

Kimberly Quiogue Andrews. “Diagramming the Diaspora: On the limits of the poetic line.”

This talk will use Monica Ong’s 2015 collection of poetry, *Silent Anatomies*, as an exemplary text for which to undertake an examination of what might be called “archipelagic form” in diasporic East Asian / Southeast Asian writing. Throughout the book, Ong, a Chinese-Filipina American, weaves together diagrams, photography, and installations that sit uneasily together on the printed page as a testament to the overdetermined linkages between a colonial-transnational heritage and the traces it leaves on the body and the mind. I want to suggest that the form(s) of these poems, which sit alongside more traditionally lineated pieces, evince a limit case for thinking about the form of the line in particular. What happens, I ask, when one of a genre’s defining formal features no longer seems adequate to the task? While I do not want to posit a necessary link between diasporic, archipelagic, and/or postcolonial thinking and this disruption of the line, I do want to show the degree to which work like Ong’s comments upon the capability (or lack thereof) of poetry to describe certain sociopolitical realities. In *Silent Anatomies*, descriptive lyricism and strategically essentialist notions of Asian relationality (“I was almost thirty when diagnosed with acute filial piety”) jostle against the unsayability of global history and the physical imprints of colonialism—disease, mental illness, whitening creams—upon the raced and gendered body. Rather than rendering these things in language, Ong’s choice to leave them as non-lineated, non-textual objects creates a constellation that serves as a persistent, dialectical reminder that there are limits to what poetry can explain, even as (and precisely because) it expands our conception of poetry’s explanatory ethics.