

LATASHA N. NEVADA DIGGS

dagging kanji
after Christian Bök

k'k'kumu	kk'kk'khakis	k'k'kare	kk'kk'amikazae
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kazoo	kk'kk'külo	k'k'kahuna	kk'k'kabob
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kali	kk'k'kulisap	k'k'kabuki	k'k'kk'kumala
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'krill	k'k'kk'kosher	k'k'kolohe	kk'k'kinkajou
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kunan	k'k'kk'kinky	k'kk'karma	k'k'kosdu
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kola	k'k'k'kitikiti	k'k'kanapī	k'k'kk'king
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kudos	k'k'k'kanatsi	k'k'klutzy	k'k'k'kawoni
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kawí	k'k'kk'kawaya	k'k'kao	k'k'k'kamama
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'koga	kk'kk'kung-fu	k'k'kimchi	k'k'k'kiru
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kaliwohi	kk'kk'kumquat	k'k'kina	kk'k'kanogeni
<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>	<i>k'k'ku'ulala</i>
k'k'kinetic	kk'k'kanoheda	k'k'kapu	cc'cc'cum

Chapter 19



Phrasebook Pentecosts and Dagging Lingua Francas in the Poetry of LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs

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Modernist multilingual poetry has tended, at least since the New Criticism, to be so mystified in the academic culture of the United States as to render it the involuted suburb of an elitist canon for which T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos* provide the template—as cosmopolitan epics groping from an English-language core toward arcane literary sources. In the bleakest of possible outcomes, poetry of the United States written in multiple languages from 1922 forward has provided the academic basis for generations of gatekeeping rituals.¹ One might have imagined a different future, for pupils like those who attended the “Ezuversity” of Pound's Rapallo were supposed—in the utopian mirage in which Ez's fascism paradoxically played a part—to constitute an enlightened population of intellectual renegades capable of radicalizing the reigning academic curriculum as “kul-chur.” Indeed, pathbreaking poets abroad, from the Noigandres group in Brazil to Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy, regarded these polyglot montages as touchstones for a radically international vernacular language, transmitting a “*volgar' eloquio* 又 樸” capable of “taking the sense down to the people.”² Nevertheless, cross-cultural and -historical references in cosmopolitan modernist poems appear to offer but two possibilities of reception: they either repel monolingual Anglophone readers or send those compelled beyond the verse to annotations and, inevitably, institutions to accrue knowledge that might begin to make them adequate to the poetry.

The twentieth century produced a less institutionally mandated lineage of polyglot poetry, which I will call subaltern in the spirit of Antonio Gramsci, the political and cultural theorist whose concept of hegemony is inextricable from his background in linguistics—and further, from his linguistic upbringing: Gramsci was born to a father of Albanian descent on the island of Sardinia, where, in the year he moved to the industrial center of Turin on a university scholarship, illiteracy was at 58 percent and standard Italian was experienced as a distant second language.³ These roots led Gramsci

to a dynamic conception of the relation between “spontaneous,” or immanent, unconscious, idiosyncratic, and evolving grammars and “normative” or prescriptive standard grammars—which he presented as transformative and potentially revolutionary. The dialectical interaction between unconscious and enforced, submerged and dictated linguistic habits renders the term that has become most associated with Gramsci, *hegemony*, useful, as it indicates that power does not operate unidirectionally but manifests in a dance between coercion and consent. In terms that speak to the linguistic panorama of today, Gramsci’s twenty-seventh prison notebook argues that “the linguistic fact” (placing uncommon emphasis on active *facture*) “cannot have national borders strictly defined”—that “the national language cannot be imagined outside the frame of other languages that exert an influence on it through innumerable channels that are often difficult to control.” Gramsci casts repatriated emigrants, translators, and even ordinary readers of foreign languages as agents of linguistic innovation and transformation.⁴

TwERK, the first full-length collection by multidisciplinary poet and sound artist LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, published by the feminist collective imprint Belladonna in 2013, implodes any tenuous binarism we might erect between cosmopolitan modernist and subaltern multilingualism. *TwERK* draws on various languages of the African diaspora with which Diggs identifies and expresses solidarity but also deploys languages out of line with essentialist expectations of representation, as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTEE* did in 1982. Diggs’s biography and some of her prose would suggest that the welter of languages in these pages can be traced to her native Harlem, with its Black southern United States, Caribbean, Cherokee, Korean-War vet, and even Valley girl influences, and more broadly to New York City—a city now, as in Zukofsky’s day, reputed to be the most linguistically diverse on earth, harboring as many as eight hundred spoken languages.⁵ However, the range of languages in which Diggs’s verse delectates exceeds the author’s “proper” linguistic background from the start. *TwERK* is composed of words from (in order of indexing) Japanese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Urdu, Welsh, Maori, Hawaiian, Samoan, Malay, Swahili, Runa Simi (Quechua), Vietnamese, Yoruba, Portuguese, Chamorro, Cherokee (Tsa’lāgī), Barbadian dialect, Kikongo, Tagalog, a pidgin of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, Hawaiian Creole English, and Papiamentu, as well as passages in unannotated Nation language, pig latin, and Snoop-Dogg-inspired shizzling; the author may well be as remote from many of these languages as her presumed English-speaking readers are.⁶ Like *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, and other cosmopolitan multilingual works, this is a poetry to which no localized “native” subject could have unmitigated access: it is laced with the traces of searching well beyond its immediate context of ambient noise for compelling lexical choices, and its notes provide deliberately capricious signposts for readers who choose to continue that process, or at least apprehend its scope.

Self-conscious engagement with the unprecedented reach of contemporary capitalist trade and communications networks (earlier versions of which triggered the amalgamation of the lingua franca) and their tendency to reify the identities they circulate with deleterious effects separates Diggs's multilingualism from that of the twentieth century; at its most critical, it brings out the "javelin," or national weapon, embedded in the term *franca*. While a book like *DICTEE* still finds a center of gravity in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's immediate family narrative, however elusive, *TwERK* travels vertiginously around the erasure and (partial) recuperation of distanced, heavily mediated, and at times even branded histories. In the key of Gary Simmons's *Erasure* drawings of racial stereotypes, obliquely summoned in the poem "have you forgotten any personal property?" *TwERK* samples the languages and lingos of globalization and information overload deliriously, taking stabs at tweaking—or twerking—them. That the collection takes on an objectifying yet equally aggressive form of provocative dance associated with women of color as a figure and, through the obscurity of its language, obliges us to incorporate the global noise at play in these pages as somatic acts of speech makes Diggs's multilingualism both more approachable, in the literal sense, and more discomfiting.

How can we account for *TwERK*'s popularity, which surpasses any small-press publisher's expectation for experimental poetry? The book sold two thousand copies in just over a year and a half, and was well into its third printing as of the time of writing, in April 2015.⁷ I want to propose that the poems' vernacular musicality seduces readers into a tuning relation of the sort that David Antin has theorized: "A negotiated concord or agreement based on vernacular physical actions with visible outcomes like walking together," as opposed to understanding, which is predicated, Antin contends, "on a geometrical notion of congruence."⁸ The notion of tuning situates the poetic act in the realm of the oral/aural without recourse to Romantic assumptions surrounding the singularity and presence of lyric voice or naive "anthropological" notions of cultural origins. *TwERK* draws us into a dance (rather than a workaday walk) with linguistic alterity that would otherwise be daunting, driven by the tempos of cultures routinely branded as inaccessible to all but insiders.

Diggs's debut collection contains a wealth of references that send us to the section of copious notes in the back, once we realize that it exists. Yet simultaneously warding off the notion of the glossary or annotation, the author identifies her exegeses themselves as unassuming materials: the humble stuff of assemblage. The note section is given the title "rhinestones, acrylic on panel, knives, mirror, packing tape, fur, found medical illustration paper on mylar, rubber tires, wood, metal, plastic, porcelain, paper, latex paint, Lonely Planet phrase books. . . ." Performatively confounding researched sources with semitrashy material origins, Diggs infuses a sense of immediacy into the least immediate section of her book—and resists the forbidding assumption

of difficulty attached to multilingual work in a monoglot climate. In spite of the inherent opacities that derive from deployment of remote languages, hyperlocalized or specialized corporate and gaming jargon, and the shit-talking code-speak of signifyin(g), *TwERK* vaunts a certain accessibility that dissociates this text from its most canonical modernist precursors by a wide gulf. Nowhere is this accessibility gap more patent than in the last item indexed: “Lonely Planet phrase books.” This admission stresses not only the autodidactic impulse that led to these poems, but Diggs’s conversationally oriented, ground-level approach to learning foreign languages: a phrasebook linguistics that Gramsci might place halfway between the “spontaneous” and the “normative,” as it is based in a vernacular middle ground between the grammar book and a direction-giving organic center.⁹ Diggs’s emphasis on communicability rather than citation and the pervasive, though ludic and incomplete, floating of translated phrases throughout the text renders these poems approachable. Working with the phrasebook as literary source also detaches Diggs’s language play from claims to either authenticity or mastery, further alleviating the pressure on the reader to comprehend that is bookishly provoked by pedagogically oriented, Renaissance-programming literary monuments such as *The Cantos*. “I love the tentative landscape of phrasebooks,” Diggs says in an interview. “They are never 100% accurate.”¹⁰ Diggs’s complexity instead hails from the populist branch of internationalist poetics—following most legibly from the ethnopoetic research of Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin, and Anselm Hollo through the Nuyorican tradition, yet infusing the linguistic adventurousness that characterizes these movements with twenty-first-century strains of suspicion in representation and Black feminist critique.

In “The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am,” a lyric essay on polycultural Harlem, Diggs stresses the fact that “in this assumed English-only neighborhood, if you turn down the volume of the Queen’s chatter, other mother tongues are heard.”¹¹ Diggs’s New York City poems expose a plurilingual, polyrhythmic measure in the metropolitan soundscape that is routinely edited from consciousness because, as she notes in a *Cross Cultural Poetics* interview with Leonard Schwartz, “our ears are only tuned to the language of commerce in the city, which is oftentimes English (unless you’re in Jackson Heights).”¹² The self-consciously multilingual subway poem “metromultilingopollonegrocucarachasblahblahblah,” published in *TwERK*, suggests in terms both musical and corporeal that conviviality conditioned only to the ticking tempo of trade under globalization and its language of conveyance, English, will be “castrated by humdrum.”¹³ Training oneself away from the habit of monoglot listening to attune to other tongues, on the other hand, can be an erotic exercise: in the interview with Leonard Schwartz, Diggs identifies a “clusterfuck of tongues” hosted by urban spaces that can at times be understood only “through the physicality that’s being performed”—so that hearing it requires a “navigation of bodies.”¹⁴

While shot through with multiple languages, poems such as “metro-multilingopollonegrocucarachasblahblahblah” reward those who do not understand Spanish with the easily voiceable, nursery-rhyme musicality of the refrain “todo todo sabe a pollo” and enable those who do to ask further questions. The figure of a “Pentecostal woman” whose feet are crossed by a water bug (immediately translated as the more broadly known *cucaracha*) at the poem’s close provides the cultural and linguistic key to this scene—and to some extent, to *TwERK* itself. For the book’s epigraph cites the story of Pentecost as told in Genesis 11:1: “And the earth was of one language, and of one speech.” The power of this citation resides in the fact that it, too, hovers as a double-edged sword; the sentence may refer both to the hegemony of English under the late capitalism of the aughts *and* to a utopia of transnational, transcultural, even translinguistic understanding modeled by the xenoglossic poetic work that follows.

Xenoglossia, a term coined in 1905, refers to the intelligible use of a natural language one has not learned formally or does not know and is distinguishable from (though often confused with) *glossolalia*, or lexically incommunicative utterances. The canonical narrative of the xenoglossic phenomenon in Western literature appears in the story of Pentecost, wherein the Holy Spirit is said to have bestowed upon the apostles the sudden ability to speak in languages previously alien to them, effectively remedying the confusion of tongues meted out as divine punishment for construction of the Tower of Babel. Such tales of miraculous translation evince a yearning for the promise of correspondence between languages, and thereby of erased cultural difference. But “metro-multilingopollonegrocucarachasblahblahblah” cites more specifically the global movement we now know as Pentecostalism—based on ecstatic forms of worship that include dancing and speaking and singing in tongues—which was driven by African American preachers from the South; Pentecostalism emerged from humble roots in what is now known as the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles at the turn of the twentieth century and spread quickly across national borders. Immigrants told of uneducated Black members of the Azusa Street congregation suddenly able to speak in and translate from Yiddish, German, and Spanish, while local newspapers decried the “disgraceful intermingling of the races” on display in the “Weird Babel of Tongues” of the “New Sect of Fanatics.”¹⁵ In 1907, leader and preacher William J. Seymour reinforced that such linguistic, racial, and national commingling was central to the purpose of the movement: “One token of the Lord’s coming is that He is melting all races and nations together, and they are filled with the power and glory of God.”¹⁶ Diggs’s “Pentecostal woman” invokes the Black roots and modernized manifestation of this transnational phenomenon—one that promises not simply the channeling of enigmatic tongues (as in glossolalia) but the inspired transgression of enforced cultural segregation. These images conclude a section of *TwERK* titled “no te entiendo” (I do not understand you), which refers, as Diggs explained in a 2014

interview, to a category in the early colonial Mexican *casta* system denoting a person of racial mixture beyond classification.¹⁷ The book becomes the receptacle for a communing of cultures, races, and languages, but does not offer instantaneous translation or transparency without obliging the work of attunement; outside a context in which we can confidently summon the Holy Ghost, we are not meant to understand the transnational speaking in tongues. *TwERK* makes an immersive, nondiscursive case for an opacity that resists comprehension as classification, in the mode of Édouard Glissant's groundbreaking demand: "Nous réclamons le droit à l'opacité."¹⁸ It lures us into a musical and conceptual dance with this strangeness. The book in fact demonstrates how a world of incommensurable languages can make its way into "one speech"—and by extension, danceable song—without glossing over the violence that inevitably accompanies such a process.

TwERK's most radical example of linguistic and cultural communion, or better, commingling, that ultimately thwarts comprehension is the more recent open-field poem "dagging kanji." This piece operates only liminally on the front of narrative or image, and principally in atomic fissions and fusions of diction—a fact immediately apprehensible through its form, a scattering of isolated linguistic units beginning with the letter *k*: four per line. These twenty-one four-unit lines, printed in alternating black and gray, invoke the grid form; the amalgam "*k'k'ku'ulala*" repeated four times on every other line in grayscale italics provides a matrix for permutation. Yet the fact that the word units in black typeface are staggered rather than resolved in regular columns suggests a tottering from unit to unit, reminding us of Antin's distinction between tuning and understanding: tuning constitutes "a negotiated concord or agreement based on vernacular physical actions," as opposed to the "geometrical notion of congruence" underpinning the notion of understanding. The navigational movements of tuning between terms foreign to us and to one another, in which we are of necessity involved, allow us to apprehend this verse field as a more spontaneous, contingent arrangement—contrasting the "autonomous and autotelic" space of the modernist grid described by Rosalind Krauss thirty-five years ago.¹⁹

"dagging kanji" announces itself explicitly as being written "*after Christian Bök*," invoking a lineage of conceptual writing with roots in both Oulipian formal constraint and modernist sound poetry.²⁰ However, "dagging kanji" would best be described as a xenoglossic, as opposed to glossolalic, sound poem. That is, it cites natural languages and asks us to approach them as bearers of meaning, dragging their histories and cultural baggage along with them, instead of being available to consumption as the sheer vocal jouissance that contemporary formalists are apt to hear in works like Schwitters's *Ursonate* (which Bök is renowned for performing with exceptional virtuosity). But what kind of meaning does "dagging kanji" convey? Diggs's notes specify that it is written in Hawaiian, Cherokee (Tsa'lägī), English, Tagalog, Quechua, Japanese, and Maori, yet the author's apparently capricious choice

to define in her notes only one term (*kinkajou*, or honey bear) out of the forty-five that make up the poem comes off as pointed: it highlights how arbitrary hermeneutic direction can be and suggests that semantic equivalences are not the key to grasping the poem's significance. Instead, the poem seems to consist in our trawling through syllables pulled into correspondence from afar and working through the enigma of their collusion in physical and historical terms, either on the page or out loud.

"dagginger kanji" is ultimately less a formal exercise around the consonant *k*, comparable to the ludic univocalics of Bök's *Eunoia* (though contrasting with Bök's vowels in being visually and sonically barbed), than it is a sexually charged and politically motivated activation of the "clusterfuck of tongues" implicit in the language of its readers: it activates, that is to say, the process of cultural interbreeding, mimicry, cancellation, and theft immanent in language. Readers drawn into conducting their own research on any given linguistic unit are rewarded less via a handful of translated terms than with apprehension of the paths these phoneme clusters took to reach this page: a fact suggested immediately through the title's use of the Japanese term *kanji*, literally "Han characters," or characters borrowed from China in the fifth century C.E. that now form an essential part of the Japanese language (and whose hybrid nature is reflected in the fact that most still possess Chinese and Japanese pronunciations). Curiosity about the origin of the English term *kinkajou*, for example, leads to awareness that it articulates the legacy of French imperialism in the Americas: it was imported from the French *quincajou* and from the earlier still Canadian French *carcajou*, itself an adaptation from the Montagnais *kwāhkwāčēw*, meaning "wolverine." The terms enlisted to charge the poem's consonantal constraint are dominated by more recognizable appropriations into English, whose presence in a multilingual congregation denaturalizes them, demanding that we ponder their genealogy: *khakis*, an Urdu word of Persian origin for "soil-colored," introduced into English via colonizing military campaigns in India and Africa; the Arabic, Persian, and Urdu *kabob*; the Cantonese-mimicking *kumquat*; the Japanese *kamikaze* and *kabuki*; the Norwegian *krill*; the Hebrew *kosher* (from *kāshēr*, "right") and Yiddish *klutzy*, from German *klotz* (wooden block). Some terms emerge in this context as being of indefinite origin, inclining toward onomatopoeia, like *kazoo*. Others seem to have been chosen because they form cross-lingual puns: *kitikiti* is Tagalog for mosquito larva, or a pun on calling to a kitty, while the Japanese term *kiru* is particularly dual edged, as it means both "cut, slice, carve" and "kill" (in a Japanese approximation of English pronunciation). The trajectories of still others bespeak racializing, and racist, associations: *king* is Germanic for "scion of the kin, race, or tribe," while *kinky*, from *curly*, as applied especially to hair, is then applied to crookedness in general and unconventional sexual behavior.

That the constellation of languages in "dagginger kanji" hovers largely around the Pacific Rim brings Theresa Cha to mind as inspiration, with the

noteworthy distinction that robust autochthonous languages are central to Diggs's poem: Hawaiian; Cherokee, one of the least endangered languages of First Nations; and Quechua, the most widely spoken indigenous language group of the Americas, still in use from Ecuador to Chile. The inclusion of unfamiliar terms like the Cherokee *kaliwohi* (integrity) and *kamama*, which can mean both "elephant" and "butterfly," apparently due to the resemblance between these creatures' ears and wings, insists that indigenous tongues are part of readers' inheritance and present, whether we tune them out or not; it demands that we engage them as both signifiers made material through sound and historical trajectories still alive, if routinely tuned out by official and academic literary discourse. Subaltern languages, moreover, actually condition the transmission of ascendant languages in "daggering kanji" rather than being suppressed in commerce, as when Whitman's "red aborigines" are said euphemistically to "melt, . . . charging the water and the land with names."²¹

Diggs's xenoglossic sound poem makes the phrase "clusterfuck of tongues" literal on multiple levels. "Daggering" is a provocative Jamaican dance form accompanied by dancehall music that moves so intensely into the spheres of wrestling and dry sex that it has spurred censorship on the part of the Jamaican government. It involves variants on twerking, the polyrhythmic, muscular dance move that gives Diggs's collection its title: an aggressive hip-and-booty jerk from a squatting position with only sporadic twisting to face the viewer (to invoke the presumed roots of the portmanteau), twerking hails from New Orleans 1990s bounce music but with roots in African culture. The appropriation of racialized dance moves like twerking led to controversy in the year *TwERK* was published, when Miley Cyrus performed at the MTV Video Music Awards show, both twerking and fondling her Black female backup singers as if they were props—prompting accusations of "cultural appropriation at its worst," even minstrelsy, as well as the accusation of debasing female liberation (but also, arguably, contributing to the term's celebrated entry into the *Oxford Dictionaries Online*).²² Though twerking took the media by storm in the period when these poems were being composed, Diggs contests a presentist reading of her book's title by pointing out that this gesture appears throughout the African diaspora—and citing the range of terms that various global subcultures have invented to name it:

There's *gouye/gouyad* in Haiti and *El Mapale* in Colombia. In Senegal there is the *ventilateur*. The *vacunao* is from Cuba, and the *mapouka* is from Cote d'Ivoire. There is the Cameroonian *zingué* and the Zimbabwean *kwassa kwassa*. Somalia has *niiko*. The Afro-Arab communities in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates can get a shy bootylicious with their *malaya*. And *dutty whine* or *winin'* you can find in Jamaica. So maybe [twerking] is not so much about muscle memory than it is about blood memory.²³

While resisting the notion that this dance move is innately Black, Diggs—who worked as a dancer at major Manhattan clubs in the 1990s—then explains that her poetry seeks to “activate” and “twerk” all “these layers of blackness, these modes of code-switching, vernaculars, and otherness.”²⁴ Such activation can be both agonizing and empowering for the performer and her audience.

Daggering has been described as a dance so violent that it makes twerking look like child’s play. The term can also refer to violent sex, with obvious phallic implications, and Diggs’s poem therefore harbors a possible joke on the epidemic of broken penises that has accompanied this Jamaican trend. An earlier version of the poem appeared in *Black Scholar* in 2008 under the title “kanji gnu glue,” as a series of apprehensible quatrains and couplets, with a visual effect far less disorienting than the revision’s ambient, “wireless” expanse of syllables;²⁵ though still composed around a group of cutting consonants, “kanji gnu glue” was almost narrative, and its sexual references were more explicit. The reader did not have to work very hard to decrypt its erotic refrain, which conformed loosely to the syntax of English:

come canyons
kaja cuckoo coos cribs cushy cashews
come canals
cocky canker crackerjacks cool corkscrew²⁶

The most significant difference between the initial poem and its revision as “daggering kanji,” however, is the addition of the Quechua glottal *k* (represented as *k'*) before a spreading march of words that begin with the letter *k*, ranging from *king* to the Hawaiian-derived *kahuna* (priest; sorcerer; expert) and Sanskrit *kali* (the fierce Hindu goddess associated with empowerment)—all conditioned in their reception by the refrain “*k'k'ku'ulala*,” repeated a total of forty times. The term *ku'ulala* is Hawaiian for “wild.” Merging this term, with its ‘okina—the Hawaiian word for the symbol that represents the glottal stop, which literally means “cutting” (‘*oki* “cut” + *-na* “-ing”)—with the velar ejective *k'* of the Aymara and Cuzco dialects of Quechua is a form of daggering indeed: erotic, cunning, and cutting. Some might call it careless appropriation, simply playing around with languages, or point out that it confuses the Hawaiian and Quechua glottal stops (marked as ‘ and ‘ respectively). Yet that would be to misunderstand the spirit of this poem and volume, which seem to take the multitextured global polyrhythms of M.I.A. as presiding genius. *TwERK*’s objective is not mastery of the arcane but exposure of the furious, sometimes damaging pleasures and contrasts latent in global syntheses. “daggering kanji” presses farther than other pieces to perform the reversal of power dynamics prone to cancel out subaltern bodies and sounds.

The trajectory of this text is undoubtedly sexual: it moves from the opening “k’k’kumu” (*kumu* being Hawaiian for “reason” or “teacher”) to “k’k’kapu” (the last Hawaiian word used, *kapu*, meaning “sacred/taboo”) to the final “cc’cc’cum,” in a single climactic shift from initial *k* to the rounder letter *c*. The intervening forty *k’k’ku’ulalas* punctuate the text with their only apparently glossolalic “clusterfucks”: they preface the Hawaiian word for “wild” or “crazy” with an adaptation of the Quechua glottal stop, while implanting within them a more immediately apprehensible French exclamation, “ooh la la!” (used in French as a signal of negative surprise or shock, but in Anglophone contexts as an exoticizing, francophilic expression of pleasure, sometimes with patronizing and ironic francophobic insinuations). In Diggs’s performance of the text, this pluri-tongued path from reason to orgasm is intensely somatized: her increasingly shrill *oohs* gradually build toward the ejaculatory possibilities of the text’s “clusterfuck of tongues.” The plosive pressures of the *ks* and swallowed glottal stop, however, quickly leave the performer breathless; the four *k’k’ku’ulalas* between each set of four *k*-words provide a rare space of reprieve in which the poet can audibly inhale.²⁷ In a brief but astute review for *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, Amaranth Borsuk alludes to the eroticism of this poem in terms of oral sex: the text “simultaneously swallows and spits as the glottal hits the back of the throat and the velar flicks off the soft palate.”²⁸ Oral sex may be a useful metaphor given the acrobatics that this poem spurs in the throat—but it is appropriate only if we apprehend the political aggression that attends the pleasure embedded in somatization of this text. The acts of swallowing and expectoration in the language of “dagging kanji” operate bidirectionally, reminding us that for Gramsci, hegemony entails a dance between compulsion and consent. Hegemony as concept encompasses the tangle of oppression and empowerment manifest and constantly being reperformed, reinflected, in both sex and partnered dance forms, from tango and salsa to twerking and daggering.

At the same time that “dagging kanji” melds tongues in the sexual ecstasy of *ulala*, it gives voice to rifts between cultures and tongues. The “k’k’” or, at times, “kk’kk” or “kk’k” preceding these *k*-words estranges them from themselves. Diggs’s virtuosic performance of the glottal stop from Quechua—one of the indigenous languages of the Americas she has studied formally, along with Cherokee, traveling to Peru for the purpose—cleaves globalized expressions away from our comprehension, leaving lopped-away, now gutturalized vowels to begin “-akis,” “-rill,” “-inky,” “-ing,” and so on. A reader viewing the text on the page can hardly fail to notice the sinister “kkk” rooted within each linguistic amalgam, but performance transforms this acidic formulation through incorporation: having first gulped down the consonant cluster, depriving it of its articulation as an acronym, the glottal stoppage hacks and purges it. The explosive use of consonants and corporeal ingestion and expelling of the vowel compose an implicit riposte to *Eunoia*’s univocalics of “beautiful thinking.”

Subjecting expressions rendered global to the lacerating physicality of indigenous languages that have been suppressed rather than the other way around ultimately constitutes an act of retribution. Diggs's invocation of Caribbean vernaculars throughout *TwERK* and her expressive use of the open field in "dagging kanji" call to mind M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* as their most immediate precursor. Philip's exegesis of her own work proposes the term *kinopoesis* as an addition to Pound's *phanopoeia*, *melopoeia*, and *logopoeia* to mark the ways in which kinesis and dance have served as ripostes to colonial impositions and erasures of language:

wherever european and african tongues have faced off against each other wherever the european has attempted to impose his tongue on the african the outcome has been a kinetic language drumming a beat with the bone of memory against the gun metal skin of the sea scatting soughing coughing laughing into vividity patwa nation language creole pidgin vernacular demotic an ting an ting²⁹

In "dagging kanji," Diggs invokes the semantic and sonic imaginary of two indigenous languages to effect an alliance in articulation, forming the *k'k'ku'ulala* refrain, whose powerfully kinopoetic effects are enhanced in performance. While this effect is arguably less potent on the page for a reader unacquainted with the transcription of glottal stops, in a context where the *ks* can become decorative via repetition, readers need not hear "dagging kanji" aloud to apprehend the heaving of Anglicisms into a context alien to them; they must grapple with what looks like a stutter.

Linguistic importations often embed within themselves the residue of conflict and domination—of a dagging that is both decreative and catastrophic. The sporadic references to knives and weaponry in *TwERK*—with "knives," we recall, being one of the sources cited in the book's pointedly humble glossary—bespeak not only street smarts and the aggressive aesthetics of hip hop and collage but defiance in the face of cultural gagging and amnesia.³⁰ Diggs's pastings of sampled sources in these linguistic montages are never without their residual cuts; they deflect the domesticating and static understanding implicit in notions of multiculturalism.³¹

As Jen Hofer and John Pluecker, founders of the language justice and language experimentation collective Antena, put it in their "Manifesto for Ultratranslation,"

Rather than running away from the untranslatable, scorning it or eyeing it suspiciously, or lamenting the loss it represents, we experience the untranslatable as invitation to further immersion, further closeness. A hint of light knifing through a door slightly ajar. Always the light slivering through, the door impossible to close because the foundation has shifted imperceptibly, the threshold askew.³²

This becomes an argument for the place of experimental poetics in a multilingual world. While it has become customary and even respectable in the United States to lament one's lack of formal training in certain foreign languages that one therefore cannot engage, or the lack of a truly international language, there are benefits to the preservation of linguistic incommensurability. From early on, Gramsci argued that the creation of language can happen only from the ground up, not as the result of a top-down formulation like Esperanto. He did, however, advocate for the creation of transnational verbal complexes that could forge solidarity.³³ We see, hear, and feel such a formation occurring in the pages of *TwERK* and are compelled to participate in this effort as we attempt, faltering, to voice and dance with these expressions aloud or in our underprepared heads.

While “daggering kanji” dares us to imagine—and participate in—a phrasebook Pentecost immanent in the everyday, each “k’k’k-” registers as a stutter (from Old High German for “knock, strike against, collide”): a collision of worlds that divulges a decoupling of the poet's linguistic athleticism from expertise, or a refusal to disavow the distance between these expressions and their self-consciously nonnative speaker. “This is why some people insist that I do not sound like a New Yorker,” states Diggs: “I have never been fluent.”³⁴ This poet's polyglot zone of tuning renders the stutter itself a space of future communicability and of an immediate muscular alteration of measure.

Notes

1. I am using 1922, already understood as a watershed year for the multilingual modernism of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, as an index; Joshua Miller identifies 1923 as a turning point in the campaign for an English-only American ideology linking nationality, race, and language. See “Every Kind of Mixing,” in Joshua L. Miller, *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

2. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 706, 708. “Vulgar’eloquio” is the Italian translation of Dante’s title for *De vulgari eloquentia*, a tractate that argues—in Latin—for an illustrious vernacular in a context of vast Babelic confusion. See also Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Volgar’ eloquio*, ed. Antonio Piromalli e Domenico Scafoglio (Naples: Athena-Materiali e strumenti, 1976).

3. Peter Ives, in *Gramsci’s Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), provides a valuable account of the relation of the “language question” to Gramsci’s conceptions of hegemony and subalternity—a relation overlooked in Anglophone criticism.

4. From Gramsci’s last prison notebook, Notebook 27 (1935). Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Valentino Guarratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. 3, 2343–44, translation mine.

5. See especially LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, "The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am," *Quaderna* 2 (2014), <http://quaderna.org/the-liquor-store-opens-at-10-am.pdf> (accessed October 3, 2014).

6. On Nation Language, see Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

7. Private e-mail correspondence with Belladonna* founder and director Rachel Levitsky, April 16, 2015.

8. David Antin and Charles Bernstein, *A Conversation with David Antin* (New York: Granary Books, 2002), 53. See also Jennifer Scappettone, "Tuning as Lyricism: Performances of Orality in the Poetics of Jerome Rothenberg and David Antin," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 782–86.

9. Notebook 29 of Gramsci, in *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 3, 2344–45.

10. "The FPP Interview: LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs," *First Person Plural*, <http://www.firstpersonpluralharlem.com/fpp-interviews/latasha-n-nevada-diggs/> (accessed April 1, 2015).

11. Diggs, "The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am," 1.

12. Leonard Schwartz, interview with LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, *Cross Cultural Poetics*, January 16, 2014, https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/groups/XCP/XCP_290_Diggs_1-16-14.mp3 (accessed March 1, 2015).

13. Diggs, *TwERK* (Brooklyn: Belladonna*, 2013), 45.

14. Schwartz, interview with LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs.

15. Quoted in Cecilia Rasmussen, "Vision of a Colorblind Faith Gave Birth to Pentecostalism," *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1998. Headline is from front-page article of *Los Angeles Daily Times*, April 18, 1906.

16. William J. Seymour, in the widely distributed Pentecostal journal *The Apostolic Faith*, quoted in Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2005), 133. See also Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., and Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). After this essay was written, Ashon T. Crawley published a fine study that elicits from this movement the conditions necessary for "linguistic rupture that announces and enunciates expanded sociality"—for "the perpetual reconfiguration . . . of normative, violative modes of repressive and regulatory apparatuses." See Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Bronx, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2016), 38, 37.

17. Shannon Gibney, "Muscle Memory/Blood Memory: LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs on Code-Switching, Poetry, and Twerking," Walker Art Center front page, March 12, 2014, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2014/latasha-diggs-twerk-poetry> (accessed April 4, 2015).

18. Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), 11; Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, translated and with an introduction by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 1.

19. See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 52.

20. Diggs and Bök taught together during the fourth week of the Naropa University Summer Writing Program in 2013, devoted to poetics of performance.

21. Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," in *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1891–92), available in *The Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html> (accessed June 1, 2015).

22. See, for example, Hadley Freeman, "Miley Cyrus's Twerking Routine Was Cultural Appropriation at Its Worst," *Guardian*, August 27, 2013. On the media storm surrounding *twerk*'s (non-)entry into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, see Maddie Crum, "Was 'Twerk' Actually Added to the Dictionary?," *Huffington Post*, May 22, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/22/new-dictionary-words_n_5366127.html (accessed April 1, 2015).

23. Gibney, "Muscle Memory/Blood Memory."

24. Ibid. On Diggs's trajectory as a dancer, see her autobiographical essay "Shake Your Money Maker," at *Harriet*, Poetry Foundation, December 3, 2013, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2013/12/shake-your-money-maker/> (accessed April 1, 2015).

25. In "Destruction of Syntax—Wireless Imagination—Words-in-Freedom," F. T. Marinetti called for poetry to keep step with developments in global networks reflecting an "annual synthesis of various races" and "an urgent need to coordinate our relations with all humanity at every moment." See the manifesto in translation, in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, ed. and trans., *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 143–45.

26. LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, "kanji gnu glue," *Black Scholar* 38, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Fall 2008): 35.

27. See (and hear) LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, recorded performance at the University of Chicago, November 6, 2014, archived at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP6aOmMy0ME> (accessed April 6, 2015).

28. Amaranth Borsuk, Review of *TwERK*, *Poetry Project Newsletter* (Fall 2013).

29. M. NourbeSe Philip, "Wor(l)ds Interrupted: The Unhistory of the Kari Basin," *Jacket2* (September 2013), <http://jacket2.org/article/worlds-interrupted> (accessed April 25, 2015).

30. Diggs describes her interest in pidgin as "this 'collage' of words, sounds, histories, natural forces that conjoined, [to] create this new language." See "DWYCK: A Cipher on Hip Hop Poetics Part 1," *Harriet*, Poetry Foundation, December 18, 2013, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2013/12/dwyck-a-cipher-on-hip-hop-poetics-part-1/> (accessed April 1, 2015).

31. Sarah Dowling contrasts multilingual poetry with the images of multinational melting pots that now ornament advertisements for Coke and the like: "In Diggs's poetry—as in so much multilingual work—it is precisely through the sonic qualities of rhythm and rhyme that we're forced to confront difference as difference." Sarah Dowling, "Multilingual Sounds: Coca-Cola's 'It's Beautiful' vs. LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs's *TwERK*," *Jacket2*, October 19, 2014, <http://jacket2.org/commentary/multilingual-sounds> (accessed April 10, 2015).

32. Antena, “A Manifesto for Ultratranslation” (Antena Pamphlets: Manifestoes and How-To Guides, 2013), 3, http://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ultratranslation_eng.pdf (accessed April 15, 2015).

33. Antonio Gramsci, “Universal Language and Esperanto,” in *History, Philosophy, and Culture in the Young Gramsci*, ed. Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone, trans. Pierluigi Molajoni et al. (St. Louis, Mo.: Telos Press, 1975), 32.

34. Diggs, “The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am,” 6.