interpretive frameworks. The multimodal

approach is useful, however, as a tool that enhances the reader's ability to understand the lived experience of others. In applying the multimodal approach to analyze Minatoya's autobiography, I interacted with the text as if I placed myself in her shoes. I tried to understand her experiences as if I were experiencing them. Understanding the other is ultimately the work of imagination and receptivity. One way to be critically imaginative and receptive to other's lived experience is to unpack various modes of interaction through which the subject interacts with their social world.

The multimodal approach recognizes identity as a politicized construction not only because it is constructed through discourses and ideologies, but also because it is materialized through human experience. Experience *is* a site of power negotiation and struggle. An individual is the subject of experience and is subjected to experience. Minatoya's Asian American identity is undoubtedly a politicized social location and it is possible to unpack it through the analytical lens of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality. Such an analytical lens, however, does not allow me sufficiently to understand how she experiences such social location, what she sees from there, and how she views and incorporates the external worlds (in her case Asia and America) into the field of her subjectivity. Minatoya's autobiography points to the need for increasing the depth and scope of inquiry into human experience as it shapes and enables the situated sense of the self in transnationally interconnected contexts.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, the entry point into this dissertation was the question about the idea of “Asia” whose meanings and images travel and manifest differently both in Japan and the United States. This dissertation began as an attempt to bridge the intersecting and contradictory manifestations of “Asia” that shape both Asian American and Japanese identities. In order to closely examine the localized experiences and implications of this transnationally mediated idea, I focused on the autobiographical texts from Japan and Asian America and analyzed how the autobiographical subjects interact with, and make sense of their identities through, Asia. I applied an analytical framework based on spatiality, temporality, corporeality and multidirectional interpellation in order to unpack the processes of interactions and engagements between the autobiographical subjects and his/her social worlds. I call this analytical and methodological framework *a multimodal approach*, which resonates with Chamber’s (1994) articulation of identity:

So identity is formed on the move. „Identity is formed at the unstable point where the “unspeakable” stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture.“¹³ In that passage, and the sense of place and belonging that we construct there, our individual stories, our unconscious drives and desires, acquire a form that is always contingent, in transit, without a goal, without an end. (p. 25)

The primary focus of this dissertation was to shed light on the situated and embodied experiences of individual subjects whose identities and subjectivities materialize into

¹³ Quote from Hall, S. (1987). Minimal selves. In L. Appignanesi (ed.) *Identity. The real me: Post-modernism and the question of identity*, ICA Documents 6, London, p. 44.

existence through complex interactions among cultural significations, personal acts and interpretations, as well as multiple and competing ideological environments.

This dissertation was guided by my intuitive—rather than academic—observation about the gap between the existing discourses on identity and the way the “self” arises and materializes on a more phenomenological level. Throughout this process, my inquiry was shaped by my desire to understand the content, the substance, or the materiality of lived experience that constitutes our social and cultural existence. The categorical or intersectional analysis of identity does not seem to fully articulate what I have come to call the materiality of the self. In my view, the materiality of the self renders false any attempt to separate symbolic practices from material and embodied human existence. In the end, it has become clear that this dissertation is an attempt to rearticulate identity as an embodied presence of the self by explicating the different modes of interaction through which the self materializes into being. Thus, the following overarching question guided my textual analysis and theoretical development: how do ideas about the self—while such ideas are social and historical inventions—attain ontological “presence” in one’s subjective experience? Simply put, how does identity achieve such power to remain at the core of human self-understanding?

In the following, I discuss how the multimodal approach has emerged as an analytical framework for theorizing identity. I revisit my critique of social constructionism in order to lay ground for my discussion on the notion of materiality later in this chapter. I then briefly summarize my findings from the textual analyses of *Asian Japanese* and *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey*. I also illustrate the key theoretical assumptions grounded in this approach by highlighting the

major findings of my textual analyses. Finally, I address the implications of the current study for the future research on identity in communication scholarship. Using the notion of materiality, I theorize identity as an embodied presence of the self. The chapter is concluded by a discussion on the implications on communication scholarship, pedagogy, and engagement.

Multimodal Approach

In this dissertation, I proposed what I call a multimodal approach as an analytical framework to illuminate the process through which one's identity materializes into being through communicative interactions with space, time, and the body. The point of inquiry that shaped this dissertation resonates closely with the question addressed by Hacking (1999) in his *The Social Construction of What?*. When communication scholars discuss the social construction of identity, what, precisely, is constructed? As discussed in Chapter 1, Hesse (2007) points out that the social constructionist approach creates a form of tautology that leads us nowhere: "race is a social construction of race" (p. 660) or "race is a social construction because it is socially constructed." The question remains: race is a social construction of what?¹⁴ For instance, this question becomes problematic when I teach race to my students. When I asked students in my intercultural communication class whether race is biological or social, most students of color believed that race is biological, while most white students had no problem claiming that race is a social construction. In the triumph of white students who got the right answer, some

¹⁴ Of course, many scholars have focused on racial discourses, practices, categories, institutions, etc. as socially constructed. However, it does not respond fully or directly to the question of "race as a social construction of what?"

students of color were puzzled and confused to be told that their race is socially constructed—a phrase that connotes it is not “real” or “it really doesn’t exist.”

This incident was a revealing moment for the question of “what” in the social construction of race. A conceptualization of race as a social construction—that is, a social convention that creates inequality—did not resonate with my students’ embodied experiences of racialized gaze and treatment in everyday life. For students of color, race is part of their body, is “natural” to the extent that it becomes their ontological—as perceived as “biological”—reality. In other words, their experience of racialization and racialized body is *material*—it is not only a category or practice that is constructed elsewhere, but is also an embodied and lived experience that cannot be separated from their sensible and sense-making body/mind. The term social construction seems to negate, if not fully conceal, the materiality of race and other subject positions that is at the core of how people experience and communicate their identities.

The purpose of the multimodal approach is not to replace race, gender, class, and so on that shape an individual’s self-understanding and social relations. Instead, the multimodal approach foregrounds the phenomenological and embodied experiences of being in the world as a site of identity realization and enactment. Rather than replacing the socially constructed categories, I shift my focus on the mode or medium through which racialized, gendered, and/or classed identities are experienced and constituted. In the multimodal approach, I focus on the mutually constitutive modes of interaction where the individual subject and the world interact, collide, and materialize. In this shift from intersections of category to modes of interaction, I utilize multidirectional interpellation, spatiality, temporality, and corporeality as analytical lenses. By focusing on the modes of

interaction and engagement, identity can be conceptualized as a process of realization—or materialization—of the situatedness of the self through multidirectional interpellation, corporeal materialization, as well as spatial and temporal orientation.

My proposed approach can be situated within the larger scholarly conversations on theories of identity in communication studies. In his proposal for the development of a communication theory of identity, Hecht (1993) argues that communication scholars must shift attention from the social role played by individuals to identity as a communicative process enacted in personal, relational, and communal levels. Hecht's framework was instructive in my development of the multimodal approach where I focused on various modes of interactions between the self and the world. In my approach, however, I politicize the subjective experience of such interactions as a site in which ideologies are re/produced, agency is enacted, and the self is materialized. Furthermore, the development of the multimodal approach is an attempt to move beyond the poststructuralist approach to communication. My goal is to move beyond a purely discursive approach to analyzing identity and to nurture a kind of epistemological attitude to articulate the nuance of the interaction between the ideological and the phenomenological in human communication.

Summary of the Findings

Asian Japanese

The analysis of the autobiographical text *Asian Japanese* revealed how the author's situated sense of the self in the world is enabled, negotiated, and transformed through his active self-interpellation. Kobayashi sees the reflection of his desirable self in the images of his photographic subjects situated in various spatial and temporal contexts.

His self-exploration is enabled and restricted by both the spatiality and temporality of Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. His sense of belonging, mobility, and inspiration for life is shaped and reshaped as he interacts with and moves across different spatiotemporal environments found in Japan, Asia, and the West. Furthermore, through his journey from Asia to Paris, his experience of his body as Asian/Easterner becomes as concrete and real at the corporeal level as the divide between the East and the West. As a young man with aspiration, it is through his active and tireless exploration for a desired and improved self that he interacts with, and ultimately internalizes, the world that is spatially, temporally, and corporeally divided between the East and the West.

The analysis showed that the process of establishing the “self” is a dialectic process in which Kobayashi internalizes—or incorporates—the external world into his field of subjectivity, while simultaneously he is incorporated into the existing and shifting structures of the world. Kobayashi ventures out and interacts with the world at large, hoping to reinvent his selfhood. Through this process, the world flows into his mind and body. For Kobayashi, Asia or the West exists meaningfully and materially because of this dialectic force that pulls him into the symbolic and cultural environment (such as “Asia” or “the West”) whose very existence requires the active and mindful presence of Kobayashi as a participant of such environment. There is a mutually constitutive relationship between the making of Kobayashi’s self and the making of Asia/Japan/the West. In this sense, Asia establishes its unshakable existence not only because of the historical discourse on the idea of Asia or the politics of the East-West binary, but more fundamentally because Asia substantiates Kobayashi’s selfhood.

Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey

The analysis of Minatoya's autobiographical text illustrated how multiple selves are interpellated as her sense of self vacillates between Asia and America. Her troubled identity position as a racialized and gendered subject is experienced and mediated both spatially and temporally. She goes back and forth—both literally and figuratively—between her American home and her Japanese homeland, a process by which she finds a sense of home in both. Her Japanese American identity is also shaped through her temporal interactions with the past memories of her family members and her racial group. In addition, her Japanese American identity embodies a particular temporality. On the one hand, she represents the progressive future as an icon of the American Dream; on the other hand, she embodies the tradition of the past that remains intact in her mother's memories of Japan. The analysis also revealed how her body is a site through which the cultural memories of immigrant women are provoked and remembered.

Minatoya's autobiography is an example of how identity is a mosaic of multiple selves in fluid and intersecting spatiotemporal contexts. It shows how identity is a politicized construction not only because it is constructed through discourses and ideologies, but also because it is materialized through and mediated by human experience. The contested nature of Asian American identity is evidenced not only in its ideological complexity, but also in the phenomenological depth and nuances of Asian American experience. Minatoya is interpellated by, and situated within, multiple spatial, temporal, and corporeal experiences. The analysis through the multimodal approach reveals how racial and gender identity is enabled and constituted within particular modes of interaction between the self and the world. Minatoya's racialized and gendered identity

as an Asian/Japanese American woman is not simply a label or discourse attached to her; rather, her identity is materialized in the ways she engages with her cultural, spatial, temporal, and ideological environment.

Key Assumptions and Application of the Multimodal Approach

In this section, I integrate the key assumptions of the multimodal approach and the findings from the autobiographical texts.

1. *Identities are realized and enacted through the process of multidirectional interpellation.*
 - a. *Rather than simply being subjected to ideologies, individual subjects actively seek interpellation for desired self-recognition.*
 - b. *There is a mutually constitutive relationship between the making of the self and the making of the world.*

The first set of assumptions of the multimodal approach is that identity is realized and enacted through multidirectional interpellation of individuals into social, cultural, and historical subjects. This approach challenges the way interpellation is typically understood: a unidirectional force of power from the center to the periphery or from top to bottom. That is, the power is exerted by the institutions of the privileged few over all individuals who are subjected to the forces of ideological interpellation. In the multimodal approach, however, I focus on how the influence of ideologies is no longer top-down or center-to-periphery. The multidirectional interpellation of subjects accounts for the fact that there is no closure to the process of interpellation. Social worlds are created and sedimented by the individual's active participation and interpretation, while

the individual's meaningful existence in the world is deeply ingrained in, and contingent upon, the kind of social world s/he inhabits.

In *Asian Japanese*, Kobayashi's journey to Asia and Europe is guided by his active involvement to see a desired image of himself in the lives of Japanese nationals. Through various encounters with Japanese people, he cultivates his consciousness and new self-recognition as someone who dares to challenge the norms and is not afraid of leaving the comfort of home. He takes photographs of individuals as if he searches for a glimpse of his face in his photographic subjects. In his search for alternative ways of life outside of the rigid social norms and expectations of Japanese society, Asia is a context in which the possible images of himself can be captured through the photographic images of other Japanese individuals.

The process of multidirectional interpellation, however, is not simply self-driven by the subject. Kobayashi's active self-interpellation takes place, and is made possible, within the transnational flow of discourses between the East and the West. Kobayashi seeks Asia as an unexplored, unknown, and underdeveloped frontier that resonates with his own sense of self as a young male in his twenties. Furthermore, his fascination with Asia is contextually situated within Japan's "return to Asia" in the 1990s when the relationship between Japan and the United States came under fire due to an increasing economic tension between the two. It is not surprising that Kobayashi turns to Asia when Japanese economic development reached its peak and when people began to realize the cost of modernization both socially and personally. Still, he chooses to "move on" to the next stage of this life by shifting his location of self-exploration from Asia to Paris. In the

process of interpellating his “Asian Japanese” identity, the strong and pervasive presence of the West unavoidably shapes Kobayashi’s journey.

Kobayashi’s autobiographical text illustrates the process of multidirectional interpellation in which his subjectivity is mutually constituted by both his *active and conscious sense-making process and engagement* with the changing worlds and *the transnational and intersecting discourses* that shape the relationship between the East and the West. In this process, Kobayashi incorporates the transnational discursive construction of the East and the West into his own field of subjectivity and lived experience. In other words, the division between the East and the West is material, concrete, and real not only because it is historically and discursively marked as such, but more so because Kobayashi’s embodied experience of the “possible self” is radically different in Asia and the West. While he is able to see an ideal self-image in Asia, his experience in Paris is not as enabling or fulfilling. The difference between Asia and the West is reified at the level of his phenomenological and embodied experience. As Kobayashi incorporates the landscape of Asia and the West into the field of his subjectivity, he is simultaneously incorporated into the larger political and cultural landscape of the world. Thus, there is a mutually constitutive relationship between the making of Kobayashi’s self and the world in which he finds himself. What he calls Asian Japanese identity signifies a location of mutual constitution where the making of the self and the making of the world are integrated into each other.

2. *Identities are realized and enacted through corporeal materialization of ideologies that emerges within the interactions between the self and the world.*

a. *The body is a site of ideological production, enactment, and embodiment.*

The multimodal approach focuses on the fact that identity cannot be separated from the body. Moving away from the social constructionist approach that treats the body as a clean slate on which social meanings and membership are inscribed, the multimodal approach focuses on the corporeal materiality produced by and experienced through ideologies. In theorizing identity, the multimodal approach focuses not only on how the body is signified (i.e., racialized, sexualized, gendered, classed, etc.) but also how an individual's situated sense of self is realized through the phenomenological experience of such signifying practices. Thus, when it comes to the question of the body, the primary concern of the multimodal approach is not the social construction of identity through bodily *significations* or how the body is made meaningful. Rather, the multimodal approach is concerned with the corporeal *materiality* that is phenomenologically lived as real. In other words, an individual's corporeality—a sense of one's bodily, material, and ontological existence—materializes through one's physical and ideational engagement and interaction with symbolic and material structures.

In analyzing Minatoya's autobiographical text, I focused on how her body is a site in which her Asian American identity is materialized. I addressed how her relationship with her immigrant ancestors is mediated by her racialized and gendered body and how her body functions as a reminder of immigrant tales and racial struggle. She also writes about her cultural displacement as a result of her familial blood lineage. One of the most important lessons from Minatoya's self-narrative is the perspective that racialization is a process of re/defining one's relationship to the body. As she described in the conversation

at the consciousness-raising session, racialization entails a bodily sensation and a sense of dissonance—of encountering one’s own body as the other, of realizing the quality of otherness in one’s own flesh. Such an experience materially defines the way an individual occupies his/her body. As a process of labeling the body, racialization is not merely symbolically significant but is materially effective (thus performative). In this process, race is not only socially constructed but materially reified in one’s experience of the racialized body. Such an embodied experience of living in the ideologically inscribed body is what provokes and mediates Asian American histories and memories in Minatoya’s personal experience.

In *Asian Japanese*, Kobayashi describes the differences between the East and the West in terms of his bodily experience. Kobayashi experiences the qualitative differences between the East and the West in how his body interacts with the surrounding environment. In Asia, his physical and bodily senses are heightened, while in Paris his cognitive and abstract thinking is central to his experience of the place. Asia enters his life by appealing to his senses and feelings, while in Paris his desire for a renewed self-image is filtered through the walls of tradition and abstract thought. For Kobayashi, the divide between the East and the West is not only discursively constructed but also physically experienced in ways that shape how he interacts with the space and who he can become as a person in each context. In the city of Paris, he comes to experience the qualitative otherness of his body as an Easterner. He struggles to belong in Paris not only because of cultural differences, but more so because of the perceived incommensurability between his Eastern body and their Western bodies. In Kobayashi’s experience, the divide between the East and the West is evidenced in his racialized body that cannot

blend into the crowd of White Europeans and Parisian historical buildings. In contrast, his sense of belonging in Asia is described as a comfort of dissolving into the environment and becoming part of the cultural and natural landscape. While the dichotomous divide between the East and the West is ideological, Kobayashi experiences such a divide through the materiality of his “Asian body”—the one that floats in Paris and the one that dissolves in Asia.

3. *Identities are realized and enacted through the spatial orientation of an individual’s social, cultural, and geo-historical locations.*

The notion of the body leads to the question of its relation to, and interaction with, the space it inhabits. The corporeal experience is always situated within a particular spatial environment. The multimodal approach focuses on the process of spatial orientation as one of the core elements that enables the situatedness of the self. In the analysis of *Asian Japanese*, I highlighted how Kobayashi engages with the world spatially across Tokyo, Asia, and Paris. For Kobayashi, his self-exploration is enabled and substantiated by his mobility across different national and cultural spaces. He is able to gauge the progress he has made in his life according to the geographical region he chooses to land and how he interacts with the cultural space. He is able to understand who he has become through how he engages with the machine-like city of Tokyo, the unknown yet rapidly growing frontier of Asia, and the timeless maze of Paris. Kobayashi’s self-exploration continues as he struggles to negotiate his relationship to the cultural and social landscape posed by each spatial context.

In Minatoya’s autobiography, her cultural dislocation is experienced as multiple spaces collide in her life: the feudal Japan that still governs her American home; the

fatherland America that cultivates her independence and assertiveness; and the motherland Asia that embraces harmony in multiple contradictions. Her multiple and competing selves are enacted within these spatial contexts. It is through traveling across these contradictory spaces that Minatoya comes to terms with her cultural identity as an Asian American woman. For her, visiting Asia has a significant meaning—that is, to reconcile the dilemma of her cultural identity and belonging. When she places herself in Asia and interacts with the people and places, she is finally able to mediate the memories of her ancestors, the history of migration, and the making of her life as a continuous and interrelated story. Minatoya’s positionality as an Asian American woman is negotiated quite literally across the Pacific Ocean.

4. *Identities are realized and enacted through temporal orientations of an individual’s social, cultural, and geo-historical locations.*

The multimodal approach takes into account the changing experience of time in the formation of our identities. Engagement with the world is not merely spatial but also temporal. The multimodal approach assumes that human beings actively seek to orient themselves temporally as well as spatially to gain a situated ground from which they activate their mobility, subjectivity, and agency. In analyzing Minatoya’s autobiography, I illustrated how her Asian American identity entails a particular temporality infused with the past, present, and future. Through her mother’s stories, Minatoya sees a glimpse of her image in the memories of her grandmothers and aunt. It is through the fragmented memories of these brave and strong women that she makes sense of her experience and struggle. She comes to understand who she is and how she lives her life through the recounting of past memories. She reenacts such memories of the women—memories of

their struggle, pain, conviction, and goodwill—as she faces various changes and challenges in her life. In this sense, Minatoya’s situated sense of the self is materialized at the intersection of these women’s lives in the past and her life in the present. She gains a strong sense of the self through the revelation that she is a consequence of historical circumstances and personal choices made by women in her family in the past. Through connecting with the past, she comes to understand who she is in the present. Through memories, the past and the present come together in Minatoya’s situated sense of the self and the parameter of the self expands beyond her immediate lifetime.

The experience of being a second-generation Japanese American is not only about its racialized discourse or gendered stereotypes: it is concrete and dense in the sense that in Minatoya’s experience being Asian American means to carry the depth of history—both personal and cultural—on her back. As an Asian American woman, she embodies both the past and the future of the American Dream. As Minatoya travels in Asia, she is treated by the local people with both admiration and ambivalence. This is because to the eyes of the Chinese and Nepali people, she embodies both the hope and price of westernization. Minatoya’s Asian American identity, thus, can be understood as a kind of temporality—or a condition of being in time—in which the self is embodied and enacted through transnational flow of time across the past, present, and future.

Materiality of the Self: Reconceptualizing Identity through the Multimodal Approach

As stated earlier, the overarching question of this study is: how do ideas about the self—while such ideas are social and historical inventions—attain ontological “presence” in one’s subjective experience? This question is posed as a way of mediating the tension between subjective/personal and objective/social construction of identity. On the one

hand, a subjective—or agential/humanist—understanding of identity assumes that individuals actively negotiate and construct their sense of self in relation to others. On the other hand, an objective—or poststructuralist—understanding of identity assumes that individual identities are constructed by social institutions and ideologies in particular historical contexts. The notion of materiality mediates this tension by asserting that the self is neither an autonomous cognitive entity nor a mere product of social construction. Rather, the self is an embodied being. It is through the interaction between socially inscribed meaning and the embodied experience (whether of acceptance, rejection, or negotiation) of such inscription that one’s self materializes. Thus, the “property” of identity is neither a composition of socially constructed categories and positionalities nor a negotiated sense of self by a transcendental subject. The notion of materiality speaks to the condition in which the self is made present in one’s subjective awareness as a performative effect of both material and symbolic interaction, such as temporal/spatial/corporeal engagement, cognitive reflection, sensory perceptions, and creative expression. Since one’s self is embodied—rather than merely re/presented or negotiated—the self, in his/her subjective experience, is material. In other words, identity can be conceptualized as the embodied presence of the self.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) use the notion of overdetermination to address the plurality of social and historical influences that fix an individual’s subject position within the realm of the symbolic. In my theorizing, the notion of materiality bridges the poststructuralist approach to identity that focuses on the discursive articulation of a subject and the conceptualization of identity from the perspective of phenomenological materiality (Ihde, 1990, 2002). This means that the conceptualization of identity as the

embodied presence of the self takes into account both the discursive formation of subject positions (the ideology-as-material approach) as well as the phenomenological experience of the sensible and sense-making body/mind (the situated-experience-as-material approach). The multimodal approach provides a set of analytical tools and a mode of inquiry that allows scholars to focus on the interactions between the ideological and the phenomenological through which identities materialize personally, socially, and historically. Rather than assuming that socially constructed categories are given in one's self-understanding, the multimodal approach draws attention to the modes and processes of communicative interaction that constitutes his or her identity. The multimodal approach focuses on how identity is constituted within and through communicative interactions and engagements.

When identity is viewed as the embodied presence of the self, it alters how we understand the elements of identity such as race and gender. Metaphorically speaking, race (or gender) is not a piece of clothing that, upon successful intervention in social systems of meaning, can be undressed and removed from one's sense of self. Rather, if race (or gender) as a social and political construction should still tell us something about the self, it is because such ideas and practices have become part of the flesh, the property of one's body. For instance, when Minatoya comes to terms with her Asian American identity, her racial identity is not merely a prescriptive meaning imposed upon her or her racial group, but the very ingredient of her material experience of the self. For Minatoya, her self-understanding is inextricably tied to her awareness of the historicity of racial relations and lived experiences of Asian Americans in the United States. Thus, Minatoya's "race" is not simply a category or label attached to her phenotype or ancestral

origin, but the entire narrative of racial relations, lived experiences, and racial ideologies that have shaped her life as an Asian American woman. She cannot simply remove or objectify the category as a social construct because she lives and embodies this narrative. Such a narrative with its historical depth and density are the property of her racial identity. Race, therefore, is not merely a social category and institution, but is also the material effects of ideas, practices, lived experiences, and social relations that have become the substance of one's embodied presence. The power of racialization—or any other social re/production of ideologies and practices—lies in this effect, rather than its meaning, to assert the ontological presence in one's subjective and intersubjective experience of the self.

When identity is viewed as the embodied presence of the self, it also alters the way we understand identity negotiation or transformation. Kobayashi's journey to Asia is an attempt to reinvent the historically and socially ingrained Japanese identity. Through his journey, he tries to embody a counter-narrative of the conventional Japanese norms and expectations. His renewed sense of self—what he calls Asian Japanese—is accomplished through his active experiential engagement with his surrounding environments in Japan, Asia, and the West. It is through this active experience-making process (rather than sense-making process) that his Asian Japanese identity is substantiated. Kobayashi does not simply *name* his renewed identity; he *experiences* it through his international travels and encounters with others. He is able to negotiate the effects of Japanese social practices and ideas about the self not only by discursively claiming his renewed identity (by writing the autobiographical travelogue) but more fundamentally by also allowing him to experience the process of transformation. His

Asian Japanese identity becomes a material and embodied fact not because it is named as such, but because his concrete experiences abroad substantiate his newly invented identity position. As Minatoya cannot simply renounce her race, Kobayashi also cannot easily denounce his Japanese identity. If his renewed sense of self is meant to have a lasting impact, he must have embodied experiences of living, acting, and being in the world *as* Asian Japanese. He must materialize a reinvented self by cultivating the modes of interaction and engagement in which he is able to act, think, feel, imagine, and relate to others as Asian Japanese.

Implications for Research on Identity in Communication Scholarship

Materiality and Identity

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I was in search of a theoretical language to re-articulate the discourse on identity. The term “construct” seemed inadequate: when this term is used in the discussion on identity, there is a sense of artificiality and a twisted sense of human agency. That is, what has been socially constructed can be deconstructed and transformed through changes in social convention. The social constructionist approach carries a sense of defeat in the ability of the human mind to accurately perceive and name reality. At the same time, the social constructionist approach easily feeds into the lure of postmodern identity; we can be anything and everything insofar as human beings are capable of manipulating symbols and constructing alternative realities. As a communication scholar, I am trained to analyze, politicize, and deconstruct the arbitrary relationships between signifier and signified. Perhaps the work of communication scholarship has focused largely on the battle against the tyranny of the symbol that controls and dictates social realities and ways of being. As

communication scholars, we tirelessly single out symbolic means and rhetorical strategies from abstract concepts and immaterial possibilities. While the symbolic practice enables the world to be meaningful, it also delimits other ways of being, acting, and thinking. Communication scholarship sheds light on this framing of the world through symbols. While the word “construct” elucidates this process of symbolic naming, it falls short of addressing its effects on the ways we engage with the world. In other words, social constructionism is epistemologically useful, but it is limited in terms of understanding the individual subject’s ontological engagement with his/her social world. Social constructionism allows us to understand how we come to create knowledge about the world, but it does not address how we come to experience and embody such knowledge within the dialectic of the (socially constructed) self and the world.

It was due to this concern about, and interest in, the ontological aspect of our identity that I began to focus on the notion of materiality. It seems a more fitting word to articulate the nuances of lived experiences of social and personal realities. When identity is materialized—rather than constructed—through symbolic means, it emphasizes the *effect* of such practice to bring something into perceptible existence, into something that assumes bodily form. It assumes that the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified cannot simply be deconstructed and detached. It foregrounds the fact that the way we interact with the world meaningfully is material (not simply symbolic); and the symbolic inscription has a materializing effect that cannot simply be undone through another symbolic naming. At the same time, the materialist approach emphasizes that a dialectic and mutually constitutive relationship exists between symbolic practice and material reality—neither comes before the other. Thus, through the process of writing this

dissertation, it has become clear that the notion of materiality is useful in rearticulating the discourse on identity.

To refine the point of my theoretical investigation, what I would like to suggest as a direction of future research and theorization in the field of communication studies is how identity as a historically specific condition accomplishes its ontological presence in an individual's subjective experience. To this end, my approach is not to deconstruct the constructed-ness of socially inscribed systems of meaning, but to seek understanding of how a relatively stabilized "self" materializes into being—into an „identity.“ While Foucault (1975, 1978, 1982) engages in the historical investigations to excavate social functions of particular concepts and practices in re/producing the subject, I am interested in how such historically ingrained concepts and practices gain the “material” presence in one's being.

The notion of materiality allows us to pay attention to both the structural and phenomenological aspects of identity formation and negotiation. In my theorizing, I situated identity not only as constructed and represented, but also as lived, experienced, and embodied. This is because I believe that the epistemological quest for identity must be grounded in the politics of ontology. Identity is the instrument of social reality and hierarchy not only because of the reproduction of discourses and institutions, but also because such social reproduction and repetition are materialized into one's condition of being. Perhaps this is my way of answering Hacking's (1999) question. When communication scholars discuss the social construction of identity, what, precisely, is constructed? My answer, at least partially, is: the embodied presence of the self—or the phenomenological materiality of the self—that is material in both ideological and

phenomenological ways. As I have argued, this materiality of the self is not reducible or fully articulated within the existing social categories of race, gender, class, etc.

One of the tasks of communication scholarship is to be attentive to the process of materialization as well as the materiality of being that remains without proper names and recognition. The following statement effectively illuminates the need for this task:

Even when we describe the totally unknown, we can do so only in terms of the partially known or the known. Instead of admitting the failure of our categories, we love to clobber our empirical experiences until they fit these categories.

The problems of such translation are not unique to the West. There is an Indian folk tale about some people who saw a pig for the first time. At first they were bewildered, then one of them confidently claimed that it was a rat that had eaten too much. Another disagreed, and as confidently said that it was an elephant, shrunken due to starvation. Neither was willing to give up his or her categories and admit that this was a new experience. (King, 1991, cited in Chambers, 1994, p. 27)

It seems what I call materiality refers to the things, relationships, embodiments, emotions, arrangements of meaning, interaction between symbolic and concrete, and that which resides in the space of unknown and in-between that remain unnamed or excluded from being an object of academic inquiry. As described at the beginning of this chapter, my students of color described such unnamed embodiments of race as “biological.” It brings us to realize that our linguistic systems are not omnipotent to conquer all human experiences and subjectivities. Thus, communication scholars must take risks. In the absence of proper academic terminologies or categories, scholars must ask questions

about phenomena without reductively depending on the existing language of identity.

This requires the development of theoretical approaches and methodological tools beyond the powerful instruments of modern society and the language of class, race, gender, and so on.

Furthermore, the notion of materiality opens a new theoretical terrain where communication is viewed not only as a site of meaning-making and exchange, but also as a process through which particular conditions of being is enabled, fixed, and transformed. In transitioning toward the study of condition rather than object, Appadurai's (1996) call for the use of "cultural" rather than "culture" is instructive. He argues that the noun culture connotes a stable and coherent object possessed by individuals; the adjective cultural, on the other hand, describes the dimensions of situated differences embodied by individuals. In a similar vein, identity needs to be theorized not as a prescriptive label or an object possessed by individuals or society, but as the lived, felt, and embodied conditions of identification and difference materialized through communication.

Implications of Multimodal Approach

The multimodal approach emphasizes a communication-oriented perspective on identity by shifting the analytical lens from the social constructionist view to the conceptualization of identity as multimodal interactions and engagements between the self and the world. In my study, the idea of Asia was a useful entry point to investigate how the ideological construct "Asia" intersects with, and is constituted through, the authors' subjective experience of being and becoming "Asian" in different spatiotemporal and cultural contexts. The notion of materiality speaks to the quality of multimodal

interactions and engagements by emphasizing the significance of both the ideological structure and the embodied experience in constituting identities.

This analytical shift has several significant implications to studies in intercultural communication. First, the multimodal approach remedies the polarization between micro and macro contexts, self and society, as well as agency and structure. Because the multimodal approach focuses on the modes of interaction—rather than the relationships—between the self and the world, it enables scholars to conceptualize identity as interactive processes of realization and materialization. Secondly, the multimodal approach generates a space for empirical studies that explicate the mechanisms of interactional engagements that orient, situate, stabilize, activate, and mobilize the “self” in the globalized world. Such mechanisms may include both the relational aspects of communication (interpersonal or locally situated interactions) as well as the structural aspects of communication (social institutions, histories, or discourses). The four modes of interaction can be applied to a variety of communication contexts and texts to illuminate the mechanisms of interactional engagements that enable the contingent realizations of identity locally and globally.

Implications for Pedagogy and Engagement

If the pedagogy of identity is meant to be meaningful for students, educators must attend to particular ways in which the materiality of the self gives rise to a student’s subjective sense of being. For example, if I were to teach a group of college athletes the centrality of identity politics in society, students must attend not only to how their athletic life is gendered, racialized, or classed but also how it feels in their bodies to perform to the best of their physical and mental ability; how it feels to perform to the societal and

parental expectations; and how the interactions among the physical, the mental, and the social give rise to the materiality of their selves. Similarly, if I were to teach a group of white students the system of white privilege in the United States and globally, the discussion must include not only the historical and structural contexts that benefit white people but also how whiteness is embodied—how it feels, how it is experienced, and how it breeds and is reified inside one’s presence of the self. Undoing racism must pay attention not only to the structure of racism but also to the ontology of the racialized self. For most students of color, the theoretical language of race as a social construction is hardly enough to capture their lived experiences and the consequences of racism. Thus, the pedagogy of identity must focus on the phenomenological experience as a site of ideological contestation and transformation.

When identity is understood as a material and embodied condition of being, it broadens the possibility of communication based on empathy and identification. Today, one of the greatest challenges in society is to have a culturally informed and empathic understanding of others in intercultural, international, as well as interreligious contexts. What I would like to envision is a new way of engaging with others whose life experiences and social locations are vastly different. I believe that when I become aware of the phenomenological materiality of my identity and my lived experiences, this enables a kind of imagination for the experiences of others. This does not mean that I can reduce their experiences into my own framework. On the contrary, it means to recognize and appreciate others’ experiences and differences as material and real as how I experience my life. The point is not to reduce people’s experiences as essentially the same or to universalize human experience. Rather, it means to appreciate cultural

differences as the embodiment of different conditions of being that are materially real and significant. No matter how different we are from each other, at the very least, we can agree on the depth of historical social inscription that marks our bodies and recognize the kind of agency and standpoint we gain from such inscription. Communication based on empathy and identification requires self-reflexivity, introspection, and awareness that the self is a historically materialized, embodied presence. It requires a form of imagination grounded in this awareness to imagine the materiality of the unknown and unknowable experiences of others.

The awareness of the materiality of the self—or the embodied presence of the self as a manifestation of particular historical conditions and possibilities—provides a possibility of identification beyond identity. If one is able to relate to others with the awareness that social categories, cultural differences, and power struggle come with ontological realness or materiality that cannot simply be negotiated symbolically, identification beyond identity is possible on the ground of shared—if not same or similar—experiences of the materiality of the self. This encourages the shift from understanding „positionality“ of individuals or groups to understanding „conditions of being.“ This is the beginning of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and imagination beyond one’s social boundary and subjective experience. The materiality of the self is not about being reified into a set of oppressive ideas or caged in the systems of meaning, but is the very substance of one’s agency through which one is able to act, think, feel, imagine, and relate to others.

We cannot cognitively and rationally break down identity into socially constructed positionalities, show its irrationality or constructed-ness, and assume it will

ultimately cure the malady of modern society. Identity is not a cognitive game that, upon successful instruction, can be played “right” and bring injustice to an end. We must approach identity as a way of being and a particular condition of being that cannot be compartmentalized into social classifications so conveniently salient in maintaining the modern social order. The materiality of the self is that which constitutes the conscious, thinking, embodied subject. Despite the abundance of academic studies and theories about identity, phenomenological materiality that substantiates identity seems to remain largely unnamed and unarticulated. To incorporate the notion of materiality in theorizing identity, therefore, means to explore, be attentive, and listen carefully to that which slips through the existing language of identity.

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