

# in(Living)between

Performing the Hyphen

by KEIKO HART

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## ABSTRACT

*in(Living)between*, Keiko Hart, Master of Fine Arts, Criticism and Curatorial Practice, OCAD University, 2019

The multiracial individual lives in the in(-)between—a space of generative potential for progressive resistance. It's neither here nor there, not strictly self or the other, but both: the hyphen. *in(Living)between* examines hyphenated identity through experiences of (mis)perceptions, (mis)interpretations and (mis)identifications. Attempting to define hyphenation within the limitations of language is contrary to its constant state of becoming. It cannot be placed because it's not fixed to a singular identity, cannot be explained or neatly contained within histories. Its fluid movement shouldn't be mistaken for indecisiveness; it exists in a paradox—perforating the boundary built up by past (mis)understandings, infiltrating the space thought to be inaccessible. Invoking it in ambiguous writing is a self-reflexive protest on the delimiting functions of specificity. The hyphen complicates context by reconfiguring time and space, interrupting the performance of the present to activate discursive inventions that contend with the question: how do we locate identity?

Keywords: identity, in-between, hyphen, boundary, performance, paradox, hybridity, self, ethnicity, race, ambiguity, context collapse, criticism, writing, live-stream

※ how do we pronounce the self? in struggling with locating identity, i investigated my own subjectivity in an exhibition at the ocad university graduate gallery. *in(Living)between* went through different stages: a three-day long performance piece where i wrote stream-of-consciousness on the walls of the closed off gallery space while a live-stream feed of the room could be viewed in the adjacent media room (or from anywhere in the world); following the room reveal at the reception, the gallery writing remained intact in the gallery for four days where spectators could enter the space and view the room alongside an edited video of the live-stream performance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge that I am an uninvited guest on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which I stand and create. I offer my deepest respect and gratitude to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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Peter Christian Ness, for complete transparency in conversation and online friendship over great distances. I've never known someone who could patiently listen to all my headaches and offer up such earnest advice with insufferably blunt assurances of affection.

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Harumi Hart (飛鋪 晴美), for being my mother. I love you.

Thank-you.

## DEDICATION

To all those who have ever felt like they weren't enough or didn't belong.

You are. You do.

And everything in(-)between.

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## IMAGE ATTRIBUTION

The images in this document aren't meant to serve as independent references, but yet another stage of the exhibition that often goes unseen. They are included here as conscious in(-) between moments that query the context of a support paper.

All images of me painting over the gallery taken by Tal Sofia.

## INTRODUCTION

How do you pronounce Keiko?

My name has been the source of many challenges upon my identity over the course of my life. Ethnically ambiguous characteristics enable fluency across different contexts, but when I introduce myself, I am instantly exposed as other to the dominant paradigm. It is an apprehensive exercise to spell out, a reluctant stretch when being read from its written form and a test of flexibility when being uttered aloud. I often must repeat it more than once. Most of these efforts are in respect to my mother, who gave me the name. She also provided me with an English name, but felt the need to make my Japanese name my first because, in her words: “You looked too white.” Looking at my infant face, she anticipated it would be difficult for others to recognize me as multi-racial—to recognize me as her child. She was right.

*in(Living)between* is an exploration of lived experiences that continue to unsettle and negotiate the space of the in(-) between—the stage where the hyphen performs. This stage is where identity finds its footing, set with political props, social cues and cultural costumes that I will reference through personal encounters. If a visible indicator of identity is not immediately present, spectators expect it to manifest itself conspicuously—individuals are meant to perform the invisible qualities of their identity. When the hyphen performs, it does so from



※ i called up my mom in the middle of writing this thesis to ask her why she hadn't made my english name my first, like she had with my sibling. it reinforced to me that even those who *see* me recognize that the way i LOOK presents differently than how i identify. the name keiko has been learned to look a certain way that i don't *fit*. when i wrote on the walls, i transliterated japanese into english—although it looked like it could be read comprehensibly, an understanding of the literal meaning wasn't directly communicable to those that weren't fluent in japanese. however, because it can be phonetically read, it is possible for spectators to mediate the writing through someone or something to translate and understand it.



an in(-)between space that is observable when written out, yet invisible when spoken aloud. To forget, or worse, to deny its existence, is a violent erasure of the ongoing trauma of colonial narratives. While my endeavours are centered around locating identity, it is counterintuitive to clearly and directly articulate this within the confines of language, so to upset structure, I use language ambiguously in a self-reflexive critique. Through this practice I work to encourage (un)learning of the expectations placed on the performance of identity. My focus isn't on developing definitions herein to articulate the *what* of hyphenation, which is reductive to its ephemerality, but on making space for process to flourish without predetermined objectives. My focus is on the undefinable *who*. It is in the interstices in(-) between conception and completion that a temporal boundary of opportunity exists, demanding ongoing engagement with a state of constant becoming. To try to qualify this inspection with the sterile language of the academy—knowledge dissemination that seeks to explain and demarcate what can be said and how one is to say it, is contradictory to its impermanence, distilling the material in a paradoxical struggle that parallels the here and there, back and forth liminality of hybridity. In no way should this study be understood as objectively absolute; I embrace subjectivity in my approach. By arranging memories, reflections and readings lifted from various times and places, *in(Living)between* invigorates interactions with the ineffable site of hyphenated identity.

※ the first person to see the exhibition in person commented that it seemed like something only a crazy person would do. i'm not *not* crazy, but this also made me think that the reception of the writing would be tense... even negative. when i revealed the room, people who came through related their own experiences of culture and more than once i was told the room expressed joy and happiness. when people noticed that the english was transliterated from another language, it opened up a conversation about hyphenation without me needing to explain the *what* of WHO i was. the writing performed as an invitation to engage with dialogues on hyphenation—people were excited and eager to share their lived experiences with me and each other. i've since received emails and messages continuing the conversation beyond the gallery.



## HISTORY AND THEMES

‘The hyphen’ was a metonymic term for identity originally deployed as a derogatory epithet for Americans who identified allegiance to another country.<sup>1</sup> At the time of World War I, it was primarily used by European-Americans who were chastised as being anti-nationalistic.<sup>2</sup> Hyphenated identity was viewed as a pollution of American ‘purity,’ while politically it expressed a division of loyalty. Canada mirrored this disdain: Canadians were defined as British Subjects until the Canadian Citizenship Act (1947) following World War II, which “legitimized the British underpinnings of English-speaking Canada,” asserting assimilation of ethnic groups because cultural heterogeneity was seen as “detrimental to Canada’s character and integrity.”<sup>3</sup> The hyphen was seen as a threat. Every effort was made to eradicate it and forcibly integrate hyphenated individuals into the façade of a monoethnic identity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed history of how the term ‘hyphen’ was used contentiously, see Vanessa B. Beasley’s *Who Belongs in America: Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*. Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on hyphenation in World War I, see John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Brusseau and Michael Dewing. “Canadian Multiculturalism,” *Research Publications*, Library of Parliament, Parliament of Canada. January 3, 2018. <[https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en\\_CA/ResearchPublications/200920E](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/200920E)>

<sup>4</sup> For example, former Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were outspoken in their condemnation of hyphenation. In a New York Times article published on October 13, 1915, Roosevelt denounced dual nationality. See “Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 1915, at <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/10/13/105042745.pdf>>. Four years later, Wilson likened the hyphen to a “dagger” that would be “plunged into the vitals of the Republic.” See “Final Address in Support of the League of Nations,”

※ the walls of the gallery are white. they are always returned to their *natural state* of white. white is this clean unobtrusive standard thing that is the original state of the gallery because it doesn’t distract from artwork in the space. the gallery must be returned to white in(-)between each show. i am writing on these walls in a performance piece where i am VERY aware of my movements and DEEPLY in the moment alone in a room watching my hands move a pen and getting SO entranced at times that i make spelling errors while my mind gets ahead of my hand. what is going on in(-) between my mind and my body when this happens??? i am the only one who can identify these *mistakes* in the room. i am hyper aware of them and know where they are without having to look around the room in search of them. i find i am more occupied with these (*in*)*correct* areas than the neat and tidy sensical sentences. i also like the areas where the text curves or moves around objects that disrupt the gallery—sockets and network jacks and fire extinguishers and

As war extended its ugly reach, the hyphen spread beyond western borders. The military occupation of Southeast Asian countries came with violence and rape resulting in children that were seen as physical embodiments of abuse, destruction and poverty. A new term—Amerasian—was conceived to label children born to Asian women and United States servicemen. The official recognition of the term came into being following the Vietnam War with the Amerasian Homecoming Act, Law 97-359 (1982). The Act states that, in addition to legal documentation and financial concerns, the Attorney General “shall consider the physical appearance of the alien” when assessing petitions for immigration.<sup>5</sup> This meant that Cambodian, Korean, Laotian and Vietnamese children with American blood could gain immigration status if the presiding Attorney General determined that their appearance was sufficiently ‘multi-racial looking’—more accurately, *white looking*. The law did not extend to other Asian countries. Tens of thousands of children were abandoned to die, while those that lived faced extreme prejudice.<sup>6</sup> Mothers went so far as to keep their chil-

vents and pipes and stuff and things that i overhear people saying make this a shitty space that no one wants to use because it's not how a gallery *should* look. when i sit in the gallery with my work on the walls i am in(-)between the performance and when i will have to cover this all up in preparation for the next show.

※ i wonder how many times this gallery has been painted over and what's hiding under all the layers. there are historical ghosts from previous exhibitions haunting the space that i'll never know about. in respect to this, i leave the gallery lights arranged the way they were for the last show and switch them on during the performance to reinforce the idea that this is a gallery, was a gallery, not sure if it always will be but it is in the now that i did this performance and the now that i'm writing these notes and probably will be for a while after i write this thesis at least. but that doesn't mean it's always the *same* gallery, it's NEVER the *same* gallery...

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speech, Pueblo, Colorado, September 25, 1919. *American Rhetoric*, at <<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wilsonleagueofnations.htm>>.

<sup>5</sup> For full details on the Amerasian Act and its legislation in addition to this quote, see Bills and Statutes, *Public Law 97-359: An act to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide preferential treatment in the admission of certain children of United States citizens*, October 22, 1982 at <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-96/pdf/STATUTE-96-Pg1716.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> For personal accounts of this and the ongoing trauma, see Sunshine Lichauco de Leon's "Filipinos fathered by US Soldiers fight for justice," *The Guardian*, at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/31/amerasiaphilippines-american-army>> and Reiji Yoshida's "Mixed-race babies in lurch," *The Japan Times*, at <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/09/10/national/mixed-race-babies-in-lurch/#.XKmb3-tKjdR>>.

dren's multi-racial status hidden from society, sometimes even from the children themselves. Generations were born with no knowledge of their hybrid ancestry for fear of being branded as 'impure' and 'foreign.' The end goal was always to erase any indication of cultural plurality.

Growing up, I had this recurring nightmare of a demon that would come through my bedroom window to devour my navel if I kicked the covers off in my sleep. Without a belly button, I worried I would cease to be human. When I had sleepovers with friends, other children never understood this fear and would write it off as my strange, incomprehensible *Asian side*. This inexplicable strangeness follows me. When people hear my name, they ask me where I am from because it is instantly recognizable as outside of Western nomenclature. Canada is never the answer they are looking for—what they want to hear is that I am some version of *other*. There are, of course, more ways I can describe my 'wheres': I am European, more specifically British and Scottish, and my family name has been recorded as indicating Irish lineage. I am Japanese, and my mother suspects that her father was hiding Portuguese ancestry. No one in the family has ever sought to confirm this, nor would I ever claim as such, she has simply brought it up multiple times in reference to the features that her and her siblings inherited—they all have supratarsal folds colloquially known as 'double eyelids.' This trait is less common in Japanese genetics and is desirable because it is regarded as a defining

※ a japanese myth relates that the thunder god raijin will come eat children's belly buttons if they don't stay under blankets when sleeping during bad weather. this is to scare them into covering up to keep from getting stomach colds. it seems like there's a thread across all cultures that to get kids to do something you scare them into it. my mother was the one who would tell me this story to try and get me to stop kicking the covers off in my sleep. she would take this one step further: she'd link the loss of my navel to the loss of the symbol of us being mother and child. this added an extra layer of fear for me, because my hyphenation is connected to the recognition of this relationship—a relation that is constantly challenged by society when people fail to acknowledge us as family.

※ i can't declare portuguese ancestry on a hunch—wouldn't DREAM of it. but increased accessibility to dna testing has



characteristic of Western beauty. I also acquired this trait. It is one of the reasons why I have been told on many occasions that I am significantly *white-passing*.

‘Passing’ suggests that I have actively assimilated into my European heritage, that I am *getting away with* posing as white while covering up the *other*. At no point did I choose to look the way I do, nor have I ever chosen to hide my Japanese background. However, I do recognize the weight it carries to present in this manner. Jews trapped in Nazi Germany sought to pass as Aryan at the risk of their lives.<sup>7</sup> During a time of anti-miscegenation laws and Black slavery in the United States, individuals borne as a result of the rape of enslaved Black women who could appear racially ambiguous would pose as white-passing in order to escape slavery, undermine the restrictive racist society and attempt to uplift other Black people.<sup>8</sup> To pass as white was to be free, while simultaneously an act of contention as many regarded it as a form of betrayal. This animosity extends to the present day. Adrian Piper, who recently had a retrospective, *A Synthesis of Institutions, 1965-2016* (2018), at New York’s The Museum of Modern Art, discussed how she has repeatedly endured accusations of inauthenticity throughout her life because of her pale skin. She relates: “I have sometimes met Blacks who, as a condition of social ac-

brought about waves of curious people discovering things about their genetic makeup that were previously invisible to them. if i sent a swab off that came back with a percentage of portuguese ancestry, is science suddenly the authority over my identity? i’ve never experienced being portuguese so i can’t see myself claiming as such, but what about if it came back that i wasn’t japanese? am i not japanese? is my life a lie, my performance fake??? how we determine our identity is increasingly being challenged in new ways that seek to disassemble genes into a formula of *what* we are made up of without considering *who*.



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<sup>7</sup> For further reading on the history of Jews passing as Aryan in Nazi Germany, see Kerry Wallach’s *Passing Illusions*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> For detailed reading on the history of racial passing in America, see Allyson Hobbs’ *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

ceptance of me, require me to prove my Blackness by passing the Suffering Test: they recount at length their recent experiences of racism and then wait expectantly, skeptically, for me to match theirs with mine.”<sup>9</sup> Claims of ethnic identity demand a rite-of-passage. At times it becomes clear why racial-passing is met with reproach—in Canada, we continue to see it manifest maliciously for personal gain: individuals claiming to be of Indigenous descent appropriate the status of marginalized First Nations who have suffered generations of cultural genocide.

The first appearance of the modern usage of the hyphen as a grammatical device was in the *Gutenberg Bible*, published by the inventor of the European printing press Johannes Gutenberg in the 1450s. While hyphens are typically set inside the boundary of the right hand margin in contemporary texts, Gutenberg used the hyphen to make each line of text equal, applying it in a way that caused it to “hang in the margin outside that boundary.”<sup>10</sup> Though his concerns were with typography, Gutenberg’s actions also brought attention to how this boundary is accessed. In present day, the hyphen is a tool used to signal a combined meaning, a division in(-)between two words, or a missing or implied element. Current academic style guides—including Chicago, APA and MLA, which are most commonly

※ i don’t visually present as a person of colour. my mother is a person of colour, therefore i am too. this was wildly apparent to me growing up, but now that i’m old enough to be independently mobile and privileged to be surrounded by receptive arts practitioners, i am confronting dialogues of white-passing ally-ship. this is perfectly valid, but i’ve also seen this play out as gatekeeping. i am in a unique position where without having to state that i’m a person of colour, my name instantly makes people aware of my eastern heritage. in pronouncing my name, i end up pronouncing my hyphen. in my live-streamed performance, i purposefully positioned the camera not on the writing, but on my self, and kept it from focusing properly so that the text couldn’t be read. it was once i opened the room, when the writing was shown to be japanese written in english, that the hyphen pronounced itself. this wasn’t me trying to hide my hyphen, but interrogating the idea of visibility and how my identity is processed by spectators. in making assessments about another person’s identity, people are participating in locating identity.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Piper. “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” *Transition* 58. (1992): 4-32. <doi:10.2307/2934966>.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Houston. “The Hyphen,” *Shady Characters: the Secret life of Punctuation, Symbols, and & Typographical Marks*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2013. 132.

used in the academy—recommend dropping the hyphen when used in(-)between two names unless one is fragmented (African American as opposed to Afro-American). I choose to hyphenate because I see this omission as an act of erasure: the utility of the hyphen is an important historical reminder that directs attention to the in(-)between. Abandoning the hyphen or, to “unhook” it, was considered full-integration into Anglonormative Western society and plays into the narrative of colonial destruction.<sup>11</sup> It is integral that this in(-)between space be engaged with while preserving sensitivity to the dangers of epitomizing the hyphenated identity.

Writers like Professor Emerita at the University of California, Berkeley, Maxine Hong Kingston express their decision to leave out the hyphen because “the hyphen gives the word on either side equal weight, as if linking two nouns... Without the hyphen, ‘Chinese’ is an adjective and ‘American’ a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American.”<sup>12</sup> Kingston is not alone: in speaking of his decision not to hyphenate, former White House speechwriter and University of Washington lecturer Eric Liu describes Chinese as merely “one adjective” amongst the many different kinds of American he is.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that both of these writers agree that hyphenation

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<sup>11</sup> Beasley, *Who Belongs in America*, 107-111.

<sup>12</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston. “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers,” *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*, ed. Guy Amirthanayagam. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982. 55–65. <doi: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-34904940-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-34904940-0_5)>.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Liu. “Why I don’t hyphenate Chinese American,” *CNN*. Accessed April 7, 2019. <<http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/11/opinion/liu-chinese-american/index.html>>.



is a personal decision. For me, being Japanese is not an adjective to my Canadian identity. While I can understand the desire to be recognized as a certain racialized identity, it should not come at the expense of sacrificing another. That the original disdain for the hyphen was founded on the notion that it expressed dual loyalties only further enforces my homage. It is from this stance that I must posture the more urgent cause for alarm as institutional writing standards taking steps to prescribe whether someone can use the hyphen or not. That a constitutional power can exercise authority over how an individual expresses their identity exemplifies the persistent brutality of imperialist structures. I practice writing and employ all of its devices in order to spread critical awareness of these structures. If I choose to use the hyphen, I do so with agency for the self.

## NAMESAKE

A principal part of imparting knowledge is locating oneself. I am positioned by the hyphen, which has imprinted on me psychologically and physically having been raised travelling back and forth in(-)between the environments of Japan and Canada. In disseminating Indigenous methodologies, Director of the Centre for Indigegogy at Wilfred Laurier University Kathy Absolon and Assistant Professor of Indigenous Education at the First Nations University of Canada Cam Willet attest to how locating oneself communicates an individual's stakes within a discussion. Being forward about where one is from before

※ remember when i questioned how science is wielding authority over identity? what about the academy?? work places that want you to identify if you're a 'minority??' governments that make you fill out surveys??? most of this is posed as voluntary, but because of how japanese and chinese immigrants and indigenous groups were treated in the past, canada is apprehensive to collect this information and has far less data on different ethnic groups (which could inform things like health risks, access to education, employment rates, child welfare) while blanket terming races besides white as 'visible minorities.' how do we determine what a 'VISIBLE' minority is? and what about all the nuances that exist in(-)between them all!? canada avoids race issues by not talking about race issues, and this is why i strive to use exhibitions as a launching point to continue speaking: to create a vocabulary.



making claims is “not only for yourself, but for your family, your nation, your clan, your genealogy.”<sup>14</sup> There is no neutrality or objectivity in disseminating epistemologies because everything is viewed through a human lens—suggesting any different is like arguing that there is an essentialist foundation of ‘purity’ that all other identities are established upon. There is no pure epistemology; the only thing I can write about with authority is myself. I know myself as Keiko.

Before I was born, my mother conferred with her parents regarding my name and was told to call me 翠 (Midori, meaning bird with pure coloured feathers). When the time came to commit this to my birth certificate, she withdrew, fearing English speakers wouldn’t be able to say it properly. I spent more than a week as Baby Hart before being given the name 恵子 (Keiko, meaning lucky). What my mother could not have predicted was that this name would cause just as much intervention in the predominantly Catholic, English-speaking town I was raised in, generating its own course of (mis)pronunciations, (mis)interpretations and (mis)identifications. The double vowel proved the most challenging oddity. The most common attempts at enunciating it include:

- Kee-ko
- Ky-ko

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<sup>14</sup> Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett. “Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research,” *Research as Resistance: critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, eds. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2005. 104.



※ one of these enunciations resulted in a particularly distressing moment with a jewish ex-partner’s parents. without meaning to, my name creates controversy.

- Kayak-o
- Kui-ko
- Kee-ku
- Kay-kay
- Ko-ko

In every address, my strangeness announced itself, inducing reluctant attendance rollcalls that had people reading off of a list as opposed to speaking directly to me. In(-)between all the biblical names, I learned to take note of where my name would come alphabetically to try and relieve people from the strife of attempting to sound it out. It was always met with an indicative hesitant pause: ...Hart? *Something* Hart? When I respond with a demonstration of how I pronounce it, I get a variety of inquisitive, unsolicited responses:

- Is that your real name?
- That's not your real name.
- What's that short for?
- Why are you using a fake name?
- But seriously, what's your real name?
- That's a dog's name.
- Wasn't that Free Willy's name?
- Are you joking?
- You don't have to lie about your name.
- So, you're not from here.
- Where are you from?

※ i've yet to see free willy. most of what i watched growing up was japanese anime record-ings my relatives would mail to canada. anime has grown in popularity in north america and i now come across pop culture references to shows that i watched decades ago being RE-

- Show me your ID.
- Oh yeah, you look mixed/exotic.
- That sounds like a pasta.

In more invasive cases, I have had people contact mutual relations to request my 'real' name.

-

The adaptability of written language endorses fluidity, yet is sorely limiting. When attempting to assemble a biography to follow my name that reads as a true representation of self, each term risks essentializing who I am. Words may appear as if they are transparent signifiers delivering a clear message, but their meanings are only derived from their relationship to other words. People of colour are people of colour relative to whiteness. An awareness of these inter-associations is integral when employing text to describe oneself, particularly for those outside the hegemonic narrative. Fortunate connections led me to organize an installation of the digital media artwork *No Choice About the Terminology* (2011) by Concordia University professor Jason Edward Lewis for *We++*, a symposium centered on themes of genetics, genealogy and agency in identity.<sup>15</sup> The piece utilizes a responsive touchscreen for participants to engage with letters and words and watch them expand into colourful shapes. Layered texts obscure legibility. Lewis uses this to vie with “the

mixed on social media. much of my fluency was adapted from these programs, so when i see these familiar materials in an online context that pulls them out of their time and space, i experience a sort of RE-contextualization—where my understanding of japanese media as childhood is RE-configured in the present. this RE-lates to the space of the in(-)between, as the complexity of these histories were necessary in developing my identity and are just as necessary now. present performance is interrupted by the RE-arrangement and RE-experiencing of memories and materials in new ways that i REspond to through the accessibility of the online dimension.

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<sup>15</sup> The symposium was presented by Subtle Technologies and took place in the fall of 2018. Lewis' work was installed in the quad of the Rogers Communications Centre, 80 Gould Street, Toronto, ON, in response to Ryerson University's controversial namesake for the evening of October 20.

danger and seduction of neat categorizations” that seek to qualify culture and ethnicity.<sup>16</sup> When Absolon and Willet interrogate how Indigenous peoples have been represented in Eurocentric society, they do so with attention to the failure of language and legislation to recognize the diversity of their territorial groups. Written language is supposed to be one of the most direct ways to communicate, yet its subservience to institutional procedures (regulating criteria for ‘correct’ ways to write), filters words through a strainer that maintains control. A select set of terminology that checks off the ‘necessary’ boxes determined by an autocracy jeopardizes the complexities of identity.

Even if one conforms to these conditions in the interest of informing audiences of their position, it raises further questions: in what order does one arrange the terms describing the self? It is always a struggle to determine which *qualifiers* should take priority over the others—does it change in different contexts? If I am speaking to a group of women, should that identification come first in a show of solidarity; if I am speaking to a group of Indigenous individuals, do I make my identity as a person-of-colour take the lead to demonstrate my ally-ship, given my white-presenting appearance? University of California, Berkeley, professor Trinh T. Minh-ha has sparred with the same concerns: “Where does [the writer] place her loyalties?”<sup>17</sup> Communicating identity in words always seems to necessitate a

<sup>16</sup> Jason Edward Lewis. “No Choice About the Terminology.” *Poemm*. Accessed April 7, 2019. <<http://www.poemm.net/projects/choice.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. 6.





hierarchical choice—something I cannot want to do. Declaring these statuses also come with their own contentious ground.

Historically, pinning these attributions of race and sex onto creative practice was done so detrimentally, discrediting a work to “the abuse of praises and criticisms that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasize [one’s] racial and sexual attributes.”<sup>18</sup>

Kingston met this with her book, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), which recieved favourable reviews that failed to draw focus away from the stereotype of the *exotic oriental*. She chose to respond to the reports with her own review, outlining how she had “really believed that the days of gross stereotyping were over” and that she had “not calculated how binding the stereotype is,” addressing appraisers as such: “The critics who said how the book was good because it was, or was not, like the oriental fantasy in their heads might as well have said how weak it was, since it did not break through that fantasy.”<sup>19</sup>

Much of this has resulted in hesitations for me when being forthright about conditions that can strap themselves to my work. The biography I use when submitting my writing to different journals or galleries doesn’t specify my gender or race. These terms have always felt like accessible modifiers amongst the many indescribable things I identify as. How does one determine which qualities warrant mentioning? Even if I were to try to dislocate these details from my work, my first name has always betrayed my gender as female and my ethnicity

※ through the live-stream, i took control over how people see me. i chose what angles the camera took and where it sat. i chose to appear blurry to defy definition. i chose when to pause the stream so i could spend time in the gallery alone without being seen when i felt i needed privacy to reflect. i made myself the authority of what was seen and unseen. the frame in which i showed my self was mine to command, and mediated my performance of self through the online dimension to allow for an interaction with the viewer that challenged linear ideas of context by collapsing them. contextual collapse is a term petter bae brandtzaeg and marika luders from the university of oslo use to describe how social media affects the performance of self and impacts social practice in spatial and temporal ways. the contextual collapse is a space of POTENTIAL—an in(-)between where RE-contextualizations become possible.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Kingston, *Cultural Misreadings by American Reviewers*, 55.

as other. My mother gave me both a Japanese and an English name because she intended the latter to be used while we were in Canada. From a young age, I made the decision to identify using only the former. The combination of my Japanese first name and European last name were both integral to how I positioned myself in relation to others. It was and still is one of the ways I attempt to locate myself, but I am persistently confronted by assertions against my stance that trigger sensations of not being *enough*. Invoking my given and sur names conjures a divisional tug-o-war that exists in struggle precisely because it remains connected. *The New Yorker* journalist Malcom Gladwell recalls being questioned on what his background was and feeling unsure of how to respond. Expressing his experiences of hybridized heritage, he has said: “I never feel my whiteness more than when I’m around West Indians, and I never feel my West Indianness more than when I’m with whites. And when I’m by myself, I can’t answer the question at all, so I just push it out of my mind.”<sup>20</sup> Like Gladwell, I get asked *what* I am regularly. The question of belonging for multi-racial individuals—what is your background, what do you identify as—seems to always be a question of *what* and not *who*. Deakin University lecturer Torika Bolatagici similarly describes her experiences of identification being “situationally dependent.”<sup>21</sup> My

※ never have i met another person who can related to the experience of consistent microaggressions directed towards their name. this happens to me regularly. to be clear, it’s not just with the infamous ‘small town back alley deep country casual racists,’ it happens within my social circles: extended family, friends of friends, coworkers, mentors, collaborators, people in this program—you name it. even if keiko wasn’t the name legally, institutionally committed to my birth certificate, what does it matter what i choose to go by? i’ve found this is a curious situation where people feel the need to question how i identify, expecting to expose me as how i *visually* present. mediating my own performance through technology upsets this understanding of the immediacy and accuracy of the physically visual representation.

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<sup>20</sup> Malcom Gladwell. “Lost in the Middle,” *Half + Half: Writers on Growing up Biracial and Bicultural*, ed. Claudine Chiawei O’Hearn. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998. 123.

<sup>21</sup> Torika Bolatagici. “Claiming the (N)either/(N)or of ‘Third Space’: (re)presenting hybrid identity and the embodiment of mixed race,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25 no. 1 (2001): 75.

identity is based on context: If I'm in a Greek restaurant, I get charged with being Greek; an Italian boutique, Italian. A long time Israeli employer would get asked by customers how we were related. Once, when speaking Japanese with my mother at a yoga studio where it wasn't common to see people of colour, a stranger approached us and asked if we were speaking Portuguese and how we got to Canada. I later learned the owners of the studio were of Portuguese descent.

Growing up in rural Alberta, my peer groups didn't choose to ostracize me because of *who* I was (they made no effort to get to know me at all); they did so because of *what* they determined me to be. The *what* was enough for them to paint over the *who*. I was (am) a person of colour. In this chiefly white, conservative landscape, I was the only person of colour (with the exception of my mother). It didn't help that this was readily announced through the strangeness of every address. I wasn't allowed to forget for a moment that I was 'different,' —wasn't *white enough*—and despite routine abuse, I didn't want to. It didn't matter that this condemned me to exclusion because I couldn't undo what made me, *me*. I wasn't about to sacrifice this to 'fit in.' On the other side of the world, similar conditions produced radically different responses, but with the same judgement. The Japanese country-side welcomed me as an attraction, heralding my mother as the woman who married a white man. As a product of their partnership (and a white-presenting one at that), my birth was the animation of a trophy. Neighbors would visit to scrutinize my exotic "hafu"

※ i wore black throughout this performance, the same colour as i was writing in, in an extension of writing my self onto the walls. the writings were ways in which i pronounce my self. i am always trying to improve my own literacy of my position and the vocabulary i use to speak about it. this isn't a finished project because it isn't singular, but is a stage in my practice.

appearance.<sup>22</sup> School teachers doted on me, complimenting my features. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't smitten with the shower of celebrity privilege, particularly in contrast to how I was treated in Canada. But as I grew older, it became more and more apparent that the adoration I was receiving was precisely because I wasn't seen as a citizen of Japan. I wasn't made to wear a school uniform like other students and the standards that I was held to were more lenient: I was praised for my fluency in Japanese even if I insisted it was because I was Japanese (still am when I meet other Japanese people). There was an opaque degree of separation that kept me from appearing like everybody else—that kept others from seeing me as belonging.

## LIVING HYPHEN

The space of the in(-)between is predicated on the existence of a transitional meeting ground where cultures collide; a space of *potential* that manifests as an “encounter with newness.”<sup>23</sup>

What Harvard University English Professor and Mahindra Humanities Center Director Homi K. Bhabha conceives of as the theoretically innovative, politically crucial condition of

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Hafu’ is the Japanese term for ‘half.’ It is almost exclusively applied to those with a parent from a Western country and rarely used for those with another Eastern Asian parent (such as Chinese or Filipino). To read more about this problematic label, see Nina Coomes’ “ハーフ (Hafu): On the Fetishization and Mistranslation of a Biracial Identity,” *Catapult*, at <<https://catapult.co/stories/column-mistranslate-hafu-on-the-fetishization-and-mistranslation-of-a-biracial-identity>>.

<sup>23</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. “Introduction: Locations of culture,” *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1994. 10.



※ to accompany the room reveal, i chose to edit a video rather than use the raw uncut footage of the stream because i feel it is ineffective to try and capture live performance in the same way language is insufficient for describing identity, the recording doesn't focus on the moments when i was writing or pausing, but on the moments in(-)between where i was ascending and descending the ladder. this was in an effort to highlight the space of potential



“newness” is contingent on reconfiguring the understanding of “narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” to articulate the processes of “cultural differences.”<sup>24</sup> If sources in the past are to be taken and remixed into newness, I see this as a deeply personal gesture that warrants stories of lived experience to speak as the hyphen in excess of the ethnic ‘parts’ positioned around it. Countless times, I have faced interactions that assumed—sometimes outright asserted—that I was not *properly performing* one of the cultural identities that I live. I was meant to choose to identify as one or the other and commit myself to presenting as such. The proposition that there is an idealistic form one must adhere to in order to ‘fit’ into predetermined categories of identity is absurd. As Stuart Hall, founder of the school of thought now known as British Cultural Studies, elaborates: “There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’—an over-determination or lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Identities are constantly in the process of change and transformation.”<sup>25</sup> This constant change is brought about by responding to the conflicting push and pull that those in the in(-)between space experience on an ongoing basis. To engage with these complexities is to convey that the performativity of identity is not a reflection of antiquities and traditions selectively recognized as representations of particular ethnicities, but critical, contradictory inventions that reimagine cultural histories.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Hall. “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay. London: SAGE Publications, 2012. 3.

that bhabha talks about through the analogy of a stairwell. the recording is also a space of potential—it has the potential to activate further conversations about the process i undertook in writing on the walls, the potential to alter how the practice of critical writing is understood as being tied to an object, the potential to be disseminated on online platforms that take it out of its original time and space yet again and again and again.



The difficulties of portraying the plurality of hybridity is what makes its investigation integral to dialogues of identity. There is no such thing as a uniform, universal hybrid. Bhabha noted how the hyphenated individual should be understood as more than a *sum* of their differences. This statement is echoed in Bolatagici's warnings that the written hyphen perpetuates a simplistic understanding of multi-racial individuals and "reduces the individual to the sum of their parts," leading to negative perceptions of hyphenation as "the embodiment of an inherent internal division."<sup>26</sup> While on a superficial level the symbol of the hyphen is meant to be an easy substitute in favour of quick transfers of information, it carries with it complex histories that are not simply recalled with each use, but are reconfigured as "part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."<sup>27</sup> The hyphen isn't exclusively applied to signal divisions, but paradoxically also combinations—a flexibility that muddles any sort of consistency or communicability to parallel the entanglement of the in(-)between. My hyphenation is similarly ambiguous: in North America, only a select few people who occupy a similar position tend to recognize me as multi-racial. When the hyphen performs, it does so from a space that is observable when written out, yet, when spoken audibly, remains invisible.<sup>28</sup>

※ writing is how i made—and  
continue to make—my hyphen  
-ation visible. by performing  
writing in the gallery, i am  
performing my pronunciation  
practice. my writing still exists  
in that room now, in(-)between  
layers of paint, along with all  
the other layers of past shows  
that took place before. it may  
not be directly visible, but it is  
just under the surface.

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<sup>26</sup> Bolatagici, "Claiming the (N)either/(N)or of 'Third Space'," 75.

<sup>27</sup> Bhabha, "Introduction," 10.

<sup>28</sup> There are many different artists challenging how we engage with writing: as art: see Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1989-present, enamel paint on wall, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago; Ann Hamilton, *LEW wood floor*, 2004, relief letterforms in maple floorboard, 669 square meters, Seattle, The Seattle Public Library; Fiona Banner, *Nude Standing*, 2006, pencil on paper, 231.8 x 182.2 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

But that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. To forget, or worse, to deny its existence, is an erasure of what it represents: a violent colonial narrative that seeks to assimilate cultural plurality; a ceaseless negotiation that is always in progress; a boundary that exists as neither and both.

As Bhabha discusses the boundary occupying hybrid, the paradoxical struggle of its threshold is not meant to be understood as destructive, but a space of great potential. Yet, in my case this potential is threatened in the political recognition of my multiracial status: Japan does not recognize dual citizenship. At 22 years of age, the country forces those with more than one nationality to renounce their Japanese citizenship. Legislation that knows nothing of who I am, only *what* I am, is enacted to subtract the hyphen from me. In an unusual turn, government officials do not take to tracking and physically prosecuting those who persist—meaning if one keeps their mouth shut, they can preserve their duality by making themselves invisible.<sup>29</sup> The issue arises when one applies for bureaucratic documents such as a passport. I no longer hold any evidence of my Japanese citizenship and can only enter the country as a Canadian citizen, which is how citizens of Japan have always seen me. Opening a dialogue to affirm that I am also Japanese would mean compulsory surrender to institutional powers. To utter my Japanese nationality is to relinquish it.

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<sup>29</sup> To read more about how multiracial individuals are impacted by this issue in Japan, see Charles Lewis' "Japan's dual citizens get a tacit nod but keep their status in the shadows," *The Japan Times*, at <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/09/14/issues/japans-dual-citizens-get-tacit-nod-keep-status-shadows/#.XKMGcutKjdS>>.





## CRITICAL PARADOX

I practice writing to attest that sociopolitical assaults on my identity will not silence me. Committing pen to paper is a protest. Just as identity is always in a state of becoming, so is my practice. This in itself is what I struggle with as a writer: to be *present* with my work. When I perform writing, I inhabit the space in(-)between conception and dissemination and am constantly becoming writer. When writing is carried out uncritically, Trinh explicates that it is done from a position elevating writer to author(ity), situating them above, before and *beyond* their work instead of *with* it.<sup>30</sup> The beyond, as Bhabha sees it, “signifies spatial distance, marks progress, and promises future,” a space of great potential no doubt, but how does one activate the language of protest when fixating on “promises” dangled just out of their reach?<sup>31</sup> What are the marks of progress, who determines their criteria? Retaining distance in(-) between writer and written word is carried out in the interest of being ‘objective.’ Objectivity is seen as a clearer delivery of criticism because it is not ‘clouded’ with the opinions of the writer. That “*clear* expression, often equated with *correct* expression” aims to be persuasive in meaning making and “send out an *unambiguous message*” reduces writing to a mere vehicle that “does not constitute an act in itself.”<sup>32</sup> Writing for

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<sup>30</sup> Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Bhabha, “Introduction,” 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 16.



communication's sake in effect is a sort of purification. The version of critical literacy touted by the academy is writing that distances itself from being speechlike, which is also posited as being 'feminine.' University of Massachusetts professor emeritus Peter Elbow suggests that the culture of institutional *literate* writing is inhospitable to women because they "tend to use more 'expression' or intonation than men," gendering the issue through studies that show women tend to use more exclamation marks than men in their writing.<sup>33</sup> The same apprehension surfaces when engaging with paradox, which Trinh explains is racialized as "the language of Taoism and Zen."<sup>34</sup> This language is entirely accessible, but is *othered* through its association to Eastern cultures. Vernacular speech and paradox, considered to be nonsensical to Westerners because they exist outside the "well behaved, steeped-in-convention-language of clarity," are purged from writing because they are deemed as illiterate and illogical therefore not repressed by the same rules constituted by the institution.<sup>35</sup> They exist outside of it.

To be critical of institutional procedures is to work at once within and outside them, and writing must always endeavour to be critical if its practice is informed by the in(-) between space of progressive resistance. The methodological tools that I was equipped with by the institution are forms of

※ this paper itself exists in a paradox as it critiques the institution while at the same time playing into it and having to *fit* into the requirements of an academic paper in order to meet 'the criteria' for an mfa. my paper, my performance, the edited video recording and the exhibition are all employed in contradictory relationships in order to create spaces of resistance. their state of potential exists in that they are not finished products

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Elbow. "What Do We Mean When We Talk about Voice in Texts?" *Voices on Voice: Definitions, Perspectives, Inquiry*, eds. Kathleen Blake Yancey. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. 1-35.

<sup>34</sup> Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

analysis that emerged to critique authorial value, but those very tools have been given precisely the power they sought to usurp. Sussex University Chair in Drama Gavin Butt observes this as a need for criticism to be repositioned.<sup>36</sup> To be critical of institutional tools is to renew and reconfigure with respect to how they initially struck out from author(ity). Like Trinh, Butt sees the dilemma of critic being comprehended as a figure that is positioned above to occupy a masculine vantage point, advising where and when to spend money; feeding people what is allegedly perceived as wrong from right. This mode of critique is pressed to serve the interests of the public—suggesting what to see and un-see, prescribing cultural cues that at times command what not to see at all. Corporate precedents breed superficial approaches that stunt writing practice as a container to merely accompany non-verbal works. Writing is there to explain, not to imagine. To resituate criticism, Butt proposes that critical writing must posture itself *para* (against and/or beside) the *doxa* (a set of values/commonly understood opinions) of received wisdom.<sup>37</sup> By distancing criticism from the capitalist constructs that motivate writer to act as discriminating jury and advisor to cultural practice, criticism becomes a creative practice in and of itself. New modes of analysis intervening within the present grant criticism the ability to reclaim its paradoxical engagement—the agency of the writer is exercised within the

and continue as practice. the defense is also a continuation of this practice as we are able to sit in a room and continue the conversation by disseminating the ideas interrogated within *in(Living)between*. while i cannot predict what these questions will be, i know the answers i give will be an endeavour to pronounce my self.



<sup>36</sup> Gavin Butt. "Introduction: The Paradoxes of Criticism," *After Criticism: New Responses to Art Criticism*. Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. 1-20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

very form of critical address through the performativity of the written language itself.<sup>38</sup> In my engagement with the in(-)between, my writing practice is always in process, running along a vector that lacks a foreseeable trajectory.

## RE-INTRODUCTION

My mother chose the name Keiko because she thought it would be easy to pronounce across a variety of languages. It is a traditional Japanese name that hasn't been adopted in any other culture, but the sounds that constitute it exist in many different tongues—the strangeness manifests in their combination. Echoing my experiences with identity, audiences are quick to separate the two syllables when trying to reach an understanding of what brought them together. When a person learns I'm Japanese, they feel the need to point out which of my features *give it away*, dividing the Eastern Asian from the European. Without invitation, they tell me which of my characteristics are white and which are of colour, reducing my identity down to an orderly recipe. Curiously, the attribution praised as being Western-looking in Japan—my double eyelids—are the feature most commonly stamped as being other in Canada: *It's in your eyes*. I've never felt the need to point out that the opposite is also true. Instead, I smile and nod in agreement when I hear this. It is. *It's also in their eyes*. More recently, I've taken to policing people less and less on the pronunciation of my name. Keiko

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 6.



has taken on its own pronunciations outside of Japanese context. In locating identity, it isn't just the self that performs, but the people around us are on stage too, knowingly or not. Identity isn't a singular experience. I know how I pronounce my name, but pushing that upon others stops the back-and-forth conversation from taking place. We are all participants in the locating of identity. To think of it as unchanging, as something that can be stilled and possessed, deters people from coming to their own understanding.

How will you pronounce Keiko?





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