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Minority Models
Masochism, Masculinity, and the Machine in Asian American Cultural Politics

by

Takeo Edward Ken Rivera

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

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University of California, Berkeley

Associate Professor Shannon Steen, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Colleen Lye, Co-Chair

As W.E.B. DuBois asked African Americans in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “How does it feel to be the problem?”, Vijay Prashad asked Asian Americans in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, “How does it feel to be the solution?” That is, what are the affective and ethical repercussions of being positioned as “model minority” in the U.S. racial system? In response, this dissertation aims to develop a queer theory of Asian American masochism, gesturing to a cultural politics intertwined with this racial position, negotiated through a masochistic attachment to the figure of the machine. My dissertation, *Minority Models: Masochism, Masculinity, and the Machine in Asian American Cultural Politics*, analyzes the masochistic performance of masculine Asian American cultural production in the co-constitution of Asianness and machineness in Asian American identity from 1982 to the present day.

Through the study of Asian American literature and theater, the political histories of Asian American critique, as well as new media forms like video games and comics, I argue that masculine Asian American cultural production places Asian American masculinity and mechanization into a symbiotic relationship in its articulations of Asian American identity. My work asks: what are the affective and ethical repercussions of being positioned as “model minority” in the U.S. racial system? One answer, this text suggests, lies in masochistic pleasure, wherein reception of pain and penetrability become sources of both pleasure and moral legitimacy. Building upon prior scholarship that models Asian American subject formation within a rubric of melancholic lack—such as Anne Cheng’s *Melancholy of Race* and David Eng’s *Racial Castration*—I gesture towards revising such models in favor of the pleasures of masochism. I argue that Asian American cultural production generates affective and ethical meaning from masochism as a moral economy, source of pleasure, and avenue for imagining racial form beyond human boundaries.

To Grandpa and Uncle Ray,
who watched as I first embarked on this,
gone before I finished it,
but reflected in these words

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Introduction	1
The Miracle Synthetic	
Chapter 1	21
Vincent Chin's Wedding	
Techno-Orientalist Subjectification And Its Discontents	
Chapter 2	48
Screen Time	
Affective Flatness And The Techno-Orientalization Of The Self In Tao Lin's <i>Taipei</i> And Tan Lin's <i>Insomnia And The Aunt</i>	
Chapter 3	73
Green <i>Ressentiment</i>	
Greg Pak's <i>Hulk</i> , Moral Masochism, And Asian American Ethics	
Chapter 4	90
An Asian Is Being Whipped	
The Afro-Asian Super-Ego In The Theater Of Philip Kan Gotanda	
Chapter 5	111
Gasp in the Shell	
Erotohistoriographic Masochism In Eidos Montreal's <i>Deus Ex: Human Revolution</i>	
Bibliography	128

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Introduction The Miracle Synthetic

“Born? No! Crashed! Not born. Stamped! Not born! Created! Not born. No more born than the heaven and earth, No more born than nylon or acrylic. For I am a Chinaman! A miracle synthetic! Drip dry and machine washable.”

-Tam Lum, *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, Act I, Scene 1.
Frank Chin (1972)

Frank Chin’s Tam Lum, the protagonist of the first Asian American-written play staged off-Broadway, identifies as a thing. The “Chinaman,” declares Tam, is a “miracle synthetic” not having a biological origin, but rather, an industrial one, bearing kinship with “nylon or acrylic” in being created or manufactured rather than being “born.”

As a number of scholars have already belabored, Chin’s *Chickencoop Chinaman* is a rhetorical flourish of Chinese American and Asian American masculinity. The play codifies Asian American maleness as castrated by a lack of paternal Oedipalization, languishing in a construction of masculinity buttressed by normative homophobia and misogyny. Yet, the aforementioned aspect often gets overlooked—Chin’s situating of the “Chinaman” as a tool, a thing, an object with a particular utility. The miracle synthetic that is “drip dry and machine washable” also invokes the image of an object that is grabbed, squeezed, roughed around, touched, and perhaps abused. Although Tam Lum is undeniably a figure of swaggering cowboy masculinity, there is, in these few opening lines, a curious masochistic pleasure in the assumption of a kind of feminizing thingification, of being rendered-object, which in turn is bound up in a becoming-thing. Already in this moment, we can see a relationship between Asian American masculinity and masochistic self-objectification, and this would continue throughout Chin’s work. Five years later, in his 1977 essay “Riding the Rails with Chickencoop Slim” in the *Greenfield Review*, Chin would autobiographically recount his time as a brakeman on the railroad:

In every engine I rode there was the possibility that I would become the intelligence of its thrusting tons. As I walked out onto the tracks, I would alert myself for the sight of the engine. And I’d say, “Hey, look at me! I’m going to get in that thing and make it do what I want. I’m going to make that thing go!” That was a fact. I carried the orders to make it go. And that made me more than just a hundred and thirty pound Chinese boy claiming the rails laid by his ancestors. I was above history. I was too big for the name of a little man, Frank Chin. No, sir. I was a thing: BRAKEMAN! That’s the person I remember being, the one I enjoy remembering on the railroad, the image I love (83-84).

Here, Chin nostalgically recounts his experiences working as a brakeman alongside a multiracial crew of masculine working-class men to run the locomotives. In his distinctively vernacular, flamboyant, passionate style, Chin not only poeticizes but eroticizes the encounter with the locomotive, becoming one with the train and “its thrusting tons.” Chin is no mere operator; he erotically fuses with the machine and transcends his own flesh, becoming “too big” for his own name, finding transcendence instead in becoming the “thing” that is “BRAKEMAN.” However,

although he describes himself as being the dominant “top” of this encounter, he who “makes that thing go,” Chin is also equally its bottom, becoming the train’s object as much as the train is his:

You’re moving. Being moved. The sound of the slack being taken up car by car, steel joint by steel joint, is heard crashing at your back; the crash and tug of the first car and each afterward is echoed in the muscles of your back, a sudden blossoming of a dark heat up your back and fading into the muscles of your shoulder and neck, more lightly again, and a hundred times again. (86)

As Daniel Y. Kim has written, “Riding the Rails” indicates an undercurrent of homoeroticism, but I would add that the scene continues the masochistic self-objectification that we see in the opening of *Chickencoop Chinaman*, in which Chin simultaneously becomes one with the machine – both the machine of the locomotive and the historically racializing machine of the railroad industry more generally – and its “bottom,” the pleased recipient of the machine’s physical force. Chin is simultaneously tool of the railroad and purveyor of masochistic pleasure both physical and psycho-historical. This “one hundred thirty pound Chinese boy” becomes a technology, a tool, and a masochistic subject, all at once.

Throughout Frank Chin’s work, we see this triad: masochism, masculinity, and machineness, all in service of the production of an Asian American literary and theatrical subjectivity. Although Chin has been heavily and rightfully critiqued for the violence of his gender politics, I begin with these examinations of Chin due to the undeniable gravity he has exerted in the production of contemporary Asian American masculinity and cultural production at large, and how his naked expression of Asian American masculinity sets a precedent for the racial masochism that I detail in the pages that follow. Chin and the “Aiiieeeee Group” of male Asian American writers, frequently deemed the “cultural nationalist” faction of Asian American artists that came to prominence in the 1970s, were intent on producing a form of panethnic Asian American identity that responded to an increasing sense of model minority accommodation to a white racial hegemony.

Like Chin’s “miracle synthetic,” the objects of study in *Minority Models: Masochism, Masculinity, and the Machine in Asian American Cultural Politics* attempt to fashion a form of Asian American subjectivity premised upon a paradigm of self-annihilation, perverse pleasure, and becoming. Building upon prior psychoanalytic and affective studies situating Asian American subjectivity within melancholic paradigms of lack, this study pivots to the pleasures of masochism in order to incorporate the twinning of exclusion and model minorityism present within Asian American subjectification.

The Model Minority & Theories of Asian American Subjectivity

As Colleen Lye has argued, the racialization of Asians in the United States – indeed, in the Americas at large – is intertwined with the economic and affective dimensions of modernity. In Lye’s words, the Oriental in America demonstrates “a putatively unusual capacity for economic modernity, extend[ing] to moments when the affect of the racial discourse has been hostile (“yellow peril”) as well as admiring (“model minority”)” (3). Indeed, modern and contemporary racialization of Asian Americans in the United States cannot be separated from the oft-cited notion of the “model minority.” Long discussed within the parlance of Asian American history and culture, the “model minority” refers to a minoritized population that has, despite its

historical advantages, managed to achieve a degree of prosperity and perhaps assimilation within a dominant culture. Within the United States, the model minority has played two primary purposes within racial discourse: first, to provide evidence for the prominence of meritocracy over the structural barriers faced by nonwhite peoples, and second, to implicitly blame less “successful” minoritized populations for their own subjugation. The tendency within Asian American Studies is to actively disprove or discredit the model minority as a “myth,” either insisting that 1) Asian Americans have been and continue to be subject to considerable racism and structural barriers, and 2) the model minority does not adequately reflect the socioeconomic diversity of Asian Americans, which can correlate loosely according to disaggregated identity. Thus, anti-model minority critique locates the model minority as a kind of harmful stereotype produced by a white racial order, one that can cause harm to both Asian Americans (such as the increased pressure to “succeed,” via stereotype threat) and to non-Asian people of color.

Consequently, since its radical beginnings with the Third World Liberation Movement strikes at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley in 1968, and continuing through a wide range of demographic and ideological shifts, Asian American Studies has often sought out to idealize what Christopher Lee has termed “the ideal critical subject,” alternately termed the “bad subject” by Viet Nguyen; that is to say, an Asian American subject position that has achieved a kind of Lukácsian racial “consciousness” against white racism. Asian American cultural critique has often accordingly read Asian American literature and theater in terms of its “resistant” potential, seeking out characters and thematics that adequately demonstrate a rejection of whiteness and an assertion of Asian American identity, whether in the vein of so-called “cultural nationalism” of Frank Chin, of feminist empowerment in Maxine Hong Kingston, of a resistance against logocentric intelligibility in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Tellingly, the first major scholarly study of Asian American literature, Elaine Kim’s *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), values Asian American works primarily by their resistant potential rather than their aesthetic attributes, a tendency that persists in the field to varying degrees to this day. This premise possesses a range of problematics, most notably that “Asian America” is itself what Susan Koshy provocatively called “a fiction,” a particularly imagined community insofar as it is overwhelmingly diverse in terms of its diasporic cultural origins, but also in imagining its politically “resistant” position against white racism when, as David Palumbo-Liu has famously written, the position of Asian/America has certainly structurally fluctuated between “of color” and honorary whiteness.

As Viet Nguyen has noted, many artists and scholars who have committed to an Asian American politic (including but not limited to Frank Chin) would go so far as to limit Asian Americanness to those who perform the required political identity, dismissive of those Asian Americans who are satisfied with the status quo of capitalist white racism; Daryl Maeda’s history of the rise of Asian American identity can, in fact, validate this position given the historical roots of the very term “Asian American” as an intentionally revolutionary identity, not unlike the rise of “Chicano/a” for Mexicans in the United States. Nguyen writes, “critics tend to evaluate resistance as positive and accommodation as negative, without questioning the reductiveness of such evaluations,” and suggests instead an Asian Americanist scholarship accounts for the flexible strategies of Asian Americans who “pick and choose their tactics of struggle, survival, and possible assimilation” (7). Thus, the signifier “Asian American,” as problematic as it is, would have to incorporate the politically less savory presence of those subjects who are an anathema to Asian American cultural resistance, that is, the dreaded model minorities, the “hard working, successful” nonwhites discursively positioned in an anti-black racial paradigm to

invalidate the structural oppression against other subjects of color. As recent historical monographs by Ellen D. Wu and Madeline Y. Hsu have detailed,¹ the production of the Asian American model minority throughout the twentieth century is not entirely the result of a white racial hegemon, but is partly the result of the strategic racial positioning by Asian Americans themselves (in the case of Wu and Hsu's texts, Chinese and Japanese Americans specifically). As Ellen Wu writes, the development of "Asian Americans as the model minority—a racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening, and *definitively not-black*" (2, emphasis in original) is partly the result of Chinese and Japanese American responses to shifting national and transnational circumstances in the pre-war, internment, and post-war periods. Strategic self-stereotyping as ideal conformists to the U.S. social order, while simultaneously self-Orientalizing to associate "Asian values" as congruent with both U.S. capitalist culture and heteronormative sexual and kinship relations, allowed Chinese and Japanese Americans to adapt to the changing political circumstances between the United States, Japan, and China, particularly in response to Japanese American internment and anticommunist anxiety towards China.

Thus, to put it obtusely, the "model minority" is not merely a "myth"; or, rather, it is not an historical untruth. Although the model minority is a myth in the Barthesian sense, a semiological system of signification that "points out and... notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes on us" (Barthes 87), it is also actively supported by some, if not many, Asian American subjects, simply by way of interpellation. So when Frank Chin decries Asian Americans as "racial Uncle Toms," he refers to both the Asian American positionality of accommodation *and* the presence of Asian American actors who comply with and further such racial ideologies. My point here (following Viet Nguyen, erin Khue Ninh, Christopher Lee, Madeline Hsu, Ellen Wu, among others) is that from the perspective of Asian American subject formation, we must take seriously the model minority not as an object of immediate disavowal to support the reigning primacy of exclusion as the ontological condition of Asian Americanness, but rather as a foundation for the psychic and affective condition of being racialized as Asian in the United States; that is, as a buttressing what we now understand to be Asian American subjectivity itself.

Of course, there is a degree of peril in addressing the very notion of Asian American subjectivity, particularly when, as I have stated above, Asian America is itself a highly socially constructed political affinity rather than a clearly defined diasporic ethnic community. Minding this, it is worth considering that "Asian America" and the "model minority" may be of equal mythological status. Given the increasing diversity of ethnicities, nationalities, genders, and sexualities within "Asian America," it becomes particularly difficult to produce generalized studies of Asian American subjectivity *per se*. Lisa Lowe's influential 1991 essay "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences" called for the broadening of Asian Americanist scholarship beyond "master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation" (63) as dominated within Chinese and Japanese American writings, and also gestured towards a transnationalization of Asian American Studies at large. In a similar vein, Kandace Chuh's 2003 text *Imagine Otherwise*, following Derrida, calls for "subjectless discourse" within Asian Americanist thought, in order to draw "attention to the constraints on the liberatory potential of the achievement of subjectivity, by reminding us that a 'subject' only becomes recognizable and can act as such by conforming to certain regulatory matrices" (9). Such

¹ Wu, Ellen, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (2014) and Hsu, Madeline, *The Good Immigrants: how the Yellow Peril became the Model Minority* (2015).

indispensible texts push Asian Americanist thought against an all-encompassing essentialism. Yet, as invaluable as they are, I would argue that neither Lowe nor Chuh's project evades the Asian American subject altogether, but rather they broaden, deconstruct, and diversify who and what that subject is.

Although I fully sympathize with the caution against "master narratives" within the study of Asian American subjectivity, such critiques can obfuscate the fact that Asian America is itself a kind of "master narrative" (that is, again, a Barthesian "myth"), constructed with both political and aesthetic intentionality, with and against the figure of the model minority. That is not to say that Asian America is inherently essentialist, but rather, that it is performative; it is instantiated through its own indexicality. And insofar as model minorityism becomes problematically equated with Asian Americanness, "Asian American" becomes as much a structural position as a demographic category. From either an Althusserian or Foucauldian perspective, subject formation cannot be analyzed without an analytic of power and the gaze that consigns it. The word "subject" invokes both *subjectivity* and *subjection*; one can only become a *subject* by being *subjected*. Althusser and Foucault agree on this basic point, even if their conceptual frameworks architecturally differ; Judith Butler writes, "Whether by interpellation, in Althusser's sense, or by discursive productivity, in Foucault's, the subject is initiated through a primary submission of power" (*Psychic Life of Power* 2). While Althusser describes the hail of interpellation, that responding to the call of "hey you" (his metaphor for ideology) converts one into a subject because the person hailed "has recognized the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed'" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 174, emphasis in original), Foucault meanwhile models power as a circuitous force that constitutes society and subjects themselves, insisting "We should not... be asking subjects how, why, and by what right they can agree to being subjugated, but showing how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects" (*Society Must Be Defended* 45). Thus, in the case of racialized subjects such as Asian Americans, subject formation and racialization bleed into one another even (or especially) in the formation of an identity politically oppositional to racialization. After all, to cite another Foucauldian truism, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*History of Sexuality Vol. 1* 95).

Thus, although racialization does not necessarily mean destiny, it is certainly at least partly constitutive of racial subject formation; in other words, minoritized racial subject formation does not solely occur "against" or "in spite of" racialization but also *with* it. Concerning Asians in North America, racialization in its multiple and well-tread aspects – orientalism, yellow peril, model minorityism, and so on – has produced a range of psychic quandaries for those ensnared in its interpellating optic. Consequently, in the early 2000s, paralleling a similar trajectory in queer and Black studies, there arose a psychoanalytic turn to analyze the interiority of Asian American subjectivity as a consequence of this relationship to racial power, inaugurated first by David Eng's 2001 *Racial Castration*, and followed by Anne Cheng's 2002 *The Melancholy of Race* and Karen Shimakawa's 2002 *National Abjection*. Across these psychoanalytic writings, Asian American subjectivity is modeled after various iterations of lack brought upon by racial injury, such as the absence of the (normative white) phallus in Eng's case. Cheng's masterful *Melancholy of Race* is particularly paradigmatic in this sense. Interpreting Freud, Cheng explains how melancholia, contrasted with mourning, is a pathological state of being "psychically stuck" (8) on the lost object, and that furthermore, "The melancholic eats the lost object—feeds on it, as it were" (8) so that "the melancholic subject fortifies him- or herself and grows rich from the empowerment" (8) even as the melancholic subject denies the

persistence of the mourned object. The initial subject of Cheng's racial melancholia is the white subject, as she explains that "[d]ominant white identity in America operates melancholically—as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial" (11). Then Cheng asks, "What is the subjectivity of the melancholic object? Is it also melancholic, and what will we uncover when we resuscitate it? (14)" suggesting then that the (racialized) object of melancholy becomes a melancholic subject herself. The racialized melancholic pathologically feeds upon the lack, requiring the absence of the object in order to stabilize meaning. In a similar maneuver, Shimakawa's *National Abjection* explores the performance of an Asian American body that has been historically abjected through legal means—exclusion acts, internment, and so on—and attempts to forge a form of subjecthood despite having been consigned the status as abject refuse. With legal exclusion established as a definitive paradigm for Asian American racialization, Shimakawa turns to Kristeva's articulation of abjection to characterize the psychic condition of Asians in the United States.

As indispensable as these studies are, particularly in charting how melancholic lack accounts for the psychic exclusion of Asian Americans from the broader U.S. American body politic and sociality, these texts do not centrally examine the role of the model minority "myth" itself in Asian American subjectification. Although one can make the historical argument for an Asian American exceptionalism regarding exclusion (e.g. via the notion the 1882 Chinese Restriction Act was the first race-based form of legislated immigration exclusion in the US), even within these measures of exclusion, there was the production of an ideal assimilated Asian American subject. To reference Madeline Hsu again, the 1882 Restriction Act was as much a process of curation as it was one of xenophobic exclusion, establishing "*gateways* that permitted admission to peoples deemed assimilable but also strategic" (8), such as students and professionals. Even the Japanese American internment camps, according to Ellen Wu, contained key elements to coerce the cultural assimilation of incarcerated Nisei, such as the encouragement of baseball play and, of course, armed services enlistment into the 442nd Regiment and the 100th Infantry Battalion. As a consequence, model minorityism even haunts the paradigmatic moments of Asian American exclusion upon which theories of exclusion-based Asian American subjectivity are based.²

I am cautious to assert that model minorityism is an ontological component of Asian American subjecthood, although I do not exclude it from the realm of possibility. Rather, my argument here is less ambitious: it is that the model minority has been under-considered as a *constitutive* (rather than merely antithetical) factor of Asian American selfhood, and that it must be considered *alongside* the conditions of lack (i.e. melancholia, castration) or exclusion (abjection). Given the particular positioning of Asian Americans as model minority, I posit that masochism provides a more comprehensive analytic for Asian American subjecthood. Although I am not the first to touch on Asian American masochism per se (as I will explain in the following section), I posit that this masochism maps onto both the subject formation and the cultural politics of the conditionally accepted model minority. Furthermore, according to Elizabeth Freeman, "unlike the melancholic, the masochist anticipates a future" (153).

² These more recent historical studies revise Robert G. Lee's influential historical framework, in which the racialization of Asians in the United States follow six stages according to the economic conditions of the U.S.: "the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook" (8). Although Lee's typology remains quite valuable as an analytic, Hsu and Wu's accounts problematize, for example, the notion that the model minority's origins arose cleanly in the Cold War—and that, in fact, its origins can be traced to the beginning of the century.

Masochism Theory & Bottom Studies

By “racial masochism,” I mean an affective response to racialization that blurs the boundaries between subjugation, pleasure, and moral authority. Racial masochism is simultaneously an affective process and a cultural politics, a model of subjectivity that often embraces rather than eschews its status of otherness and subordination. Masochism implies pleasure from pain and from trauma, but it is a pleasure that defies simple rationality, as masochism is first and foremost located in the body. Theorizations of masochism, since its coining by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in the 19th century, have belonged primarily to the domain of psychoanalysis: from Freud’s secondary and primary masochisms, Lacan’s assertion of masochism as an invocatory perversion attached to the *jouissance* of the death drive, and Deleuze’s literary revision of Freud’s masochism as suspense and coldness, to relational psychoanalysis that situates masochism as a compensatory narcissistic psychic economy. Although I am not committed to a psychoanalytic methodology in this text, each of these psychoanalytic models of masochism contribute to my own construction of racial masochism, which is in turn in conversation contemporary scholarship in queer theory surrounding bottoming and S/M practice.

Sigmund Freud’s highly influential descriptions of masochism ultimately form the foundation for much of masochism theory for the twentieth century. The early Freud of “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905) considered masochism to be a secondary psychic function, one that stemmed from an inwardly-turned sadism: “masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject’s own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object” (252). However, as Freud began to pursue study of *thanatos*, the death drive, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud revised his model of masochism to be “possibly” primary rather than secondary, arguing that masochism reflects the instinctual drive of the subject to return to a state of inactive death.

Jacques Lacan takes this latter Freudian notion of masochism and situates masochism as being the primary function, with sadism as its secondary. In fact, Lacan states, “sadism is merely disavowal of masochism” (*Seminar XI* 186), in which the sadist exists primarily for the masochist’s fantasy. Crucially, both sadism and masochism, argues Lacan, is founded upon self-objectification: “the subject assuming this role of object is precisely what sustains the reality of the situation of what is called the sado-masochistic drive, and which is only a single point, in the masochistic situation itself. It is in so far as the subject makes himself the object of another will that the sado-masochistic drive not only closes up, but constitutes itself” (185). Under the Lacanian paradigm, masochism is principally a perversion of becoming the object of the drive, and the other’s *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle; that is, towards death.

Meanwhile, Gilles Deleuze, in his influential *Coldness and Cruelty* theorizes masochism from its literary origins, the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Departing from Freud, Deleuze’s post-psychoanalytic description of masochism locates it as a phenomenon that manifests primarily as aesthetic form. According to Deleuze, the masochistic aesthetic is primarily driven by suspension and disavowal, and works to replace the father’s moral authority with that of the mother’s. Consequently, although still male-centric like Freud and Lacan’s models, Deleuze’s masochism attempts to recuperate the feminine, although ultimately in the service of a male ego, attempting to birth “a new sexless man” that is no longer dependent on masculine control. Deleuze argues that this is achieved through masochistic coldness: “The

coldness of the masochistic ideal... is not the negation of feeling but rather the disavowal of sensuality. It is as if sentimentality assumed in this instance the superior role of the impersonal element, while sensuality held us prisoner of the particularities and imperfections of secondary nature. The function of the masochistic ideal is to ensure the triumph of ice-cold sentimentality by dint of coldness; the coldness is used here, as it were, to suppress pagan sensuality and keep sadistic sensuality at bay. Sensuality is disavowed, and no longer exists in its own right; thus Masoch can announce the birth of the new man 'devoid of sexual love'" (52). Thus, Deleuze's masochism possesses an affective character, one that rejects the sensual. Moreover, Deleuze disagrees with Freud and Lacan on masochism's relationship to sadism, arguing that masochism is completely separate from sadism, since sadism relies upon a process of "negation," opposed to the "suspense" of masochism. Furthermore, argues Deleuze, masochism possesses a temporal dimension, requiring long durations of suspense between painful strikes.

Finally, within relational psychoanalysis, masochism is something of a different order altogether, being not primarily invested in sexual pleasure at all, but rather, a narcissistic moral economy of suffering and recompense. According to Victorian literary scholar John Kucich, who draws from the tradition of relational psychoanalysis, masochism should be understood primarily as a fantasy structure, rather than limited to (though not excluding) the scene of chains and whips of the popular imagination. In fact, notes Kucich, the contemporary consensus among psychoanalytic clinicians is that "masochism should be understood within a narcissistic technology, not a sexual one" (22), with the extension of the self as the primary preoccupation of masochism. Kucich's preoedipal relational model of masochism furthermore argues that various fantasies of omnipotence are the "primary narcissistic compensation that masochism provides" (22), including the omnipotence of others: "By exaggerating his or her suffering, the masochist can provoke fantasies, too, that an unknown, infinitely sympathetic rescuer will someday appear. The projection of omnipotence onto others serves the masochist in a more general way by producing a morally simplified and thereby controllable world in which judgments about others are always absolute and always the masochist's narcissistic needs" (24-25). The preoedipal masochism of relational psychoanalysis that Kucich describes is not tethered to sexual pleasure, but rather to fantasy, the pleasure of imagining, itself.

These four psychoanalytic traditions of masochism theory—Freudian, Lacanian, Deleuzian/aesthetic, and relational—vary in their investments and their general characterizations of masochism, but I draw from all of them to develop my own working model of racial masochism. Ultimately, all of these models gesture beyond masochism as a sexual "perversion," but rather—to invoke Foucauldian terminology—a technology of subjectification. There has been a recent wave of queer scholarship that invokes iterations of masochism or self-annihilation as such, loosely termed "bottom studies"—works by Amber Jamilla Musser, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Darieck Scott, and Elizabeth Freeman, for example—who dramatically expand the theoretical scope and utility of masochism beyond the sex act itself. Musser, in the opening salvo of her text *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*, writes, "Usually understood as the power to abdicate control in exchange for sensation—pleasure, pain, or a combination thereof—[masochism] is a site where bodies, power, and society come together in multiple ways.... As such, masochism allows us to probe different ways of experiencing power" (1). Although Musser herself complicates this definition throughout her book, what is crucial in this working definition is the often-counterintuitive intersection of pleasure and power that transcends its origins. "What begins as a literarily influenced sexual practice," continues Musser, "morphs into a universal aspect of subjectivity, a way to describe a type of relationship between self and other, a

subversive mode of desubjectification or resistance to dominant forms of power, and finally a privileged mode of personhood” (2). I follow Musser’s conceptualization of masochism as not only a sex act, but as an analytic whose stakes rise dramatically when hailed into a minoritized, “oppressed” position that critically engages the paradox of what it means to take pleasure from one’s own oppression, or at least, from some relationship to it. Importantly, Musser indicates that masochism is a mode of desubjectification, a form of actively undoing the subject. This desubjectification is often accompanied, or preceded, by the self-objectification we find in Lacanian masochism; desubjectification dismantles the subject-turned-object.

Other poststructuralist and queer theorizations follow this desubjectifying reading of masochism. In his June 1982 interview with the *Advocate* “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” Foucault gleefully celebrates S/M as “inventing new possibilities of pleasure with creative parts of their bodies,” declaring it “a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure” (165). Foucault dissociates pleasures from sex, noting the fascinating dimension of how S/M derives pleasure from parts of the body that are not the sex organs. Bersani builds upon Foucault to explore how the masochist does not technically enjoy pain itself, but “rather a passion for pleasure so intense that extreme pain is momentarily tolerated (rather than loved for its own sake) as necessary to bring the masochist to that biochemical threshold where painful stimuli begin to produce pleasurable internal substances” (94). The thrill of masochism then becomes a thrill of “self-shattering” in which “the ego renounces its power over the world.... Through pain, S/M dramatizes (melodramatizes) the potential ecstasy in both a hyperbolic sense of the self and the self’s renunciation of its claims on the world” (95).

Bersani’s “thrill of self-shattering” is extraordinarily valuable in relation to subject formation more broadly, but even without considering this subversive, bravado element, masochism retains crucial critical import. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler suggests that there exists a masochistic dimension to the maintenance of subject formation more generally, particularly as the adult subject is formed through the foreclosure of desire: “To desire the conditions of one’s own subordination is thus required to persist as oneself,” she writes. “What does it mean to embrace the very form of power—regulation, prohibition, suppression—that threatens one with dissolution in an effort, precisely, to persist in one’s own existence? It is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that *one is dependent on power for one’s very formation*, that that formation is impossible without dependency, and that the posture of the adult subject consists precisely in *the denial and reenactment of this dependency*.” (9, emphasis mine). This “denial and reenactment” of the dependence on power sets the conditions for a masochistic encounter with racialization, for the racialized subject depends on racialization in order to achieve legibility. Here, Butler uses the word “desire,” but masochism gestures not just to desire; masochist critique asks whether not just desire but *pleasure* exists in that nexus of power and subjectification, asking if subjugation lays the groundwork of what Celine Parreñas Shimizu has titled “productive perversity” (6). In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault pronounced that “Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement” (48).

My argument here is that Asian American subjectivity is best understood precisely through this desubjectification, and equally, self-objectification. Asian American subjectivity becomes itself through its own undoing. This is partly reflective of the constructedness of “Asian

American” interpellation itself, but also of the psychic and affective life of the model minority racial position, one that exists liminally between strategic inclusion and radical otherness. Pulled doubly by the diametrically opposed moral authorities of assimilation and “good” subjecthood and the resistant anti-model minority imperative of “bad” subjecthood, masochism manifests in Asian American subjectivity in both directions: the pleasure of being stereotyped or assimilated, as well as the pleasure of self-punishment from enjoying being stereotyped or assimilated.

This text aspires to be the first full-length study deploying masochism to map model minority subjectivity and Asian American cultural politics, but I am nevertheless indebted to previous mentions of masochism within Asian American cultural production. Josephine Lee, for example, locates pleasure in Song’s occupying of a stereotype in *M Butterfly*: “It is easy to argue that what gives pleasure is the subversion of the stereotype.... But this position is complicated by Song’s pleasure in his own performance: he is thrilled not only by his duping of Gallimard but also, the play suggests, by the fantasy of being loved as a butterfly” (118-119). Additionally, masochism itself is of particular prominence within Asian American scholarship already: Daniel Y. Kim describes Asian American masculinity as characterized by “self-loathing, masochism, and melancholy” (143), while erin Ninh suggests that the debt-bound daughter of Asian American literature is disciplined into a self-immolating masochism as a consequence of the micropolitics of capitalism manifest in the Asian immigrant family. This text is deeply influenced by these works, although it brings masochism to the fore, with attachment to model minorityism, in ways that these studies have not.

This work also is in dialogue with the recent works of Nguyen Tan Hoang’s *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (2014) and Juliana Chang’s *Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature* (2012). Nguyen’s project lays out a project of bottomhood “not as a fixed role, an identity, or a physical act, but as a position—sexual, social, affective, political, aesthetic—[that] facilitates a more expansive horizon for forging political alliances” (3). Nguyen’s queer examination of Asian American masculinity configures bottomhood not as a position of immediate subordination, but one of sexual agency and power within Asian American cultural production. Asian American gay bottomhood, for Nguyen, becomes “a hermeneutic, a tactic of information... a tactic of joy” (24) deployed by “subjects that do not seek to overcome injury but those that have learned to live with past and present damage, in particular, everyday injuries marked by gender, race, and sexuality, that cannot find relief or make amends through legitimate social or political means” (25). Nguyen’s assessment of bottomhood is ultimately quite optimistic, configuring bottomhood—configured roughly as the “masochistic” position—as a recuperative strategy to reconfigure past trauma. Although his insights are invaluable, Nguyen’s theoretical optimism leads to a potential utopianism to bottoming that does not fully encompass the multiple trajectories of power relations enacted upon Asian American subjectivity. Its model of Asian American subjectivity also remains attached to the prior Asian Americanist premise of exclusion and lack, as opposed to incorporating the heterogeneous vectors of power associated with the model minority. Nevertheless, Nguyen’s queering of the relationship between power and pleasure within the site of Asian American masochism remains essential to my own argument.

Juliana Chang’s *Inhuman Citizenship* also contributes powerfully to the discussion of Asian American theories of literary subjectivity through a masochistic analysis, and forms much of the foundation of my own study. Whereas Nguyen’s conceptualization is more wedded to Foucauldian-descended queer theory, Chang opts for Lacanian psychoanalysis. Drawing primarily from Lacan’s formulation of *jouissance*, Chang suggests that Asian Americans may in

fact enjoy traumatic, stereotypical representations of Asianness, even identifying with the stereotypical image itself. According to Chang, racialized subjects can derive *jouissance*, a mixture of traumatized shock and pleasure, from what she calls “inhuman,” often thing-like, figures, representations that are outside the human, uncannily different, yet still necessary for the understanding for the composition of the human. I am deeply influenced by Chang’s connection of masochistic *jouissance* to inhuman representations, but like Nguyen, Chang operates principally from the postulate of fundamental Asian American exclusion as the central foundation of Asian American racial subjectification.

While remaining deeply indebted to both Nguyen and Chang, I insist that Asian American racial masochism must account not only for exclusion, but *inclusion*, as flawed and contingent model minority inclusion may be. Masochism’s function as *both* a technology of subjectification *and* a moral economy maps onto the model minority paradigm, since masochism possesses an internal logic of accommodation and subversion at once. Although Nguyen and Chang each account for the nexus of pain and pleasure for the Asian American subject, their studies are ultimately focused on micropolitics and aesthetics. I wish to broaden Nguyen and Chang’s implications to consider how such formulations affect the affective fabric of Asian Americanness itself; thus, I consider racial masochism to be, among other things, *a cultural politics*, one that shapes the Asian American self as much as it does the moral logic of a liminally interpellated panethnic community. Racial masochism incorporates the condition of being or becoming-model minority.

Nevertheless, I take a cue from Chang in considering how racial masochism manifests representationally and beyond. I thoroughly concur with Chang in that the Asian American subject seeks the “inhuman” figure, but given the specificity of the model minority racial form, I would argue that Asian American “inhumanity” takes on a more specific form, as well. That is, that of the machine.

Techno-Orientalism, Becoming-Machine, and the Masculine

Musser, reading both Simone du Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre’s unflattering descriptions of masochism, points to objecthood as central to masochism. “Masochism is an obsession with the state of being an object” (65), writes Musser, primarily referring to Beauvoir’s argument that the female masochist is preoccupied with being the object of desire for the male. Continuing to a reading of Sartre, Musser adds that “[i]n masochism, the subject imagines him- or herself as relying entirely on the Other for existence, thereby attempting to more fully become an object for the other and to annihilate his or her own subjectivity and transcendence” (79). Read alongside Butler’s argument that the subject “is dependent on power for one’s very formation” (9), masochism structurally thwarts itself; it is at once necessary for the minoritized subject for their own legibility and simultaneously signals a desire for annihilation of that very legibility.

I return here to the passage that begins this introduction: Tam Lum’s monologue as the “miracle synthetic.” Tam’s characterization of the Chinaman as “miracle synthetic” suggests this “state of being an object,” in this case, of a tool being used by the subject. It is furthermore denoted with artificiality and technology—synthetic, as opposed to the natural. Frank Chin’s objecthood—typically read as a diagnosis of the “castration” of Asian masculinity—is enmeshed in both masochism and a mode of self-objectification. The limp fabric with the potential for utility serves not only as a potent metaphor for the model minority, but also as a pushing of

Asiatic racial form outside of human boundaries. Tam Lum's monologue invokes Colleen Lye's question regarding racial form and the conceptual boundaries of the human:

We easily recognize the presence of race in visual media because of its identification with a set of phenotypical traits and a relative absence of interiority. Yet the visuality of Asiatic racial form has a distinctive character insofar as the sense of its deceitfulness or mystery always points to the presence of something not shown. To put it another way, we recognize the Asiatic as a figure for the unrepresentable. Yet how is the unrepresentable to be visualized? *Does it have a human body? If not, what shape, as a whole or in part, does it take?* These are the kinds of questions that are bypassed if our study of racial figuration begins by supposing the anthropomorphism of Asiatic form (7, emphasis mine).

Here, regarding the white U.S. literary consciousness, Lye suggests that we should not assume that Asiatic racial form even have unmediated access to the human. But even within the double consciousness of Asian American cultural production, such as in Frank Chin's iconic play, we see this instability of the human, a thingness within Asianness. To invoke Mel Chen's groundbreaking theory of animacies, we could say that Asianness indexes an affective difference of animacy away from a "humanity" whose paragon is inescapably white, male, and normative. The miracle synthetic is flat, pliant, obedient, and above all, artificial.

The miracle synthetic, the unnatural product, suggests an Asian racial form with affinity for technological production, an affinity that has been termed "techno-orientalism." David Morley and Kevin Robins were the first to elucidate this new iteration of orientalism, describing how the Japanese have been variously configured in western discourse as "little yellow men" or "ants" (147) who, through forms of mimesis, were attempting to "steal America's soul" (149-151). Morley and Robins configure Japan as being simultaneously a future and a past, a temporal dystopia where robots and samurai simultaneously represent the loss of selfhood and personhood so arduously won through the development of liberal modernity in white society. Techno-orientalist critique emphasizes how Asian subjects and Asian bodies take on traits of the synthetic. Indeed, as Sau-Ling Wong and Rachel C. Lee write, "Asians have been contradictorily imagined as, on the one hand, machine-like workers, accomplishing 'inhuman' feats of 'coolie' manual labor, and on the other, as brainiac competitors whose technological adeptness ranges from inventing gunpowder to being good with engineering and math" (xiv). Wendy Chun writes that such orientalism "seeks to orient the reader to a technology-overloaded present/future... through the premise of readable difference, and through a conflation of information networks with an exotic urban landscape" (177). Techno-orientalism also takes on aspects of mass reproducibility and an absence of originality,³ a consequence of the machine-like incapacity to originate. Echoing Morley and Robins, Adrian Johns describes the binary of 1980's American

³ It is curious to contrast this imaginary of mass reproducibility to that described by Christopher Bush in his 2007 essay "The Ethnicity of Things in America's Lacquered Age." Bush, in describing Gilded Age *japonisme* in the United States, describes a fetishism of Japanese objects that conceptualizes them as *not* mass-produced, but rather, that the Japanese people *themselves* all universally possessed an inclination towards aesthetic craftsmanship. This imagination of Japan would shift as Japan rose to become an industrial power, and East Asia on the whole became conceptualized as being fundamentally imitative. This could be one of the primary distinctions between more "generic" East Asian orientalism and more contemporary techno-orientalism.

Japanophobia: “Almost routinely, now, one side was identified as ‘American’ and ‘creative,’ the other as Japanese and, implicitly, imitative” (454). Indeed, Asian subjects and Asian bodies take on traits of the synthetic altogether; as Sianne Ngai elaborates, Asianness is racially coded as not only “silent, inexpressive, and... emotionally inscrutable” (93), but consequently less “animate,” on the spectrum “between the organic-vitalistic and the technological-mechanical, and between the technological-mechanical and the emotional” (95).

While critique of techno-orientalism has recently been flourishing within Asian American cultural studies—evidenced, for example, Stephen Hong Sohn’s “Alien/Asian” special issue in *MELUS* (2008) and the recent anthology *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* co-edited by David Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta Niu (2015)—the critique of techno-orientalism has largely focused on an associative representationalism, locating the particulars of a particularly potent stereotypical structure. Yet, the discussion of techno-orientalism can be expanded considerably further beyond stereotypical representation; perhaps techno-orientalism is itself a *technology* of subjectification, woven not only into the interpellating hail of white supremacist racial formation, but within the optics of self-actualization among the racialized.

Already, it should be apparent that there are parallels between techno-orientalism and the model minority, both in terms of the attributes they index and how they are similarly disavowed within Asian American cultural politics. I would go so far as to argue that the techno-oriental is the visual personification of the model minority itself, replete with both the promises and perils of an increasingly technologized society. Insofar as Asianness becomes associated with a laboring body—once the coolie, now the H1B visa-sponsored tech worker—Asiatic racial form shifts according to the status of material labor conditions. And as contemporary neoliberal society becomes increasingly enmeshed in high technology and new media, the boundary between human and machine in general becomes increasingly blurrier.

Techno-orientalism, then, provides an essential imaginary and visual vocabulary for masochistic self-objectification. Concurring with Musser’s assessment that “masochism is a mobile entity whose meanings shift depending on context” but nevertheless “hovers around... discussions of pleasure and racialization” (167), I argue that masochism becomes a fruitful yet amorphous analytic for techno-orientalism and its discontents. My assertion, then, is that techno-orientalist racialization, as it pertains to Asian American subjects, can best be analyzed through masochistic self-objectification. Consequently, I attempt to answer the call of Rey Chow in her concluding remarks on Ang Lee’s *Lust, Caution*:

The supplementary questions about this *masochism* series—questions conjuring all the identificatory stakes of loyalty and betrayal, of becoming-other and self-immolation, and enmeshed with the ubiquitous social media technologies for (self-)imaging, (self-) announcement, and (self-)display typical of the communications of our age—are a seldom discussed but, to my mind, nonnegligible aspect of the paradigm shift taking place today in the study of Asian cultures in a globalized academy.... [T]his extra dimension of the historicity of having-been-rendered-object needs to be recognized as a dimension of intellectual and artistic creativity, one that bears a sticky, messy historical imprint—namely, a claim to a (collective) memory of being aggressed against *and* the masochistic pleasures and pains that typically accompany such a claim (*Entanglements* 181, emphasis in original).

Although she discusses Asia and not Asian/Americans per se, Chow importantly ties together masochism, late-capitalist new media technologies, and subjectification for Asian subjects. She also associates masochism with “having-been-rendered-object,” all the while reading engagement with contemporary new media technology as a form of “self-immolation” itself. This applies equally, if not more, to Asian/Americans, given that “the Asian (American) cyborg is not solely the construct of the West, but also a self-invention that takes on model minority dimensions” (Wong & Lee xiv). And considering Tam Lum and Frank Chin’s pleasure at becoming a drip-dry, machine washable, miracle synthetic it becomes apparent that there is something of a masochistic perverse pleasure from operating through the very material with which one has been racialized.

Moreover, if we consider techno-orientalism as an operation of subject formation, then representation is merely the surface layer of techno-orientalism’s reach. Techno-orientalism under the masochistic apparatus transcends representation and is better characterized as an operation of “becoming.” Here, I draw from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s articulation of becoming, which they describe as a “real” transformation. “A becoming is not a correspondence between relations,” they write. “But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or at the limit, an identification” (237). Rather, write Deleuze and Guattari, becomings “are perfectly real” (238), even if the trajectory of the becoming (e.g. the animal) is not. Becoming, in effect, produces its own reality through its actualization: “Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes” (238). Thus, argue Deleuze and Guattari, “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself” (238). I would posit that this poststructuralist articulation of “becoming” has its strongest valence when thought through performance studies. Under the regime of becoming, it is within the transit between the approximate “signified” and “signifier” where “reality” resides, rather than either as a fixed, molar category. Consequently, Deleuzian “becoming” bears liveness and presence, resisting the fixity of representation; becoming, then, can be understood as primarily *performative* and *liminal*, even if it can be later documented and represented.

To once again belabor its constructedness, I would assert that one can only access Asian Americanness through “becoming.” Within literature, panethnic Asian Americanness is typically achieved through some variation of bildungsroman (as documented at length by Patricia P. Chu in *Assimilating Asians*), a process of claiming “Americanness” as a politico-social coming of age. It is the trajectory, the liminality between ethnic affiliation and Asian Americanness, rather than the end result, that characterizes the “Asian American novel,” for example. But similarly, I turn my attention to the in-transit, liminal becoming of techno-orientalism; that is, *becoming-machine*. This becoming-machine is both performative and phenomenological, a mode of feeling racialized, and intertwined with a racial masochism premised upon self-objectification. In this sense, becoming-machine exceeds the representational strands of techno-orientalism, suggesting that Asiatic racial form is not only *represented* outside of anthropomorphic boundaries, but *actuates* itself outside the human, as well.

Furthermore, techno-orientalism & becoming-machine illuminates the means by which this Asian American racial masochism is, in fact, gendered. As a tradition of feminist modernist scholarship has convincingly argued, the fear of becoming-machine has been associated with a terror of castration. As Andreas Huyssen writes in “The Vamp and the Machine,” his reading of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, “The fears and perpetual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality, reflecting, in

the Freudian account, the male's castration anxiety.... Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness; by their very existence they raised fears and threatened male authority and control" (70). In Huyssen's account, mechanization becomes associated not only with the endlessly reproducible Taylorist embodiment within capitalist industrialism, but with a panic of feminization, the removal of self-determinist agency at the core of modern western masculinity. The female, then, is consigned to the machine position, instrumentalized not unlike feminine labor itself. Similarly, in her examination of gendered cyborg imagery from the 18th to 20th centuries, Jennifer González argues that the advent of modern technology produced "a situation in which the relation – and the distinction – between the machine and the human became a question of gender and class. Those who had access to certain machines were privileged, and those who were expected to behave like certain machines were subjugated. The same is true today" (60). To become the machine, in other words, is to assume the position of the feminine, the *used* as opposed to the *user*.

Although the position of the female machine has been thoroughly reappropriated – most emblematically, of course, by Donna Haraway's iconic and indispensable "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" – the becoming-machine becomes something of a threat, in particular, to hegemonic masculinity. The techno-orientalization of the Asian American *masculine* subject, then, engenders not only a masochistic relationship, but also a valence of feminization. Similarly, it is worth noting that the very dialectic between the "resistance" of the bad subject and the "accommodation" of the model minority good subject maps onto a problematic, traditionally masculine/feminine binary. Just as the anxiety over techno-orientalism is an anxiety over feminization, so is the anxiety over being or becoming model minority. We should pause to consider these implications in conversation with preexisting studies on Asian American masculinity. As David Eng, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and Nguyen Tan Hoang have each already illuminated at length, Asian American masculinity finds itself variously "castrated" or "straitjacketed," cast in incomplete, feminized manhood relative to hegemonic white heteromascularity. These prior studies of Asian American masculinity rightfully argue that this disruption of masculinity may possess a productive element, queering and potentially dismantling an allegiance to the patriarchal logic of white supremacy itself. Moreover, for my discussion, I find it productive to turn again to Daniel Y. Kim's reading of Asian American masculinity in Frank Chin. Within Chin's work, argues Kim, we witness a rabid homophobia, but it barely disguises a persistent masochistic homoeroticism that he attempts to overcome. Kim points to the "Riding the Rails" essay cited earlier here as a clear example of Chin's orgiastic fantasy of a masculinity that would transcend race, in which Chin's body moved and swayed in harmony with the multiracial crew of men working the train.

To return to techno-oriental feminization, in *Chickencoop Chinaman*, we can consider Tam Lum's becoming-synthetic a paradoxically gendered, masochistic maneuver. He boldly declares himself a utility, a racial object, a piece of technology, in a gesture that is performatively hypermasculine (his flourish, after all, is being addressed to the silent "Hong Kong Dream Girl") even as the content can be understood as feminizing. Although Chin has been lambasted for misogyny, Tam Lum's admission to being the "miracle synthetic" might actually speak to a yearning to exceed the masculine even as he performs it. Through this brief glimpse at becoming-machine, this techno-oriental self-objectification, Tam Lum's racial masochism indicates a cultural politics that grapples with the multiple inversions of being Asian American, both model minority and not, a subject forming himself through the synthetic object.

Method, Theory, and the Suspenseful Reveal

It should be apparent from the preceding pages that the humanistic theoretical traditions I draw from are exceedingly diverse: psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, technocultural theory, phenomenology, among others. Although I am well aware that there are dangers to such diversity of approaches, particularly given the historical conflicts between many of these schools of thought, my theoretical hybridity reflects my refusal of epistemological “allegiance,” which would carry with it the equal danger of obfuscation. Such hybridity in theoretical traditions has already been rigorously tackled and justified within queer theory, itself committed to an ethico-politics of disrupting normativity; Judith Butler, for example, has argued forcefully for the reconcilability between Althusserian/Foucauldian models of the subject and psychoanalytic ones in *The Psychic Life of Power*. Similarly, within performance studies – the interdisciplinary field in which I am most firmly situated – the intellectual threads vary vastly in order to account for the performance (or performing object), the audience, and the mise-en-scene that encompasses them.

In the chapters that follow, the theoretical terrain will only broaden. Methodologically, however, I remain primarily influenced by two approaches to encountering texts and performances: Roland Barthes’ notion of myth and signification, and Amber Jamilla Musser’s practice of “empathetic reading.” Following Barthes, I focus on the ways my various objects of analysis undergo signification under the regime of racial masochism, and the ways they contribute to the diffuse multiplicity of meanings within contemporary Asian American subjectivity. This Barthesian style of reading centralizes the interaction between form, content, and context, concerned with the ways in which unexamined mythological structures can deceptively hide ideological meanings in plain sight, a type of reading that allows Barthes to dismantle a striptease or a photograph of his mother with the same deftness as he would a novel. Yet, I combine this Barthesian reading with Musser’s strategy of empathetic reading, which draws from prior feminist and queer praxes developed by Elizabeth Freeman (eroto-historiography) and Eve Sedgwick (reparative reading), incorporating both the felt sense of engaging with the text—that is, the affective response to the text—as evidence, and the body and positionality of the author. This method enables Musser “to make the flesh more visible within the process of knowledge production” (21), drawing attention to the embodied, performative dimension of writing practice itself. On this latter point, I distance myself from Barthes’ oft-cited postmodernist declaration that “the author is dead,” regularly considering the author’s subject position as evidentiary content. By putting these two opposing styles of textual and performance analysis into dialectical praxis, I aim to locate ideological technologies of subjectification both within the senses and within discourse.

Because of the scope of racial masochism within Asian American masculinity, I have chosen an eclectic range of objects across multiple media, including more rarefied objects such as avant-garde theater and alternative literature, as well as new media objects from popular culture such as comic books and video games. Doing so allows me to center panethnic masculine Asian American subjectivity itself, rather than any particular literary or aesthetic form, as the primary object of study. Nevertheless, I treat each medium differently, relative to its particular relationship to content and form, and consider how each object in each medium builds upon that which precedes it.

My first two chapters closely establish the masochistic relationship between techno-orientalism and Asian American identity formation. These chapters centralize becoming-machine as central to Asian American racial masochism, and tend to focus more on the embrace rather than disavowal of racializing machineness. Chapter 1 serves as a temporal/historical launching point for the narrative of the larger dissertation, reading the actual event of Vincent Chin's murder as a crucial moment that binds together contemporary Asian American subjectification, techno-orientalism, and masochism. By beginning with Vincent Chin, I reread a well-known historical incident as both techno-oriental dehumanization and the masochistic basis for contemporary Asian American identity. Here, I read the racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 as not only a profound event of domestic 1980s Japanophobia, but as a pivotal social drama that enacted the techno-Orientalist interpellation of today's contemporary Asian American subject. The landmark 1988 film *Who Killed Vincent Chin* presents a documented sequence of a large, carnivalesque gathering in which a crowd of predominantly white American adults bludgeon Japanese cars using sledgehammers with intense, vengeful abandon. While Frank Eaman, the defense attorney for Vincent Chin's murderer, claims that "it's a quantum leap... to say you're angry at, uh, Japanese imports and then hate Oriental people," the embodied public practice of violence produces a vital discursive, affective link between violence against a technological threat – the Japanese automobile – and the slaying of Vincent Chin at the hands of disgruntled white auto workers Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz. Using this scene as a launching point, I assert that through the Japanophobic 1980's white American imaginary, the Asian body became conflated with that of the automobile itself, and that conversely Vincent Chin underwent a Deleuzian "becoming-car," setting a precedent for the techno-Orientalist subject position that Asian Americans continue to occupy in the North American logic of late capitalism. Examining the murder of Chin and its aftermath through the lens of Victor Turner's notion of the "social drama," I explore the death of Vincent Chin on two levels: 1) the murder by Ebens and Nitz as a performative choreography that transmuted Chin from human to machine, and 2) a gesture towards examining the discursive aftershocks of Chin by way of persisting techno-orientalism that informs contemporary Asian American subject formation and identity performance. The range of objects in this chapter are vast: the archives from the American Citizens for Justice, Ping Chong's 1995 play *Chinoiserie*, the documentaries *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* and *Vincent Who?*, and a trial reenactment at UC Hastings in 2013. Each of these is considered a performance in the larger social drama of the Chin murder, and each configures racial masochism differently.

Furthermore, through archival research of the documents of the American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), the organization that mobilized the Asian American community to protest the light sentences given to Ebens and Nitz, as well as an analysis of Frank Wu's dramatic restaging of the trial of Ebens and Nitz directed by Philip Kan Gotanda, I argue that the discourse surrounding the Asian American protest was configured primarily to counter techno-oriental racialization and the affective "coldness" associated with the orientalized, but countering this racialization also necessarily entailed a politics of respectability that performed Asian American assimilation into liberal democracy. Chin was, after all, slain after emerging from a strip club on the eve of his wedding, but only the wedding would be mentioned by ACJ publicity (with the strip club referred to generally as a "bar"). The sexual/masculine aspects of Chin's murder were understandably downplayed, but by casting Chin posthumously as both moral paragon and "normative" in his Americanness (in other words, model minority), the ACJ inadvertently reinforced the very logics of techno-orientalism that had impelled Chin's demise. Doing so furthermore established a masochistic relationship between the death/becoming-car of Chin and

Asian American subject formation. Thus, I also argue that the performative responses to his death masochistically reconfigured this techno-orientalization, inadvertently reifying preexisting racial narratives of the model minority.

With the becoming-machine established as paradigmatic for Asian American subjectivity, I then ask: how does one *feel* when becoming-machine? Chapter 2 follows the encounter between techno-orientalism and masochism initiated with Vincent Chin into the realm of literature, focusing on the becoming-car and other becomings-objects and tying this techno-orientalist move to affective coldness, one of the two primary affective facets of Deleuzian masochism. As Stephen Sohn writes regarding techno-orientalism, “Alien/Asians conduct themselves with superb technological efficiency and capitalist expertise, their *affectual absence* resonates as undeveloped or, worse still, a retrograde humanism” (8, emphasis mine). Such an observation is striking alongside Fredric Jameson’s (in)famous declaration that, in late capitalism, “The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego—what I have been calling *the waning of affect*. But it means the end of much more—the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, *the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke* (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction)” (*Postmodernism* 15, emphasis mine). Within techno-orientalist cultural production, the “waning of affect” is perhaps best embodied by the racialized Asian figure; affectively, the techno-oriental is the postmodern subject par excellence whose hordelike presence also signifies “the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke.” Furthermore, affective flatness seems to signify the absence of an interiority, an “interior milieu” in Bernard Stiegler’s terms, as the techno-orientalized figure is affectively rendered as only exterior, as only tool.

Thus, I turn to works of contemporary alternative literature written by Asian American men. I analyze Tao Lin’s semiautobiographical novel *Taipei* (2013) and Tan Lin’s fictional memoir *Insomnia and the Aunt* (2011) as texts that conceptualize Asianness itself as affective flatness accessible through technological mediation. In the ostensibly postracial *Taipei*, Tan Lin produces an aesthetic of flatness to demonstrate the Asian male protagonist’s interface with high technology and new media, although close examination of the text reveals a considerable preoccupation with racialization, a means of accessing Asianness precisely through becoming-machine. As the protagonist Paul moves through the mundane minutiae of his highly digitized life, his phenomenological experience with the world becomes indistinguishable from technological interface, which also, in turn, is the central means by which he accesses a sense of race, all while the text attempts to performatively position itself as having achieved model minority inclusion. Meanwhile, Tan Lin’s *Insomnia*, described as an “ambient” text, situates its narrator reflecting on his childhood with his Chinese aunt, with whom he watches television late into the night. *Insomnia* effectively demonstrates explicitly what *Taipei* does implicitly: a relationship between affective flatness, becoming-machine, and Asian American subjectification. Together, these texts express a racial phenomenology inherited by the techno-orientalization elaborated in the previous chapter, suggesting that Asian American masculinity retains masochistic attachment to machineness.

Next, my third and fourth chapters contend with the moral economy and ethics of Asian American cultural politics in relationship to other radical forms of otherness. Chapter 3 turns to the 2006-2007 run of Marvel Comics’ *Incredible Hulk* penned by Korean American writer and filmmaker Greg Pak. Also an acclaimed independent filmmaker of such Asian American works as *Robot Stories* and *Asian Pride Porn*, Pak authored a now-celebrated run of *The Incredible Hulk* from 2006-2007 entitled *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk*. In these two sequential

storylines of superhero comics, Pak reinterprets the Hulk – a Jekyll-and-Hyde-inspired beast whose strength grows proportional to his anger and sense of hurt – as a racialized tragic hero/messiah who becomes a utopian revolutionary leader of other fellow abjected monsters, only for his own rage to be the hamartia that ironically brings everything to ruin. I argue that Pak reinterprets the iconic superhero as a loose allegory of racial *ressentiment*, deftly utilizing the graphic novel as a form to stage the limits of racial *ressentiment* itself. As a creature who literally feeds on *ressentiment*, the Hulk requires more pain (both emotional and physical) to actualize and become legible to himself. I read Pak’s run with *Hulk* as an Asian Americanist and techno-orientalist reclamation of a classic superhero figure as the boundless rage embodied within the body of a meek scientist (and doubly emphasized by Pak’s introduction of Asian American sidekick Amadeus Cho, as well as his own tacit acknowledgment to the fact in the Asian American superhero anthology *Secret Identities*). Yet, in Pak’s 2006-2007 run, the Hulk opens greater political possibilities not through the moral economy of *ressentiment*, but through the embrace of his penetrability and pleasurable de-subjectification, that is to say, masochism. Pak’s *Hulk* demonstrates the crucial differences between *ressentiment*’s “politics of woundedness” and the pleasures of masochism, ultimately offering a contentiously optimistic vision of masochism as a possible corrective to contemporary Asian American cultural politics.

Chapter 4 then continues the theme of moral masochism in Chapter 3 by broadening the racial scope to consider Afro-Asian interactions within cultural politics. I frame this chapter with a masochistic question by Vijay Prashad, invoking W.E.B. DuBois, famously and provocatively asked the South Asian American community: “How does it feel to be the solution?” It is a question, applied across Asian/Americans generally, that is painstakingly negotiated in the work of acclaimed Japanese American playwright Philip Kan Gotanda. Given the impassioned rebuke to the recent contentious 2012 revelation of Richard Aoki, the celebrated Japanese American Black Panther, as an FBI informant, Gotanda’s work has exceptional relevance in the contemporary moment as it contends with “model minority” discourse and the relationship of Asian Americanness to Blackness in the US racial system. Through a comparative reading of two of Gotanda’s plays, *After the War* (2007) and *I Dream of Chang and Eng* (2011), this paper analyzes the role of Black characters in signifying longing for a politically redemptive Asian/American subject position while simultaneously demonstrating the limits Asian/American radicality within an antiblack hegemony. This chapter argues that Gotanda positions blackness as a moral center of unambiguous oppression, conjuring what I call the “Afro-Asian super-ego,” and considers the Asian American political choice of either solidarity or complicity, ambivalent about agency as the Asian/American subject is positioned as both victim and perpetrator of epistemic violence. Thus, I consider how Blackness operates as a racial super-ego for the Asian American masculine political imagination, subjecting Asian American identity to punishment by the unambiguous “real” of racialization—a “real” that is positioned diametrically opposed to model minority machineness—what Fanon once called the “fact of Blackness.” Ultimately, this chapter ends gesturing towards examining the pleasure of failure, of the morally masochistic punishment for failing political responsibility.

Finally, all threads of inquiry converge in Chapter 5, which concludes with an autoethnographic exploration of the 2011 cyberpunk video game *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* by Eidos Montreal. This chapter delves into new media analysis of an explicitly techno-orientalist video game in order to provocatively explore the ethics and practice of masochistic self-annihilation itself. As a medium, the video game particularly emphasizes the presence of the gamer – who is part reader, writer, and actor – and places them directly into a masochistic

relationship with the game itself. The potential for technologization of Asian bodies explodes exponentially in the medium of video gaming, in which the player immerses and empathizes with the environment and procedural logics of the gameworld. *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* deploys an interplay of cyberpunk content and an immersive first-person gaming interface to generate a cyber-racial erotics of violence. The 2011 video game, widely touted for its agentic gameplay, “cyberrenaissance” aesthetics, and posthumanist themes, stars a white male “supercrip” cyborg detective named Adam Jensen as he unravels a transnational corporate conspiracy to control the world through cybernetic augmentation. As the player *assumes the body* of Jensen to explore the near-future world of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, she encounters classic, sexually-mediated orientalist tropes in the Chinese dystopia Hengsha, such as China doll prostitutes, dragon ladies, dirty streets and (cybernetic) Asians who “all look the same,” all of which serve as signifiers of a cyberpunk, techno-Orientalist ethos.

As a game, a medium governed predominantly by active and direct interactivity, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* precisely satisfies this desire, providing an opportunity for the Asian American gamer to experience not only their own body-as-stereotype, but also their own body-as-other. I argue that this is precisely how *DX:HR* presents generative potential for the Asian subject who plays it and engages its deeply problematic gameworld. I thus follow Viet Nguyen’s call to break from the moralizing binary of resistance and complicity in Asian Americanist critique, suggesting instead that playing and performing within the techno-Orientalist gameworld of *DX:HR* that the Asian/American subject may exercise a mode of what Elizabeth Freeman terms “erotohistoriography,” a deployment of violent erotics to contend with one’s own subject formation. Through a reading of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, this concluding chapter gestures to an Asian American cultural politics that locates itself in slippages, role reversals, and unintuitive affects. Consequently, this paper aims to bring technocultural studies, queer theory, and Asian American Studies into conversation around this politically “improper” object. Like Song in *M. Butterfly*, the Asian/American player of *DX:HR* can learn to “be” the transhumanist white man in order to play within the structure of fantasy, opening discomforting corridors of racial possibility. *DX:HR* is a private theater for the racially depressed, presenting a virtual world of self-annihilation for the Asian/American gamer to reflectively interrogate their own racialization.

Thus, across multiple media, *Minority Models* aims to provoke, flirt, and lacerate in the manner of its objects of study. Through these instantiations of self-objectification and self-annihilation, *Minority Models* subjects Asian Americanist critique to the masochistic operations that have long lurked beneath as a dominant cultural logic. It aims to capture a portrait of contemporary panethnic Asian American masculinity that can imagine itself as a miracle synthetic: bound up, haptically pliable, endlessly reproducible, a conduit of racial power relations whose future remains uncertain. The racial masochism of the model minority can begin to answer the question: what uncanny model of minority is this?

Chapter 1 Vincent Chin's Wedding Techno-Orientalist Subjectification and its Discontents

One of the most iconic, haunting images in Asian American history is a portrait of Mrs. Lily Chin taken by Helen Zia, which first appeared in the Chinese American periodical *East West Journal*. Middle aged and conservatively dressed, Mrs. Chin is seated in a cropped, humble room, her torso facing the camera but her head tilted a few degrees away, her face betraying a solemn sadness. But most importantly, a photo of her son Vincent sits on her lap, which she cradles intimately. It is a portrait of mourning, bespeaking a silent, exhausted rage, the photo-within-the-photo portraying a man tragically young for his life to be cut short, his mother's grim stoicism undergirded not only by calamity, but by injustice.

In the 2009 documentary *Vincent Who?*, activist Stewart Kwoh states, "We don't have a lot of Jesse Jacksons in our community, but we do have a number of Lily Chins." As a prominent figure throughout the campaign for redress, Lily Chin was a deeply influential, earnest voice for her murdered son, and her grief was public spectacle, bringing her a level of minor celebrity through her passionate appearances at a multitude of rallies, press conferences, and news articles from 1983-1984. The image of the bereaved Lily Chin, accompanied always by a reminder of her son, has a peculiar symbolic value within the study of Asian American history and politics. But her possession of the image of Vincent Chin itself would become the means by which she would be visually identifiable. Lily Chin would become the Bearer of Vincent's Portrait, emphasized even more strongly by Joe Mortis' photograph – in this shot, the portrait of Vincent, held at a slight tilt, occupies the majority of the shot, with Lily Chin's hands, sweater, and bracelet being the only visible parts of her. The photograph of Vincent Chin would become the fetish substitute of melancholia that would forever haunt the imagery of Lily Chin, or perhaps, more accurately, the sign of Vincent Chin's photograph is enough to signify the presence of Lily Chin, she who mourns.

The photograph of Vincent is not only a substitute for his brutal murder, but for Lily Chin, as well, demonstrating the completion of Vincent Chin's conversion into fetish-object, temporally suspending both Chins. This abstraction functions on the level of mythological signification, effectively completing the conversion of the murdered Chinese American man into an object. Here, the photograph Vincent Chin – and perhaps Chin himself – becomes what Joseph Jonghyun Jeon has called a "racial thing," a materialization of "uncanny phenomena" at the intersection between "reification and racialization" (xxiv). The melancholic haunting of the racial thing, amplified by the political deployment of its visual rhetoric, furthermore produces a masochistic moral economy around which Asian American subjectivity would come to congregate. Rebecca Comay argues that such fetishistic substitution, when placed within the melancholic schema, produces a masochistic relationship with the lost object: "The incorporation of the object requires [melancholia]'s abbreviation as a frozen attribute and thereby inflicts upon it a kind of second death... a violence which will in turn reverberate within *the sadomasochistic theater of grief* wherein, famously, *it is the lost object itself which is being whipped by the subject's most intimate self-flagellations*" (94-95, my emphasis). With every dramatic retelling of Vincent Chin's story, from speeches and press releases by ACJ members or by Lily Chin herself, there is necessarily a re-invocation of the incipient violence, and if not a literal pleasure, a movement towards "intimate self-flagellation," a paradoxical reiteration of death, "a kind of second death" in order to seek its redress.

Her son's death was a story that would be publicly recounted again and again, almost gaining the iconicity of a folkloric fable. I am, of course, obliged to recount it yet again here. On June 19, 1982 Vincent Chin was celebrating his upcoming wedding at Fancy Pants Club, a strip club with three of his friends (Kresnak 6A). Two white men in the bar, Ronald Ebens and his son-in-law Michael Nitz, both of whom were recently laid-off autoworkers. Ebens and Nitz watched Chin and his compatriots bitterly as Chin and his friends enjoyed the strippers, possibly making statements like "nip" and "chink," blurting at them: "It's because of you motherfuckers that we're out of work." A melee ensued, Chin throwing the first punch, and Vincent and his friends departed the space. According to eyewitness reports, Ebens and Nitz drove their car in the surrounding area for twenty or thirty minutes, and found Vincent Chin and his friend Jimmy Choi in front of a nearby McDonald's. Nitz held Chin from behind as Ebens swung a baseball bat repeatedly against Vincent Chin's head, bashing his skull open, until police arrived on the scene, guns drawn. As Vincent lay dying, Ebens pointed to Jimmy Choi and said, "I did it, and if they hadn't stopped me, I'd get you next." Vincent, on the other hand, moaned, "It's not fair." Vincent Chin went brain dead after 8 hours of emergency surgery, and was released from life support four days afterward. "His four hundred wedding guests," writes Helen Zia, "attended his funeral instead" (*Asian American Dreams* 60).

However, it was not so much the slaying itself, but rather the light sentencing of perpetrators Ebens and Nitz, that would facilitate the galvanization of Asian American political organizing in the 1980s on his posthumous behalf. Nine months after his death, on March 18, 1983, Ebens and Nitz appeared for their sentencing in the Wayne County Circuit Court, facing a plea bargain from second-degree murder to manslaughter. Edward Khoury, Nitz's defense attorney, portrayed Nitz as a law-abiding citizen "making a contribution to the community" who acted "in the heat of passion." Ebens' defense attorney Bruce Saperstein stated that Ebens' background is "impeccable" but "normal people act strange when loved-ones appear to be seriously injured," referring to the notion that it was Vincent Chin who provoked the attack¹, and the fact that Michael Nitz received a head injury from the brawl that required eleven stitches (although investigation revealed that it was actually Ebens who inflicted that wound). When Judge Charles Kaufman asked: "Did the victim have a criminal record?" Saperstein replied "I don't have any background on him either way, Your Honor." Shortly afterward, the sentence was dealt: Ebens and Nitz were dealt probation and fined \$3780 each - \$3000 for the killing and \$780 for court costs. Judge Kaufman would infamously remark in a later interview that Ebens and Nitz "aren't the kind of people you send to jail" (Waldemeir).

The 1982 murder of Vincent Chin was without a doubt a watershed moment in mainstream U.S. Asian American identity. There is, in fact, a popular narrative that Asian America emerged from Vincent Chin's bludgeoned skull. From Robert Ebens' two-handed swing of a baseball bat – that quintessentially American object of play and violence – in Detroit 1982 came a movement for redress, for justice, which for the first time on a national scale coalesced the otherwise disparate Asian ethnic groups in America into one singular Asian American political constituency. The story of Vincent Chin's murder – a Chinese man slain for being mistaken as Japanese in a period of virulent Japanophobia – is something of a linchpin in the canon of Asian American Studies, a subject of multiple books and documentaries,² framed as

¹ This is partially, though not entirely, true, for according to most accounts, Chin threw the first punch. However, this does discount the escalation that happened prior to the first act of physical violence.

² Many of which are covered in this chapter, but the Chin case is prominent in such legal scholars' texts Frank Wu's *Yellow* and Robert S. Chang's *Disoriented*, Helen Zia's *Asian American Dreams*,

a hate crime and the tragically predictable absence of justice. Compellingly, legal scholar Frank Wu even ventures to say: “Before the Vincent Chin case, it’s fair to say there weren’t Asian Americans. There were Chinese Americans; there were Japanese Americans; there had been briefly in the 1960s a student movement on the West Coast. But there wasn’t a meaningful, abiding Asian American *Movement*. It faltered. It didn’t have an icon, a symbol. It didn’t have a narrative that people could identify with.” Although Wu’s characterization of the early articulations of Asian American identity as a “brief... student movement” is rather reductive, his declaration nevertheless underscores the weight of signification endowed to the Chin case, particularly in relationship to the once-fledgling panethnic political formation that was, and now is, “Asian America.” Indeed, as Ronald Takaki noted in 1989, “all Asian Americans—Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Southeast Asians—are standing up this time” (484). Moreover, sociologist Yen Le Espiritu noted in 1992 that “as a result of the Chin case, Asian Americans today are much more willing to speak out on the issue of anti-Asianism; they are also much better organized than they were at the time of Chin’s death” (153).

Although it would be historically inaccurate to say that Asian American panethnicity was truly “born” in the aftermath of Chin’s murder, I cite these examples of eventualization to illustrate its narrative weight and its paradigmatic role in coagulating an Asian American identity. For Wu – and the *Vincent Who?* documentary more generally, as I will demonstrate – the death of Chin and the organized community response to Ebens’ and Nitz’s light sentencing formed the event that birthed a particular mainstream iteration of “Asian America” as a cultural-political construction attached to a kind of racial masochism demonstrated by the Lily Chin photographs. Thus far, the murder of Vincent Chin has been primarily a concern of Asian American legal studies (e.g. Frank Wu’s *Yellow*, Robert S. Chang’s *Disoriented*, Thomas P. Kim’s *The Racial Logic of Politics*), Asian American history (Ronald Takaki’s *Strangers From a Different Shore*, Sucheng Chan’s *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*), and sociology (Yen Le Espiritu’s *Asian American Panethnicity*, Joe Darden and Richard Thomas’ *Detroit: Race Riots, Race Conflicts, and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide*), and has consequently received minimal attention in the humanities, performance studies particularly (Joshua Chambers-Letson’s *A Race So Different* covers the Chin affair briefly through an examination of *Chinoiserie*). But with the exception of Chang’s *Disoriented*, none of the above studies are closely critical of the Chin affair beyond the clear conclusion that the events constituted an injustice, nor have they centrally focused on the psychic and affective impact that the Chin case has had on Asian American cultural politics at large. Methodologically speaking, I analyze the cultural politics of the Vincent Chin affair as a social drama, a broader performance event itself whose multiple pulls of signification, from the beating to the civil rights organizing by the American Citizens for Justice, created the conditions for an Asian American cultural politics premised upon a masochistic becoming-machine. Indeed, the eventualization of Chin in the aftermath of his death and trial inaugurated a moral-masochistic “Asian Americanness,” one that would enable Chin to function as a figure of masochism upon which both pleasure and subjectification would concur.

In addition, this masochistic figuration is both a response to and redeployment of Asiatic racialization that pushes Asiatic racial form outside of the boundaries of the human in unsettling ways in 1980s Detroit. That Chin was “mistaken” as Japanese is misleading; it is perhaps more accurate to say that the bludgeoning *made* Chin Japanese. More generally, the Chin case has carried particular rhetorical clarity in demonstrating the superseding of racial over ethnic

marking within the U.S. social system; Asianness,³ and by extension Asian Americanness, arose as the determining factor of Chin's death rather than any specific ethnic marker. But even to say that Chin "became" Japanese is insufficient: I argue that, metonymically speaking, Chin *became* the Japanese car itself. But in this "becoming" – a term drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari – a contemporary formation of Asian America formed masochistically, drawing both pleasure and meaning from the fusion of flesh with machine. Thus, this opening chapter asks: what do the social drama of Vincent Chin and its performative aftermath teach us about Asian American relationships to objecthood and machineness? How can we think of racial "becoming-machine" simultaneously as a technology for Asian American subjectification, masochistic desubjectification, and consolidation of model minority ideology?

Moreover, in this objectification of Chin, we see the convergence of three intertwining but conflicting cultural logics: *ressentiment*, melancholia, and masochism. To simplify, the first is a politics of woundedness for moral authority, the second is perpetual grief that feeds endlessly upon the lost object, and the third is the suspenseful derivation of pleasure from pain. Chin's becoming-machine establishes the conditions for all three of these cultural logics to sometimes harmonize over, and sometimes contest, the narrativization of Chin. As I aim to show in the following pages, the Vincent Chin case and its performative aftermath gesture towards a complexly masochistic relationship between the racialized subject and the racial form of that subject, establishing a diffusion of morally masochistic economies through which Asian America has ethico-politically defined itself since the Chin event. The social drama surrounding the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, which transpired just days before his scheduled wedding, was itself a wedding of the contemporary Asian American subject to techno-orientalism, one whose ongoing signification would result in a masochistic attachment to Chin's murder and the techno-oriental objectification it performed. As a performance event that intervenes into the discourse of Asian American subject formation and political organizing, I analyze the Chin event across a number of performance "nodes" for the larger performance of Chin: the documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin* (1987), the activist organizing documents of the American Citizens for Justice, the play *Chinoiserie* by Ping Chong, and finally the 2013 UC Hastings Vincent Chin trial reenactment by Frank Wu, Denny Chin, and Philip Kan Gotanda (2013). Unlike the following chapters, this chapter grapples with the cultural memory of Vincent Chin as its primary object, rather than centering the specific works themselves, in an attempt to provide a greater examination of both the broader discourse and affective legacy left by the Chin murder and its immediate aftermath. By contending with Vincent Chin's becoming-machine, these performative responses to Chin's murder variously grapple with masochisms of subjectification and undoing.

Becoming-Machine and Metonymic Racialization in Motor City

The social context of Vincent Chin's murder and the subsequent aftermath was one in which Japan represented an economic-technological threat, specifically due to Detroit's historically inextricable association with its auto industry. Throughout Detroit's longtime status as "Motor City USA," industrial mechanization has been a persistent component of its corporate manufacturing infrastructure. The city is the birthplace of Henry Ford's first moving assembly line at the Ford Highland Park Plant, which opened in 1910, and its prestige as "a symbol of itself" (Galster 6) in the US national consciousness fluctuated according to the US relationship to

³ I refer to "Asianness" and "Asian Americanness" but I wholeheartedly reject any essentialist notions of either of these descriptors. I analyze these abstractions precisely as abstract constructions.

industrialization at large at various historical moments. As historian George Galster elaborates, Detroit shifted from being a site of technological ingenuity and “industrial unionism” to that of “postindustrial apocalypse” in the early 1970s, a “murder capital,” “a place of unbridled crime, violence, and racial strife that could be patrolled successfully only by robocops” (6-7). In other words, what was once a beacon of cutting-edge 20th century industrialism became a site associated with deterioration. Detroit of the 1970s and 1980s was a space of anachronism, of uneven modernity, an industrial symbol of material futurity decaying into a symbol of quixotic futility in the face of corporate globalization. Nevertheless, whether conceptualized as innovative or antiquated, as a boon to productivity or as a threat to labor, industrial technology has been a nucleus of Detroit’s identity in cultural production and the U.S. public imagination.⁴

Consequently, the Detroit of the early 1980s was preoccupied with the technological and machinic. This has been a particularly threatening preoccupation among Detroit’s labor unions, particularly when increased levels of automation spanning throughout the 20th century would result in unemployment and displacement. Moreover, even for those remaining within the proletarian vicegrip of the Detroit auto industry, “auto workers found that the devilish font of their physical resources extracted considerably more sacrifices of psychological resources than anticipated. Four core characteristics of the Detroit auto industry—assembly line production, draconian management, cyclical instability, and long-term employment declines—ally to forge an economic engine of anxiety” (Galster 243). Unfortunately, such conditions, paired with the transnational tensions of the auto industry in the 1980s, resulted in the severe racialization of Asians in Detroit. The rise of fuel-efficient Japanese auto makers in the late 1970s and early 1980s inculcated an unsurprising U.S. American resentment towards racialized “competition,” in this case, towards orientalized subjects. The November 14, 1983 issue of the *Baltimore Sun* reported that “The guard shack at the parking lot entrance to Solidarity House, the international headquarters of the United Auto Workers, has a sign declaring ‘300,000 laid-off UAW members don’t like your import. Please park it in Tokyo.’ A bumper sticker on the window says, ‘Toyota, Datsun, Honda and Pearl Harbor.’” Writing in 1983, Ronald Takaki additionally noted other bumper stickers, in the spirit of the American automakers’ “buy American” campaigns, stating phrases like “unemployment—made in Japan.” What may superficially have begun as a critique of globalized capitalism transformed primarily into an expression of nationalism, and, by extension, racialization. To a certain degree, as Japan became increasingly associated with an orientalized, faceless mass of automobiles, racialization and mechanization began to blend together.

This labor-based Japanophobia, produced at the precipice of increasingly transnational flows of immigration, capital, and production, echoed a long-standing tendency within American

⁴ Moreover, the material conditions of 1980s Detroit were in dialogue with its aesthetics. As Ben Williams recounts, Detroit’s Black community is not only the birthplace of “Motown” soul music, but American techno music: “techno is a specifically African American variation on the themes of inner-city collapse explored by [cyberpunk artists Alvin] Toffler, [Ridley] Scott, and [William] Gibson, a variation that teleports African diasporic traditions into the disembodied world of computer networks” that “soundtracks the decaying industry of Detroit” and “leaves the city behind for the new global space of postindustrial capitalism” (155). Galster also remarks that “it’s not surprising, with its alien-like work environments stressing machine-like precision, that Detroit later would become the acknowledged birthplace of Techno music” (4). Furthermore, Galster’s remark about “robocops” extends to the Detroiters’ 2011 campaign to erect a massive statue to the cyborg hero of the same name from the iconic film by Paul Verhoeven.

orientalism since the 19th century that ties racial form to material class relations. To recall Colleen Lye's study of orientalism in U.S. American naturalism cited in the Introduction, Asiatic racial form does not necessarily remain constrained within the boundaries of the human, particularly given how Asianness has easily become associated with increased industrial automation, in being perceived as similarly competitive with white American labor.

Within the visual regime of Asiatic racial form, the Asian subject can be thought of as undergoing a techno-oriental becoming-machine. To recall Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, becoming is not a metaphorical relationship, but one effectively of "reality," one in which the very constructions of the subject and the endpoint of becoming blur together. That is, becoming is a mode by which the particles of an assemblage⁵ (to oversimplify, a non-unitary subject or object) enters the territory of another, and the nature of both are altered, and both units are deterritorialized (237-238). In Deleuze and Guattari's schema, becoming is not unidirectional, but rather informs the two forms themselves such that they bleed into one another. Through becoming, it becomes possible conceptualize the relationship of Asiatic racial form to the machine, producing a techno-orientalism at the core of this central event of Asian American history.

In the case of becoming-machine, Asianness and machineness develop a coterminous relationship, one closer to *metonym* than *metaphor*. As Kaja Silverman states, metaphor "exploits relationships of similarity" (*Subject of Semiotics* 110), while metonymy "exploits relationships of contiguity between things, not words: between a thing and its attributes, its environment and its adjuncts" (111). The events of Vincent Chin's murder and its aftermath suggest that Asiatic racial form does not operate merely on the level of representational similarity (the Oriental is *like* a machine, the machine is *like* an Oriental), but rather on the level of continuity (the machine is *an extension of* the Oriental, the Oriental is *an extension of* the machine). Yet, insofar as there is contiguity within metonym, there is also asymmetry. It is this asymmetry, paired with continuity, that gives metonym both a peculiar performative power, and a potential for resignification. As Peggy Phelan writes, "In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of 'presence'" (150), and as a consequence, "Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body *per se*; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body – that which cannot appear without a supplement" (150-151). The Toyota, then, becomes not only a *symbol for* and an *extension of* the imagined Japanese threat in in early 1980s Detroit, but also potentially a site of contestation.

⁵ Thus far, I have referred to Asian American "subjecthood" when, strictly speaking, the term "subject" is ultimately an inadequate descriptor in relationship to Deleuze and Guattari's description of "becoming." It is thus more proper, and in fact more accurate, to deploy the term "assemblage," implying a model that "lean[s] more to collection, combination, assembling" (Puar 4). Jasbir Puar favors the assemblage over the (intersectional) subject, arguing that the assemblage "de-privilege[s] the human body as a discrete organic thing" (5) and "do not privilege bodies as human, nor as residing within a human/animal body" (5). That said, my usage of the term "subject" is not mutually exclusive of the Deleuzian model of assemblage as described by Puar, and neither, I would argue, many strands of critical theory; for example, the Foucauldian model of subjectivation as described in Volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality* entailing "technologies of the self" are quite compatible with the assemblage. What I reject, as cultural theory at large seems to have soundly rejected for decades, is the notion of the soundly unified, universal subject. Thus, I will deploy the terms "assemblage" and "subject" more or less interchangeably, except to highlight particular aspects at various points.

The unstable metonymy of techno-orientalist becoming-machine would be the affective terrain upon which Asian American activists and cultural producers would perform; they would project or negotiate the trajectory of their racialization, securing various racial masochisms premised upon correspondingly various forms of objecthood. Insofar as we consider self-objectification as central to masochism, the performative responses to Vincent Chin's death are spectacular examples in which Asian American objecthood and subjectivity converge. For the clearest instantiation of becoming-machine, I first turn to the work that has rightfully been considered the definitive account of the Vincent Chin affair, the 1987 documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*

Clinging to the Chrome: Becoming-Car & Chin as the Detroit Android

“Real Americans Buy American” continues to be one of the more popular sayings gracing the large chrome bumpers of cars in Detroit. The case of Vincent Chin has peeled back those slogans, showing that what makes them cling to the chrome is a powerful and ugly undercurrent of racism. It’s a revelation that we Detroiters will not soon forget.”

-Matt Beer, *The Detroit Times*, June 2, 1983

Christine Choy and Renee Tajima-Pena's 1987 documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, widely acknowledged as the definitive work documenting Vincent Chin's story, won an Emmy and an Academy Award nomination for compellingly covering Chin's murder through a thorough and powerful editing of news clips and interviews, intimately covering a wide range of individuals from Vincent's mother Lily Chin, Robert Ebens, his defense attorney Bruce Saperstein, Helen Zia, Fancy Pants dancers Starlene and Racine Colwell, among a number of others. As a documentary, it is immensely successful at exploring the question of its title, what seems to be a rhetorical question with a self-evident answer, but instead properly examines the social context in which the murder occurs. Writing in 1988, Vincent Canby of the New York Times praised the film, noting aptly: "There would also seem to be no doubt about who did it. Yet, by the end of their film, Ms. Choy and Ms. Tajima have so successfully analyzed this sudden, sad, fatal confrontation that almost everything except the Big Mac becomes implicated in the events." Indeed, Ebens and Nitz are undoubtedly the literal perpetrators, but through its panoramic exploration of Detroit as a social context, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* effectively points to larger discursive factors as being equally guilty parties, putting society on trial equally alongside the two men in question. For better or for worse, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* has gained a kind of canonical truth-effect within all subsequent discussions of Vincent Chin; on some level, even all of the other objects in this chapter owe or directly cite the research and footage of this initial documentary, as well as its comprehensive narrative.

Here, I focus on a segment in the first third of the documentary, explaining the social context in which the Chin murder occurred in terms of what I have described as techno-orientalist violence. The exquisitely directed and edited *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* is not primarily a text that explores techno-orientalism; rather, it is primarily concerned with providing a panoramic portrait of the event and the multiple social forces at work: Detroit unemployment, the sense of entitlement from white privilege, and the colorblind denial of racism. However, one of the most crucial early segments of the documentary profiles the racialization of the Japanese automobile, which the film aptly covers through a display of anti-Asian propaganda developed

by the Detroit auto industry. Approximately 31 minutes in, the film features a fear-mongering American cartoon of dark-eyed “foreign” cars surfing across the ocean to reach American shores, creeping past the Statue of Liberty like cockroaches, eventually constituting a faceless dark horde that overtakes the heterosexual white couple kissing on the screen of the Americana-suffused drive-in theater, all to a menacing horror soundtrack. The voiceover narrates: “When it started, America was unprepared. From across the ocean they came, little cars determined to change the buying habits of a nation. And for a while, there was no stopping them.” A few minutes later, the documentary displays a still of a Japanese car with buck teeth, flying overhead Detroit releasing a bomb, an imperial Japanese flag shadowed underneath – a cartoon that had been originally displayed at Flint, Michigan’s Six Flags Auto World Theme Park in 1984 (Darden & Thomas 170). In these propaganda pieces, there is, as Lye suggests about Asiatic racial form in general, a white anxiety of oriental threat that is leveraged on the specific visuality of the Asiaticized body. In the former example of US auto industry propaganda, the surfing horde of cars are legibly Asiatic in their hordeness; their empty eyes and uniformity providing a primarily affective contrast with the white couple, performatively exhibiting a capacity for (heteronormative) love and expression. The couple’s extradiegetic awareness of the cars exhibits furthermore a threat to sexual normativity, their palpable fear at this interruption bespeaking an economic threat that is not only material, but libidinal. Meanwhile, in the latter example, phenotypic Asian features are located onto the bodies of the car itself. The second image, a still rather than an animation, is less focused on the performativity of relentless swarming, and more premised upon the anatomy of the car itself.

Within these cartoons, the boundary between car and Asian blurs dramatically; not only is Asianness ascribed to the vehicles, but the mechanical is ascribed to Asianness. There is, in these cartoons, a mutual becoming. The movement of machine to the hyper-racialized human as we see in the cartoons – such as in the “Pearl Harbor” bombing still – which depicts a Japanese car with stereotypically Japanese *facial* features, as opposed to features of the Japanese Zero, the plane to which the car is clearly being analogized – paradoxically moves the automobile *further* from humanity; the vehicles are anthropomorphized only enough to be orientalized, revealing this mode of techno-orientalism as a discursive technology of dehumanizing abjection. In other words, the car’s becoming-Asian is *not* a becoming-human, but quite the opposite; the Asian car is fully abject, invoking “one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (Kristeva 1). As David Leiwei Li and Karen Shimakawa have separately demonstrated in *Imagining the Nation* (2000) and *National Abjection* (2003) respectively, Asians in America had been legally abject since at least the mid-20th century (in Li’s account), or since the 19th century (in Shimakawa’s), victims to a politic of exclusion beginning with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and continuing all the way through 1965 immigration reform and beyond. In Shimakawa’s narrative, the psychic life of abjection manifested legally, performatively codified to enact a persistent racial exclusion. Here in the automotive propaganda pieces, that abjection is both physically and psychically cathected upon the body of the Japanese machine itself.

To reinforce the body of the car as the site of contestation, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* next cuts to a (literally) striking scene: actual news clips from a public lynching of Japanese cars. In early 1980s Detroit, “Japanese cars were vandalized and their owners were shot at on the freeways” (Zia, *Asian American Dreams* 58) and car dealers “held raffles for the honor of taking a baseball bat to a Toyota to bash it to pieces” (Wu 71). The following scene of *Who Killed*

Vincent Chin? captures such an event: large crowd of white Americans takes turns swinging a sledgehammer – multiple two-handed swings – against the bodies of ownerless Japanese cars. Children are present, waving flags. Police officers stand nearby but do not interfere, assuming relaxed poses. The news caption reads: “Striking Back.”

“Striking back” implies a righteous resentment, of fighting against that which has wronged them. The news media captured by *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* exposes a logic of *ressentiment*, of developing a moral economy fundamentally driven by injury, a process critiqued extensively by Nietzsche. As I will detail at greater length in Chapter 3, *ressentiment* is related to but different from masochism, in that *ressentiment* seeks revenge for injustice while masochism seeks self-punishment, although both operate from injury as its affective or libidinal fuel. Under *ressentiment*, revenge is individuated upon particular objects of fury. Thus, the crowd in question is not just striking back at the economic downturn, at having lost their jobs; the specific targeting of Japanese cars means that they “strike back” against a machine, colored and exaggerated by racial logics. They “strike back” against a machine built by a machinelike people, a society of simulacra who can perform the American industry better than the Americans themselves. It is a foreign machine that they rage against; rather than directing proletarian rage towards the exploitative bourgeoisie that disenfranchises them domestically, they perform the nationalist ideology that enframes the entire corporate entity, from CEO to workers, as a single unit against a foreign power. Here, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* powerfully demonstrates a feedback loop between social drama and stage drama, a choreographic spectacle of violence predicated upon the annihilation of foreign metal bodies. It is embodied rehearsal, the destruction of *things* made doubly *things* by virtue of racialization; their Asianness, their uncanny signification as possessing a race, heightens their threat. And in turn, the discursive logic leads equally to its inverse, that the race itself is monstrous from its mechanization, from its oriental, machinelike quality.

But above all, the underlying the violence committed upon the automobiles reveals an intriguing masochistic operation of the Detroit labor force itself. As the participants of the Detroit car-lynchings were the perpetrators of violence, this may seem counter-intuitive, or perhaps points to a *sadistic* relation instead. However, the more crucial dimension of this interaction between Detroiters and cars is that there is no mistake that the participants are the former victims in the theater of Detroit techno-orientalism: hence the headline “striking back.” The propaganda cartoons of the cars and the performative spectacle of the car destruction equally contain the self-victimization of *ressentiment*, presupposing the Japanese as an omnipotent villain. The omnipotence ascribed to the other within the resentful fantasy is augmented precisely by this techno-orientalization, as the figure of the oriental-machine is at once soulless and all-powerful, an ascription that provides moral validation to the public car destruction. The car destruction, then, is immediately understood as a carnivalesque and thus merely temporary reversal of a status quo in which the oriental-machine remains sovereign. The masochist’s violence may consequently demonstrate the inverse of the relationship of masochism and sadism articulated in Freud’s early work – that is, that masochism is simply inwardly directed sadism rather than its own independent function, although Freud would change his position in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – in that what appears to be sadistic catharsis is secondary to a dominant narcissistic masochism. But in any event, *Who Killed Vincent Chin* establishes that both the cartoon car propaganda and even the physical car destruction produce a compensatory fantasy structure that is, first and foremost, fantasy, that the violence is somehow unreal and mythological, the realm of the masochistic imagination.

Regardless of whether Ebens and Nitz “actually” participated in such prior activities, *Who Killed Vincent Chin* clearly implies that such liminal performances of violence upon a racially marked vehicle were choreographic rehearsals for the two-handed baseball bat swings of Ronald Ebens upon Vincent Chin’s racialized body. These Bakhtinian carnivalesque public performances produced a topsy-turvy world of transgression,⁶ but the stage for such techno-lynchings transcended the lots of the auto dealers. In a constellation of anti-Asian hostility in early 1980s Detroit already described, the car-slayings were one node among many, but of particular note was the means by which they were embodied. Unlike the anti-Japanese bumper stickers and the racialized propaganda, the car-bludgeoning provided a corporeal momentum. For Ebens and Nitz, white workers disenfranchised by global capitalism, it is the transference of their own dehumanized status as standing-reserve onto an external Other, their expressive passion and rage a reminder of their humanity relative to the machine they have broken, rather than the person they have killed. In the context of such violence, Vincent Chin *became* automobile, at least within the frame of *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*. Moreover, Chin’s becoming-car is the opposing Janus head of the becoming produced in the Japanophobic cartoons and original choreographic spectacles of the destruction of Japanese cars documented in *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*: the automobile’s becoming-Asian.

Intriguingly, Ebens and Nitz were positioned as the wronged subjects of their own social drama. With Ebens’ “It’s because of you motherfuckers we’re out of work,” Chin, having become-automobile, is attached to the specter of the omnipotent techno-oriental machine, seen as perpetrator within the moral economy of Detroit. Like the public car destruction, the murder of Chin is a fantasy of *ressentiment*, understood as mere fantasy by the techno-oriental imagination. The unsurprising irony is that, between competing dramaturgical grids of intelligibility, Ebens and Chin compete for the position of wronged subject, and *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* brilliantly demonstrates this dialectic through its thorough and persistent survey of all of the players involved. The emotionally devastating climax of *Who Killed Vincent Chin* shows the reactions of Ebens and his legal team to the press when he has learned that he was won his appeal in the civil rights trial. The film cuts away to an interview with Ebens and his wife, in which Ebens states, “Detroit. It’s got the reputation for murder capital in the world. It’s like,” he pauses for a moment, then says indignantly, “and-and I didn’t even do it on purpose! You know, I didn’t just walk up and shoot somebody!” Then, cutting back to the trial aftermath, the documentary shows Ebens’ lawyer Khoury telling the assembled reporters, “The press has always reported this case one-sided since the beginning, and it’s really nice to get twelve people who agree with the way we look at this case.” Finally, a few minutes later, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* cuts back to Ebens’ interview, wherein Ebens says, “He [presumably a reporter] asked if justice failed somewhere in this case and uh, I don’t see anywhere it did fail. I-I think the way the system worked the way it should have worked. Right down the line.”

The indignation and apparent guiltlessness from Ebens and his legal team within *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* simply provides more evidence for the masochistic fantasy of self-victimization of Ebens and his team, positioning them as the recipients of unfair media attention. Then, in its final shot, the documentary cuts to an infinitely bereaved Lily Chin, literally trembling in and shock. Ebens’ fascinatingly absurd insistence that “he didn’t just walk up and shoot somebody” to morally soften his actions speaks to the potency resentment, one buttressed

⁶ I refer here to Mikhail Bakhtin’s classic *Rabelais and His World*, in which he describes the medieval carnivalesque as a finite period in which the “fools” are “elected kings” (385), demonstrating the capacity for the festive to possibly overturn society and its social norms.

by the sense of imagined unreality made at least partly possible by the techno-oriental interpellation carried within each bludgeon.

Thus, one of the compelling secondary effects of *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* is its portrait of *white* subject formation, of its capacity to produce both physical and epistemic violence based on its own appeals to victimization. The annihilation of Chin, which was equally the *production* of a machine figure, buttresses and secures this whiteness upon the moral economy of white *ressentiment*. Consequently, the legal battle that would ensue between Ebens and Asian Americans seeking redress was a contest of competing narratives of injury. One of the great accomplishments of *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* is its potent exhibition of Chin's murder as a becoming-machine itself, demonstrating the marriage of Asiatic racial form to the machine (ejected, then, as abject refuse) that served as a prerequisite for both white violence and white self-making.

What, then, of the objects of this racial violence, of the survivors in the wake of becoming-machine? As I will demonstrate next, Asian American responses to this becoming-machine, despite their attempts, did not successfully reject this relation outright; rather, they reconfigured it, partly as a consequence of politically strategic necessity.

“It's Not Fair”: The American Citizens for Justice and The New Sexless Machine

On March 31, 1983, thirteen days after the notoriously light sentencing of Ebens and Nitz, journalists Helen Zia and Henry Yee, lawyer Liza Chan, and community leader Kin Yee, in cooperation with Vincent Chin's mother Lily Chin among others, founded the American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), a civil rights organization with the primary purpose of seeking the justice for Vincent Chin that the first trial denied. Their preamble reads as follows:

We, as citizens of the United States of America and members of the Detroit, Michigan Asian American community, in order to seek fair and equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of their race, creed, color, sex, or national origin; to support just enforcement of our laws; to promote understanding between all groups of people; to educate the public on human rights issues; to bring about greater awareness of the needs and concerns of Americans of Asian ancestry; do hereby establish this constitution for the American Citizens for Justice (Bridges et al).

The tone of this document is representative of the ongoing communications of the ACJ throughout their organizing work in the 1980s. Working within the juridical and social mainstream, the ACJ consistently and strategically appealed to a liberal and assimilationist Americanism in order to achieve its goals. The opening sentence of the preamble, listing “citizens of the United States of America” before “members of the Detroit... Asian American community,” both emphasizes membership within the U.S. nation-state and subtly excludes those members of the Asian American community who may not, in fact, be citizens, not unlike the Japanese American Citizens' League in the period of Japanese American internment. The ACJ was committed to what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has termed (referring to Black Baptist activist women from 1880-1920) “the politics of respectability” (14) that aims to “earn their people a measure of esteem from white America” (14) but has had a tendency to disavow the culture of the “folk” – simply put, the disrespectable.

The Asian American “model minority” is the telos of Higginbotham's politics of respectability; it is the actualization of the structural position to which respectability aspires. Although the pragmatics of the political strategies of the ACJ likely demanded such modes of

respectability in order to garner popular support, they also helped consolidate the model minorityism that Asian American cultural politics continues to try to disavow. In these next several pages, through an examination of their archives, I analyze the organizing work of the ACJ through the lens of performance historiography, considering the means by which their collective process of narrativization performatively enacted a legible grievability for Vincent Chin, and in doing so, resignified the becoming-machine enacted by the murder itself to appeal to a palatable assimilationism. The ACJ's historic efforts engaged the mise-en-scene of the broader U.S. public, but most especially Asian Americans, tethering the narrative of Vincent Chin to dramaturgical imagination of liberal justice.

Chin's last words – "It's not fair" – would serve as the crux of the logic of the ACJ's rhetorical strategy, one that would prove to be quite effective in garnering support among mainstream Asian Americans. As I stated earlier, the invocation of "fairness" is premised upon the notion that, in US racial politics among others, "fair" treatment is something can be attained, has been historically attained, or, perhaps more accurately, *as if* the above were true. Furthermore, "fairness" implies an adherence to a tacit U.S. American social contract, a sense that the law-abiding subject be entitled to the benefits of recompense from liberal democracy. Consequently, the ACJ's public relations efforts focused on portraying Chin as a subject deserving of "fair treatment."

The ACJ mobilized locally, but the organization would eventually spearhead a movement that would garner nationwide attention, demanding that the Michigan Court of Appeals vacate the sentences and order a retrial (Chan 177) and eventually pushing for a civil rights investigation by the US Department of Justice. The ACJ was enormously successful in its pan-ethnic mobilization of the Asian American community around the issue and would be reasonably successful in the achievement of its legal objectives. As Sucheng Chan summarizes:

Sufficient evidence of violation was found and a federal grand jury was convened in September 1983. Two months later the grand jury indicted Ebens and Nitz on two counts. The following year they were tried in a U.S. district court, whose jury convicted Ebens of violating Chin's civil rights but acquitted him of conspiracy, while acquitting Nitz of both charges. Ebens was sentenced to 25 years in jail and was told to undergo treatment for alcoholism, but he was freed after posting a \$20,000 bond.

Ebens's attorney appealed the conviction and a federal appeals court overturned it in September 1986 on a technicality: one of the attorneys for American Citizens for Justice, who had interviewed several of the prosecution's witnesses, was said to have "improperly coached" them. The Justice Department ordered a retrial, which took place not in Detroit but in Cincinnati, a city whose residents not only had little exposure to Asian Americans in general but also were unfamiliar with the hostility that people in Detroit harbored against Japanese cars and Japanese-looking people. Much to the dismay of Asian Americans across the country, the Cincinnati jury acquitted Ebens of all charges. Neither he nor his stepson ever spent a day in jail. Lily Chin, Vincent's mother, was so upset by the final outcome that she left the United States—a country where, she felt, no justice existed—to live in China (177-178).

It is undeniable, then, that the ACJ played a central role in organizing Asian American legal efforts in the wake of Ebens' and Nitz's sentencing, including the "improper coaching" of a

witness (which I will address later in further detail at the end of this chapter). However, I wish to draw particular attention to how the ACJ strategically managed the public perception of Vincent Chin in order to tightly control the narrative of Chin as a wronged victim. As legal scholar Robert S. Chang accurately writes, “In order for Vincent Chin to become the focal point of organizing and politicizing people about anti-Asian violence, the unsavory parts of the narrative were suppressed” (23). An examination of archival documents from the American Citizens for Justice makes this clear; for example, in Helen Zia’s and other ACJ speeches and press releases, there is rarely any mention that the Fancy Pants Club, where the initial altercation between Chin’s party and Ebens and Nitz transpires, is a strip club. Instead, Zia and other ACJ spokespersons – certainly, strategically – repeatedly refer to “a bar.” Zia and the ACJ often emphasize Chin’s background as an engineering student, as well as his betrothal. A March 23, 1983 ACJ statement for the Chinese On Leong Association is reflective of these tendencies:

Vicent [*sic*] Chin was well-known and well-liked among Detroit’s Chinese.... He worked hard to help support his family, and at the time of his killing, had a promising career with an engineering firm. Chin worked a second job as a waiter at the Golden Star Restaurant, where Monday’s [On Leong] meeting was held.

On the night of his death, Chin and his three friends were celebrating his upcoming wedding which was to take place later that week. Chin’s father had died only a few months earlier; as an only son, a large wedding had been planned for Chin and his bride, with over 400 guests invited. Instead of celebrating Chin’s wedding, his guests attended his funeral.

The On Leong Press Statement’s narrative of Chin magnifies his respectability; both as an “only son” and as the sole male presence in the household, Chin is praised for dutifully supporting his family, even working a second job. His futurity as a guarantor of social reproduction is represented both economically and socially: “a promising career with an engineering firm,” as and the “large wedding... planned for Chin and his bride, with over 400 guests invited.” Helen Zia’s 2000 memoir *Asian American Dreams* describes Chin in much the same tone as ACJ’s documents, as well:

Vincent grew up into a friendly young man and a devoted only child who helped support his parents financially. He ran on his high school track team, but he also wrote poetry. Vincent was an energetic, take-charge guy who knew how to stand up for himself on the tough streets of Detroit. But friends and co-workers had never seen him angry and were shocked that he had been provoked into a fight....

Vincent was part of an entire generation for whom the immigrant parents had suffered and sacrificed. Other Asian Americans also found a strong connection to the lives of Vincent, Lily, and David Chin. Theirs was the classic immigrant story of survival: work hard and sacrifice for the family, keep a low profile, don’t complain and, perhaps in the next generation, attain the American dream. For Asian Americans, along with the dream came the hope of one day gaining acceptance in America. The injustice surrounding Vincent’s slaying shattered the dream.

But most of all, Vincent was everyone's son, brother, boyfriend, husband, father (*Asian American Dreams* 63).

Although aimed at two slightly different audiences – the Chinese American community in the midst of ACJ organizing and a mainstream lay readership retrospectively, respectively – both the On Leong press statement and Helen Zia's recounting are clear in establishing the respectability of Chin.⁷ The former places an emphasis on filial values and scholarship, while the latter is particularly intent on establishing Chin's mainstream Americanness in his investment in the "American dream." Zia's statement particularly invokes – and equally reifies – a wholesome masculinity, mentioning his work on the "track team" and characterizing him as "an energetic, take-charge guy." Additionally, Zia makes it abundantly clear that he and his family were *not* a threat; by both of these accounts, Chin and his family were quite literally model minorities, and the violence inflicted upon Chin was doubly unjust by virtue of the fact that he had, in effect, played by the rules. And finally, the most tragic dimension of the narrative, is the wedding that does not happen; the promise of what Lee Edelman has called (heteronormative) reproductive futurity is disrupted. The loss of marriage, and with it, the possibility of the Child and of social reproduction, serves as a central narrative fulcrum of Ebens and Nitz's atrocity. Zia's declaration of Chin as "everyone's son, brother, boyfriend, husband, father," furthermore establishes his symbolic value as legible primarily within this same hetero-familial nexus – the label of "father" especially, particularly since Chin was not a father. In the father, the relatability of Chin is magnified not by a mode of kinship that he embodied, but one that he *potentially* could have. The official Chin narrative thus demonstrates that model minority adherence to Americanness possesses a sexual dimension, that the "successful" assimilation of Chin and his family depend equally upon their docility to an economy of labor and of normative sexuality.

Ultimately, these rhetorical moves aim to render Chin's life as grievable. Considering the symbolic and epistemic violence that the Ebens and Nitz sentencing inflicted, the project of the ACJ was of imbuing Chin's life with value, emphasizing his dutifulness and normativity while expunging the unsavory. The act of remembering, of memorializing Vincent Chin, is one haunted by the question posed by Judith Butler: "what makes for a grievable life" (*Undoing Gender* 18)? As Butler articulates, grievability is never a given, and its unequal distribution is correlative with global and local inequalities, as well as discursive dehumanization. "On the level of discourse," writes Butler, "certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level" (25). Exclusion from "the human" is exclusion from grievability; "Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark" (25). The establishment of Chin as a moral and economic paragon of respectable-heteronormative Americanness – ensuring that the upcoming wedding, and not the strip club, is remembered – speaks to this strategic need to ensure that Chin is deserving of grief by conforming to normative humanness. However, regarding grievability, Butler insists that attempting to fit normative grievability has severe political limitations, reifying

⁷ Zia has had a tendency towards the magnification of normative respectability in other works, as well. For example, as Colleen Lye argues in "The Literary Case of Wen Ho Lee" (2011), Zia (as coauthor of *My Country Versus Me*, Wen Ho Lee's memoir) goes to great lengths to establish Lee's apparent naïveté and subsequent political education, establishing Lee as a dutiful adherent of the American Dream, in order to underscore the injustice that is inflicted upon him.

forms of kinship that non-normative lives have problematized and disrupted as long as they have existed. Speaking of queer lives in particular, Butler writes:

[I]t is one thing to assert the reality of lesbian and gay lives as a reality, and to insist that these are lives worthy of protection in their specificity and commonality; but it is quite another to insist that the very public assertion of gayness calls into question what counts as reality and what counts as a human life.... [T]o be called unreal and to have that call, as it were, institutionalized as a form of differential treatment, is to become the other against whom (or against which) the human is made. It is the inhuman, the beyond the human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality.... To be oppressed you first must become intelligible. To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible... is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not (29-30).

Butler thus asserts that to argue that a life is “worth protection,” that a life matters, is a comparatively unambitious one compared to the profound restructuring of reality itself that comes from publicly embracing the non-normative. For Butler, then, the “human” is an ambivalent category, defined (as all identifying groups are) by what it excludes, often violently, and on the basis of grievability.

The becoming-machine of Vincent Chin is what the ACJ’s rhetoric towards grievability attempts to combat; closer proximity to both sexual and economic normativity also means closer proximity to the “human,” insofar as “the human” is in fact constituted by such normativities. Yet, I would argue that the becoming-machine is not truly undone; rather, it is reconfigured within a melancholic masochistic apparatus. The insistence on Chin’s grievability recalls Anne Cheng’s racial melancholia in a literal sense, describing the racialized object-turned-subject who becomes dependent on mourning – in this case, a single figure in Chin. The racial melancholy of the ACJ is, in fact, a dominant affect of its rhetoric. However, as I have alluded earlier, melancholia bleeds into masochism by way of pleasure through self-annihilation. Notably, pleasure – specifically, Chin’s pleasure – is disavowed. Whereas in melancholia, there is a disavowal of the normative timeline of grief (grief is perpetual), in (Deleuzian) masochism, pleasure is disavowed in order to effectuate the ideal of coldness. Melancholically, Chin is frozen in time, like the photograph in the opening of this chapter, but the disavowal of the sexual Chin, the Chin who threw the first punch, the Chin who was civilization’s discontent, is the necessary prerequisite.

Chin’s excessive heteromascularity and pursuit of pleasure—indeed, his *organicity*—is what is purged from the official narrative. Given the valorization of pleasure within queer theory as “a rallying point of the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality” (Foucault *A History of Sexuality* vol. 1 157), I do not mean that Chin was a “queer” or even “feminist” figure; the Fancy Pants Club was by all means a site of heterosexist objectification of women, and on the eve of his wedding, Chin was reportedly a very active and enthusiastic participant of the club’s services. Chin furthermore did little to de-escalate the fight, throwing the first punch and shouting at Ebens and Nitz in the parking lot “Come on, you chickenshits, let’s fight some more” (qtd in Chang 23). Robert S. Chang hypothesizes that the initial animosity from Ebens and Nitz arises from a libidinal conflict of heteromascularity competition: “Chin was displacing [Ebens and Nitz] as (the rightful) consumers of sexual attention. Here we have economics, race, gender, and

sexuality coming together.... Loss of jobs entails a loss of masculinity. The loss of masculinity was caused by a racial and foreign Other, an Asian man who in many ways was just like them” (23-24). Considering the multiple levels of emasculation occurring in this context, Chang’s reading deepens the implications of Chin’s murder, suggesting that the racialized battle between Chin and Ebens ultimately transpires on the territory of patriarchy, and their shared attachment to dominant manhood ultimately provides the conceptual currency of value for the conflict.

Nevertheless, the sanitization of Chin, whose sexual expressiveness (even hetero expression) is strategically suppressed, whose moment of irrationality and violence is minimized and normalized (“an energetic, take-charge guy”), deliberately frames him as a model minority whose capacities for assimilation and complicity within a postindustrial capitalist market makes him an ideal American capitalist subject – and, even more tellingly, as an *engineer*, a job emphasizing his technological prowess. Insofar as it is premised upon utility, conformity, and a degree of predictable reproducibility, model minorityism is in fact coterminous with becoming-machine, and one that is buttressed by Asian American communities themselves, including the ACJ. In the case of Vincent Chin, Butler’s argument that the inhuman forms the boundary of the grievable requires a degree more specificity, when there are forms of “inhumanity” that are acceptable (the machine-like) and others that are not (the undisciplined and chaotically desiring). The promise of heteronormative futurity, the disavowal of pleasure with the excesses it typically entails, and the fidelity to the capitalist market (and moreover, a STEM field, as an engineer) converge to secure Chin’s status as a grievable model minority and, I would suggest further, a cyborg. Chin’s conversion into model minority is thus *also* a becoming-machine, only of a different, more palatable order. Unlike the threatening and grotesque becoming-machine of the Japanese car, the becoming-machine of the official ACJ narrative suggests a model minority that would serve domestic interests and help secure heteronormative futurity.

As the Vincent Chin case shows, there is a political and psychic toll attached to the politics of inclusion, one that perhaps necessarily operates from a logic of masochistic disavowal. Here, I invoke Gilles Deleuze, who asserts, “Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it” (31). Taking Deleuze’s definition, the disavowal of the desiring and violent creature, the disavowal of the scene of Chin’s pleasure, is one that “opens up” a new horizon, instantiating Chin’s status as model minority. Disavowal also produces a mechanized, non-desiring figure, what Deleuze calls “a new sexless man” a figure who transcends sensuality and the need for it: “The masochistic process of disavowal is so extensive that it affects sexual pleasure itself; pleasure is postponed for as long as possible and is thus disavowed. The masochist is therefore able to deny the reality of pleasure at the very point of experiencing it, in order to identify with the ‘new sexless man’” (33). Bourgeoning Asian American subjecthood in 1983 disavowed Chin’s pleasure, even if Chin’s pleasure seems to have been a lubricating catalyst for the racial violence stemming from Ebens and Nitz’s castrated masculinity (horribly recuperated by the phallus of the Louisville slugger). But additionally, Deleuze’s masochistic disavowal is one of temporal postponement, of suspension, of the denial of pleasure even “at the very point of experiencing it” (33). According to Deleuze, Masoch, and by extension the masochist, “does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is to disavow and thus to suspend it, in order to secure an ideal which is itself suspended in fantasy. He questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality, an operation which is perfectly in line with the judicial

spirit of masochism” (32-33). The vicarious disavowal of Chin’s pleasure by Asian American narrativization results in that pleasure’s postponement and resubstantiation in the repeated re-narrativization of Chin, symbolically transforming him into this masochistic “new sexless man” – or rather, a new sexless *machine* – by way of repetitive signification.

Indispensable to this melancholic masochism was the tireless figure of Lily Chin,⁸ photos of whom I discussed at the introduction of this chapter. If the Japanese car was the endpoint of the becoming-machine of Chin’s murder, the photograph of his photograph was the endpoint of this model minority idealization: proper, static, and neatly fit within the boundary of the frame. Recalling Rebecca Comay’s argument that there exists an underlying masochism within melancholia wherein the subject is whipped in “the sadomasochistic theater of grief,” the ACJ’s deployment of Lily Chin throughout its campaign nevertheless produced a fetishized visual spectacle of suffering, playing into the fantasy that an “infinitely sympathetic rescuer” (Kucich 24) – namely, the U.S. justice system – may intervene and end the social drama with reconciliatory justice. Indeed, in Deleuze’s interpretation of masochism, the mother figures prominently in masochistic fantasy, both idealized and disavowed as a representative of the law. The presence of what John Kucich terms as “the two interdependent elements of masochism” (33) – that is, “cherished suffering and fantasies of omnipotence” (33), or melancholy and magic, respectively – helps consolidate the Lily Chin photos as vivid props in the masochistic theater of grief. Kucich explains that these phases operate in sequence to produce masochistic fantasy: “The melancholic phase revolves around instances of self-sacrifice or self-punishment, in which exclusion, dependence, or abjection are cherished; the magical phase, by contrast, exaggerates autonomy, inclusion, and self-esteem. In masochistic fantasy, these two phases logically reinforce one another” (33). Furthermore, masochism serves to produce a “morally simplified” world, the brutal flagellation of Chin-as-martyr⁹ establishing clear character lines of protagonist

⁸ As many have noted the narrative similarities between the Vincent Chin case and the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, so exist similarities between the figuration of Lily Chin and Mamie Till. Both women were tireless activists whose grief was publically demonstrated to demonstrate the wrongness of their sons’ deaths in order to demand some form of justice denied to them by the juridical court system. But while Lily Chin is most iconically figured with the dignified photo of her son resting on her lap, Mamie Till is best known for her powerful and controversial demand that her horrifyingly mutilated son be displayed in an open casket. The image of Lily Chin is homologous with the whole and respectable Vincent, while Mamie Till is figured with the material annihilated Black body.

⁹ The sanitization of Chin effectively worked to turn Chin into a martyr for a budding Asian American cause. One can certainly analyze the Chin affair, and the ACJ’s work in particular, through martyrdom as a primary optic. In *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, Elizabeth Castelli writes that “American martyrdom has historically had far more to do with political conflicts and especially with race” (192), and that “[t]he language of martyrdom serves in these different examples as a way of assigning a broader symbolic meaning to an event that might otherwise be interpreted as senseless and capricious violence” (193). Hate crimes in particular, according to Castelli, bear the discursive legacy of early Christian martyrdom that “floats in the background uncannily, as a distant analogy, a narrative resource, and an object of ambivalent nostalgia” (193). But martyrdom, too, is entwined with masochism. Using the discourse of British imperialists as an example, John Kucich writes, “What is particularly striking about British imperial culture is how often it mythologized victimization and death as foundational events in the teleology of empire.... The foundational myth [of Captain Cook]... revolved around the sanctification implicit in the imperial martyr’s suffering--a sanctification that allied imperial pain with redemption and with the beginning, rather than the end, of history. In short, sanctification transformed the pain and finality of death or defeat into pleasurable fantasies of ecstatic rebirth or

and antagonist within the Asian American social drama. While the ACJ's organizing tactics disavowed the unrespectable pleasure of the strip club, it masochistically deployed the pain of melancholy represented by the respectable, grieving mother to summon the fantasy of the omnipotent savior of justice. That is to say, the ACJ disavowed the scene of sexuality for scenes of the wounding of the heteronormative telos – the mother mourning the son, the wedding that became a funeral – to follow a masochistic script of compensatory fantasy. Thus, what begins as a reaction to techno-oriental violence becomes an appropriation of techno-orientalism through model minorityism, within a masochistic fantasy structure tethered to a politics of respectability in order to galvanize its narrative antagonisms.

Through the ACJ's signification of Chin, techno-orientalism becomes repurposed as a masochistic technology of subjectification in order to resist the mode of abject otherness. It is also a masochism that may, on some level despite itself, urge towards its own death. After all, the later Freud (breaking from his initial argument that masochism was merely sadism turned upon one's own ego) suggested that the death instinct, the "inherent" urge to return to inorganicity, runs within hypothetical, primary masochism: "Masochism, the turning round of the instinct upon the subject's own ego, would in that case be a return to an earlier phase of the instinct's history, a regression" (48-49). In becoming an organization committed to providing redress to wrongful, racialized death, the ACJ sought out that moment again and again, masochistically repeating the wound within the limited confines of an American legal system that would ultimately fail them.

Ultimately, the official Chin narrative demonstrates that model minority adherence to Americanness possesses a sexual dimension, that the "successful" assimilation of Chin and his family depend equally upon their docility to an economy of labor and of normative sexuality. That is to say, Chin is obedient to the econo-sexual morays of his home. The right, as opposed to the wrong, kind of machine. Not unlike how the model minority is in actuality the reverse mirror image of the yellow peril, Chin is configured from repository of neo-Luddite fear to a helpful cog in the US sexual-economic order. However, paradoxically, there is also an erotics of this transformation. In order to explore this, I move to the staged, dramatic performance I referenced in the beginning of this talk: Ping Chong's 1995 play *Chinoiserie*, which deploys the murder of Chin as a masochistic climax to conclude its nonlinear narrative.

Suspense and Masochistic Reparation: Ping Chong's *Chinoiserie*

On a dark, minimally set stage, the twenty-first scene of Ping Chong's 1995 experimental play *Chinoiserie* plays out: a projection stating "From a Chinese-English Phrasebook of 1875" is displayed overhead. Three of the performers conduct a range of choreographic movements corresponding to the lines stated by Ping Chong and Aleta Hayes, who alternate statements. Starting with phrases that are from the actual 1875 phrasebook—"He took it from me by violence / He claimed my gold mine. / He cheated me out of my wages," the statements quickly become anachronistic, forming a pastiche of esoteric statements that meanderingly approach a foreboding of exclusion and anti-Chinese sentiment. Chong and Hayes say lines such as "Was *Coolie High* a film about inner-city Chinese youth?", to a string of racial epithets, to "The Chinese immigration will soon be stopped," to "Everybody was kung-fu fighting—huh!", and

resurrection" (5). Similarly here, the posthumous conferral of political martyr status thus inculcates a modality of pleasure and rebirth that reflects the masochistic function – this will become particularly apparent in the upcoming section regarding the documentary *Vincent Who?*.

then one of the last, and longest of the lines: “The Vincent Chin murder case united the Chinese community in ways never seen before.” Even among the seeming randomness of the phrases, the line about Vincent Chin stands out as serious and expository, a jarringly prosaic climax to the litany of phrases.

In a sense, this scene serves as a synecdoche of the larger play: an escalating rhythm of short phrases and movements with a masochistic climax of racial injury. Commissioned by the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln Nebraska in 1995, *Chinoiserie* is the second of what would be known as dramatist Ping Chong’s “East/West Quartet.” As a multimedia queer theater maker and artist who began work in 1972, Chong’s *oeuvre* is massive, spanning more than fifty plays across three continents, and having earned two Obie awards, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a spread of many others. Unlike many Asian American playwrights of his generation or immediately following it – Frank Chin, Philip Kan Gotanda, Momoko Iko, and Velina Hasu Houston, for example – Chong did not begin his career within the institution of Asian American theater companies, but rather with the theatrical avant-garde.¹⁰ Partly due to this fact, as well as Canadian origins, plus the fact that his work as a whole has not fully committed to the “Asian American theater” concerns of his time, he is sometimes only ambivalently considered an “Asian American playwright” as part of the tradition with which the title is associated. Nevertheless, his *East/West Quartet* remains quite influential within Asian American theater studies.¹¹

Chong describes *Chinoiserie* as “a documentary concert theatre work” and “meta-theatre” (xxiv). Taking as its departure point as the 1793 first contact between Chinese Emperor Qianlong and the trade emissary of King George III, the play fluidly moves between various historical moments all engaged with the encounter of China or Chinese people by Anglo/Americans. Blending an international array of instrumentation, vocal song, elaborate choreography, and overhead projection with a nonlinear pastiche of historic flashes, *Chinoiserie* is a thoroughly multimedia production requiring particular attention to the audio and visual registers. But one of the central theatrical thrusts of *Chinoiserie* is that of Vincent Chin and the grief of his mother Lily Chin. The Chin narrative haunts the whole of *Chinoiserie*, serving as a slow, masochistic reveal, displaying an aesthetics of suspension. As Deleuze notes, suspension (along with disavowal) is a central aspect of sexual, Oedipal masochism writing: “It is no exaggeration to say that Masoch was the first novelist to make us of suspense as an essential ingredient of romantic fiction” (33). Suspense functions to draw the reader or audience into the masochistic fantasy, for “the art of suspense always places us on the side of the victim and forces us to identify with him” (34). The torturer’s whip, after all, must suspend and produce anticipatory tension before its strike in order to fulfill its erotic potential. Similarly, *Chinoiserie* flirts with the audience, teasing

¹⁰ Here, I follow Esther Kim Lee’s historicizing rubric in *A History of Asian American Theatre* (2006); Lee prefers to keep Chong separate from the “first” and “second” waves of Asian American playwrights in the 1970s and 1980s due to his generally separate genealogy. I will also note here that Chong’s distance from the “core” of Asian American theater of that period is of some significance in relationship to the Chin case; much of his work throughout the years avoided direct discussion of Asian American issues until *Deshima*, the first of his “East West Quartet,” in 1992. I venture to say that intellectually speaking, Chong was not primarily influenced by the Asian American Movement discourses as those in the “first” and “second” waves of Asian American theater were, but came to the subject circuitously. *Deshima*, which covers Japanese American internment among other issues, was initially inspired by his study of Van Gogh, for example. This means that it is likely that his first access to Asian American politics occurred within a post-1982, Vincent Chin-inflected style of liberal discourse.

¹¹ See Karen Shimakawa’s *National Abjection* (2001) and Joshua Chambers-Letson’s *A Race So Different* (2014).

towards its climax of horror, dangling Chin's death before the audience as its terrible narrative reward.

Chinoiserie relies highly on its nonverbal stage elements to propel its dramatic action, such as its overhead projection, which provides a combination of historical exegesis, character context, and poetry. Most crucially, the overhead projection provides a slow count, numbering each scene from one to forty, each number accompanied by the entire cast in unison stating the number. With the passing of each number, the play visually projects a built-in rhythm, hurtling its audience forward and instilling a lingering tension, unclear which number would be the last, or whether the numbering would alter or cease. The scenes vary greatly in length and in context, portraying moments including but not limited to Ping Chong's contemporary autobiographical anecdotes, historical narrations, historical reenactments, and a restaging of sinophobic theater.

However, there are two crucial sound cues that reappear repeatedly throughout the performance. The first is the sound of a baseball being hit and accompanying roar by the crowd, which first appears in the middle of Scene 9, following a meditation on Chinese-derived gunpowder tea and immediately after one of the ensemble actors asks the audience: "Whose history is this anyway" (75)? The second is the sound of a loud cannonball, appearing first at the top of Scene 10 to initiate a scene covering the 1792 confrontation of Great Britain with China, forcibly demanding China open its doors to trade. After this latter sound, as the actors collectively narrate the story, alternating stating in chorus the onomatopoeia "Boom boom boom," indexing the cannonball sound with their percussive voices.

Both the baseball and the cannonball sounds are repeated several times throughout the play as the scene numbers steadily increase one by one; the former is enshrouded in a degree of mystery due to its apparent decontextualization, whereas the latter begins in context and becomes resignified repeatedly. Still, despite the relative lack of characterization and linear narrative structure, both sounds seem to suspensefully build towards a linear climax. It is only with the first vague reference to Vincent Chin in Scene 16, followed by Lily Chin's first appearance – played by noted African American dancer and performer Aleta Hayes – in Scene 17, that it becomes apparent how these sounds are destined to resolve. At the beginning of Scene 16, Hayes states a line quoted directly from a scene of *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, "Boom. Boom. Boom. / All I heard was boom boom boom. / Men fighting, ya know" (83). Notably, this line is from the Fancy Pants dancer Starlene, who is named and given exposure in *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, but *Chinoiserie* does not do so, leaving her role and name ambiguous and unmarked. This transitions surreally to the baseball bat sound, a sports announcer gleefully announcing the Detroit Tigers' defeat of the Toronto Blue Jays, and then the shift to Scene 17 showcasing Hayes as Lily Chin, who tells the story of adopting a young Vincent from China. Unlike her role as Starlene, Hayes' role as Lily Chin is explicit, her name displayed on the overhead projector.

Both Lily Chin and the Starlene's account would appear in segments at a time, hinting at the final bludgeoning of Vincent interwoven with the historical political narrative of Anglo/American sinophobia, but Lily Chin as a character would be named, while Starlene would not. Many of Lily Chin's lines – written by Michael Matthews and largely derived from *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* – establish the Chins as law abiding, respectable US subjects. For example in Scene 22, Mrs. Chin recalls:

My husband serves in the American army
we were happy to come to America
my father say America hard

my husband say America good
and I think so, too.

And lots of Chinese
lots of Chinese
my husband say all American good
he get job in a factory
we go to baseball game
very American
but they kick and curse at us.
I ask my husband
why they do this?
Why they do this?
(*Sound of baseball being hit. A crowd roars.*) (96)

This two-stanza monologue establishes the immigrants' hyper-Americanness, a willingness to participate in the armed forces,¹² participate productively in the economy, and even attempt to partake in the quintessentially American pastime of baseball. It demonstrates the same politics of respectability in the ACJ organizing from the previous section, a continuation of the same political-rhetorical strategy. Then, the final violence inflicted upon Chin serves as the dramatic apogee of the play, revealing furthermore the baseball bat as the instrument of Chin's death. Following Scene 35 – an eerie rendition of the cast singing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” first in Chinese, then in English, followed by the baseball hit sound – Scene 36 gruesomely describes the murder itself by three of the male actors in ensemble:

MICHAEL: Nitz
RIC: Ebens
MICHAEL: Two big white *guys*
RIC: One with a *mustache*
MICHAEL: Two big white *guys*
RIC: One holding a *bat*
MICHAEL: A bear hug from *behind*
RIC: A full swing to the *head*
MICHAEL: A bear hug from *behind*
RIC: A full swing to the *head*
MICHAEL: He held the bat with both *hands*
RIC: A full swing to the *head*
MICHAEL: Again
RIC: Again
SHI-ZHENG: *Again*
CAST: Boom boom boom
MICHAEL: All I heard *was*
CAST: Boom boom boom

¹² Well in line with the history of racialized people in the US – the Buffalo Soldiers, the Tuskegee Airmen, the 442nd Infantry Battalion, the American Indian Codetalkers, and so on – utilizing military service to demonstrate loyalty and perform equality.

MICHAEL: Doubles, triples, and *home runs*
 CAST: Boom boom boom
 MICHAEL: His skull was *crushed*
 RIC: Pieces of brain bleed into *tar*
 MICHAEL: The body released turns and *falls*
 RIC: He was wearing white *socks*
 MICHAEL: The body released turns and falls
 RIC: Not a speck of blood on white *socks*
 MICHAEL: A black man standing on the corner *says*:
 PING: Ebens swung the bat as if a baseball player was swinging for a home run, full contact, full swing.
 (*Sound of baseball being hit.*) (114-115, original emphasis)

Within this frenzied, climactic retelling, the dramatic crescendo of violence reaches its peak; furthermore, it mirrors the usage of repetition seen throughout the play prior. “A bear hug from *behind*” and “A full swing to the *head*” are repeated for dramatic emphasis, but also invoke the rhythmic echoes throughout the play of “boom boom boom” and the baseball bat strikes. This final annihilation of Chin in the play, followed by Aleta Hayes’ sobbing Lily Chin in Scene 37, functions as the ultimate fruition of masochistic suspense until this point, a suspense including not only the selective details of Chin’s murder, but an entire history of Chinese contact with Britain and the United States.

Moreover, the usage of repetition, the slow numbered count that leads to the climax, also infuses the play with industrial relentlessness. *Chinoiserie* produces masochistic suspense through an aesthetic of industrial erotics in which the components of narrative are assembled to produce a final product. Similarly, the “boom boom boom” of the cannonballs and the baseball bat swings places Chin into a continuity of the modern, an age of mass reproduction, and equally, mechanical racialization.

In this sense, *Chinoiserie* treats the murder of Vincent Chin as the masochistic climax of the entire play, erupting not only from a history of anti-Chinese rhetorics and violence, but an avant-garde theatrical structure whose postmodern timekeeping and poetics parallels the assembly line. The projection at the end of Scene 37, immediately following Lily Chin’s lament, reads: “Vincent Chin’s murderers never served any jail term. They were fined \$3780 and released on probation” (117), silently providing the emotional fulcrum upon which the metahistorical narrative rests. However, on this theatrical assembly line, the assembly of meaning comes with the disassembly of the Chinese body once aural smoke of the “boom boom booms” is clear. Through the staging of self-annihilation, *Chinoiserie* embraces a masochistic fantasy of reparation. The play spectacularizes historical wounding as self-wounding through its strategic deterritorialization of the Chin murder, Anglo-Chinese relations more broadly, and Ping Chong’s personal life experience.

Chinoiserie, echoing the prior Asian American responses to the Chin murder, reflects a racial masochism of the machine, one that would fantasize and spectacularize self-annihilation. In this sense, *Chinoiserie* reveals racial masochism’s entwining with a poetics of modern machinery, suggesting that self-annihilation is to be found in the staccato of the cannonball and the baseball bat, American rhythms into which Asian Americans try to enter. Chin’s inclusion into the rhythm of Scene 36 is only possible via his dismantling, his techno-lynching, his becoming-machine, for the postmodern catharsis of the witnessing audience. The theatrical

masochism of *Chinoiserie*'s quasi-narrative arc depends on a techno-orientalist onslaught to the senses, and presents a Chinese American subjectivity based upon Chin's disintegration itself.

The play seems to seek reparation, although the shape of such reparation is necessarily vague;¹³ regarding the end of *Chinoiserie*, Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson writes that the play uses "the stage to imagine the kinds of collective, social acts that are required in order to make reparative justice possible. This occurs through an excavation, confrontation, and reconciliation with the past. Using the imaginative space of the stage, *Chinoiserie* models a reparative practice to create conditions of possibility in which justice might finally make itself known" (95). The play's deployment of Vincent and Lily Chin also echoes what Anne Cheng has described as the move from grief to grievance: "public grievance is a social forum and luxury to which the racially melancholic minorities have little or no access. If the move from grief to grievance, for example, aims to provide previously denied agency, then it stands as a double-edged solution, since to play the plaintiff is to cultivate, for critics, a cult of victimization. So the gesture of granting agency through grievance confers agency on the one hand and rescinds it on the other" (174-175). Such theatrical melancholia, then, allows grief to become political, although it also risks undercutting the temporal space for grief itself. However, I must pessimistically add the caveat that within the boundaries of respectability, the potential reach of the borders of grievability are shortened even as they are actually widened to include a Chinese American man. This is because, in regards to the Vincent Chin case, *Chinoiserie* represents an unintentional aesthetic materialization of the ACJ's organizing strategies. Like the ACJ organizing material – and notably, *unlike* the 1987 *Who Killed Vincent Chin* – *Chinoiserie* omits the desiring Chin, the angry Chin, retreating to a logic of American universalism even as it ostensibly critiques it. While the melancholia of the ACJ's rhetoric, reflected again in *Chinoiserie*, temporally disrupts the normative timeline of grief, and confers melancholic racial subjects a capacity to grieve that the state juridical apparatus has denied, it nevertheless validates the preexisting boundaries of grievability, thus thwarting the "pathological" potential that melancholia often seems to afford. Although it intriguingly attaches the Chin narrative to a transnational history of Chinese/Anglo interaction, *Chinoiserie* ultimately aspires to a universal humanism that (rightfully) seems largely impossible given the racial-political strife exhibited throughout the rest of the play: the final overhead projections of *Chinoiserie* read "You believe in the goodness of mankind" and "To be continued into the 21st century" (122). There is, as in masochism, a kind of faith in the contract; in this case, a liberal social contract in which "the goodness of mankind" – unraced, colorblind, and for that matter, gendered – may be able to overcome social difference and social disparity.

Moreover, the naming of Lily Chin, alongside the *unnaming* of Starlene, even as both women's words are quoted from *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, further demonstrates this point; the mother, and not the stripper, is given acknowledgment, even though both of their testimonials are crucial for its intended dramatic effect. Whereas *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* is open about Fancy Pants' status as a strip club, and Vincent Chin's interaction with its employees, *Chinoiserie* re-obscures Fancy Pants and returns to the official strategically respectable ACJ narrative, even as

¹³ As Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman have written regarding the question of slavery reparations in the writings of Ottobah Gugoano, "justice is beyond the scope of the law, and redress necessarily inadequate. If what has been done cannot be undone, then the forms of legal and social compensation available are less a matter of wiping the slate clean than of embracing the limited scope of the possible in the face of the irreparable, and calling attention to the incommensurability between pain and compensation" (1-2). *Chinoiserie* gestures towards this form of reparation, although, as I argue, it remains limited by its attachments to normative grievability.

the play quotes directly from Starlene. Paradoxically, even as it narratively eroticizes the techno-oriental lynching of Vincent Chin, *Chinoiserie* adheres to the model minorityism of the ACJ in order to streamline its narrative.

Ironically, the dismantling of the model minorityism of Vincent Chin would occur on a different stage, one more pedagogical than rarefied. While *Chinoiserie* would deploy masochism as an aesthetic, the 2013 Vincent Chin Trial Reenactment would deploy moral masochism as an *analytic*, one that dislodges the oft-overdetermined affects and narratives ossified within the Vincent Chin affair.

The UC Hastings Reenactment & Masochistic Reconfiguration

The Vincent Chin Trial Reenactment was staged at the University of California, Hastings Law School in San Francisco, CA on January 30 and February 1, 2013, free and open to the public. While also a masochistic performance, the UC Hastings reenactment reconfigures masochism itself as a mode of self-interrogation. Crucially, the Hastings reenactment deploys masochism not as fantasy, but, as in Amber Jamilla Musser's sense, an *analytic*. The reenactment was co-written by UC Hastings Dean Frank Wu, Judge of the US Court of the Appeals Denny Chin, and the Asian American Bar Association of New York, and was directed by famed playwright Philip Kan Gotanda, an alumnus of Hastings himself. Having a clear legal emphasis, the hour-long reenactment consists primarily of the staging of select transcripts from the series of trials involving Ebens and Nitz, including examinations, cross-examinations, and arguments from the prosecution and defense. The various figures in the Chin legal drama – including Saperstein, Kaufman, Liza Chan, and others – are predominantly performed not by trained actors but by Hastings law faculty and alumni in the Baxter Appellate Law Center. Throughout, Frank Wu and Denny Chin stand at either side, narrating, providing commentary, and providing contextual walkthroughs between excerpts. A PowerPoint display provides photos and other additional material and information of the various figures who appear in the narration.

Although performed with minimal theatrical production apparatus, I examine the UC Hastings reenactment as a work of documentary theater, a medium well-rehearsed within performance studies, and like all such works, the UC Hastings reenactment provokes the question posed by Carol Martin: “not everything in the archive is part of the documentary.... What is the basis for the selection, order, and manner of presentation of materials from the archive” (9)? Consequently, continues Martin, “The process of selection, editing, organization is where the creative work of documentary theatre gets done” (9). In other words, documentary theater is a curatorial medium, defined as much by its selections from the archive as much as that from its omissions, all the while creating “its own aesthetic imaginaries while claiming a special factual legitimacy” (Martin 10) and, “[a]s staged politics, specific instances of documentary theatre construct the past in service of the future the authors would like to create” (10). Thus, being mindful to the documentary theater form, I find it particularly curious that the UC Hastings reenactment, contrary to *Chinoiserie*, elects to provide a multifaceted account that problematizes its own moral thrust, within a structure that has been traditionally read as didactic or even non-aesthetic. Although the reenactment ends with a melancholic nostalgia for death – Denny Chin closes, “The death of a man was the birth of a movement” – the piece overall resists the normative idealization as in the ACJ propaganda. The UC Hastings reenactment could have been entirely propagandistic in its account of Chin, yet nevertheless chooses to provide a multifaceted picture of the various arguments of both the prosecuting and defending sides of the trials.

Beginning with the original sentencing of Ebens and Nitz, the reenactment transitions to the federal civil rights trial that begins on June 5, 1984, which is prefaced by Denny Chin's explanation that the primary point of contention was not Ebens and Nitz's violence (which was undisputed), but rather that of motivation: "The government had to prove that Ebens and Nitz acted *because* of Chin's race." The reenactment spends the plurality of its time on this particular trial, beginning with the opening statements, followed by two witness testimonies (both examinations and cross-examinations), and closing statements. Far from obscuring the fact of the strip show, the first witness portrayed is Racine Calwell, an exotic dancer at the Fancy Pants Club who testifies that Ebens states, "It's because of you little motherfuckers that we're out of work." The cross-examination of Calwell by defense attorney David Lawson attempts to cast doubt on her objectivity, emphasizing that Vincent Chin was a regular patron of the club and that perhaps Calwell enjoyed his company.

The presence of Calwell's testimony in this curated reenactment not only serves as strong evidence in favor of the prosecution, but also undeniably acknowledges the unrespectable strip club scene in which the initial fight occurs. Furthermore, Lawson's cross-examination displays a curious irony that would persist throughout this segment of the reenactment: unlike the dismissiveness of Saperstein in the first trial, the defense rhetorically aims to *humanize* Chin. The reenactment performs Lawson's closing remarks, in which he states, "Vincent Chin was the same as Ronald Ebens: a human being. He was not a person who had only great virtues and no faults. Vincent Chin got drunk and he went to nude bars and he started a fight and then he wanted to finish the fight. And Mr. Ebens, like Mr. Chin, became full of rage, and Mr. Ebens wanted revenge. Vincent Chin wanted to finish the fight. Does this make him a hero or a martyr?" Although this can certainly be read as a cynically colorblind and reactionary move – that Chin occupies the space of universal humanity only insofar as it aids the case of the white perpetrator – it is nevertheless noteworthy that the reenactment de-sanitizes Chin and restores missing pieces from the "official" ACJ narrative.

Moreover, the reenactment curiously chooses to hold ACJ lawyer Liza Chan accountable for improper witness preparation, which would be cited as the primary justification for overturning Ebens' guilty civil rights verdict in 1986, a point that is typically minimized in official accounts Chin narrative: *Chinoiserie* and even the commendably-balanced *Who Killed Vincent Chin* all overlook this point entirely, while historian Sucheng Chan mentions it only briefly without further elaboration. The UC Hastings reenactment makes the narrative choice to depict Chan's improper coaching at length based on her interview of Chin's friends Jimmy Choi, Robert Siroskey, and Gary Koivu on May 17, 1983; Chan coaches all of the witnesses together to ensure that there was continuity in their testimonies, despite the fact that several of them express uncertainty with the exact details of the event. Chan's opening to the meeting is particularly problematic (the following is quoted directly from Appendix A of 800 F2d 1422 *United States v. Ebens*, which is performed in the reenactment):

We will agree this is the story, this is it. When it's a federal prosecution, h'm, we're all going to have to be agreeing on this is what happened. Now, if you don't agree, like I explained to them earlier, you definitely remembered certain things happened, say, it's a black car and you definitely remembered it's a white car and we kind of (inaudible), okay, other than that, let's all have it sort of down, have it down pat, is it five minutes or is it ten minutes. Is it more like eight minutes, let's all agree. Otherwise, you all look funny on the stand. You all supposedly were there. But one says two minutes, the other says eight and that's what robbed me before.

Throughout the following interview, Chan is also particularly insistent on finding verbal examples of racist hate speech from Ebens and Nitz, hard evidence of Ebens and Nitz's inherent racism that would aid the government's civil rights argument. Choi (played, amusingly, by Gotanda in the reenactment), Siroskey, and Koivu have difficulty deciding exactly what it was that Ebens or Nitz said and its racist content, and Chan guides their preparation throughout.

Technically, defense attorney Lawson's closing remarks are not altogether incorrect when he states: "we have three different racial allegations by three different people surfacing at three different times. People worked hard with each other and their attorneys searching the dark recesses of their minds to find something. Anything that could make this a racial murder." The UC Hastings reenactment acknowledges that the prosecuting legal team pushed insistently to find evidence of overt racism from Ebens and Nitz in order to consolidate Chin's racial victimhood, when, on the basis of the presence of ethnic slurs, such evidence was ambiguous. Furthermore, the ACJ's success in community mobilization was ironically counted against the prosecution, accused of influencing the jurors in the initial civil rights trial.

Yet, given the broader context of all that occurred surrounding Chin's death and punishment that was dealt in the wake of his death as I have explored throughout this chapter, it would be absurd to say that race and racism were altogether absent. The failure, rather, is in the law itself, and the utter incapacity for the U.S. juridical system to have an adequate vocabulary or grasp of racism beyond the simple paradigm of overt racial injury by individual perpetrators. In its multidimensional portrayal of the players on both sides, the UC Hastings reenactment displays the very cognitive limits of the legal apparatus to grasp the operation of racist discourse. As Frank Wu concludes in the reenactment:

Was race a factor? Ebens steadfastly denied that he was motivated by Chin's race and in post-trial interviews even to this day he continues to deny that he is a racist. Perhaps Ebens is not a hardcore racist, but perhaps too, racism may be more ambiguous and complex and subtle. Clearly, the mix of the recession, alcohol, testosterone, and tempers was a lethal combination. Ebens was not a racist in the conventional, simple sense, but he may have well been motivated by racial impulses that he may have only been dimly aware of, if at all.

Here, Wu gestures towards an understanding of race that is "more ambiguous and complex and subtle," an operation of racism that operates more deeply and systemically than the "injurious performatives" of hate speech described and problematized by Judith Butler. Moreover, by portraying the Chin trials from a multitude of vantage points, displaying how Ebens eventually but perhaps fairly "won" by the rules of the legal game, the UC Hastings reenactment implies the absurd incapacity of the legal apparatus to even provide adequate terms by which injustice was committed.

The 2013 UC Hastings reenactment masochistically subjects its own political protagonist – the Vincent Chin justice legal team – to punishment, and furthermore demonstrates the potency of masochism, in the analytical mode, to demonstrate the absurdity of the law. Thus, the ACJ, rather than Chin, becomes the focus of masochistic punishment. Deleuze argues that masochism aims to subvert the law by embracing and pushing it to its furthest extremes through the deployment of the contract, which consists of promises to torture and punish according to the desires of the masochist: "By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or to conjure.... A close

examination of masochistic fantasies or rites reveals that while they bring into play the strictest application of the law, the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it). It is a demonstration of the law's absurdity" (88). What is being displayed in the UC Hastings reenactment is a literal scrupulous application of the law, and doing so demonstrates its very limit, not just in procuring justice, but in limiting and codifying racist violence within the bounds of overt performative "hate speech."

Through this masochistic performance of rigorous law, the UC Hastings reenactment does not foreclose all conclusions but one (*ressentiment* and outrage), but rather opens up a more compelling conclusion: that Liza Chan and the ACJ's folly was not so much in breaking "the rules," but rather in following too closely the terms in which racism (and by extension, "fairness" and equal treatment) is defined in juridical discourse, that is, as words of overt injury. After all, it was not so much the overtly racist motives of killing of Chin, as the light sentence of Ebens and Nitz given by Judge Kaufman, that was of greatest violence to Asian Americans. It was the epistemic violence from the sovereign juridical power, more than the bludgeoning itself, that loudly declared that Asian lives did not matter. The masochistic UC Hastings reenactment ironically demonstrates the futility to achieve "justice" insofar as the terms of injustice remain as they are, bounded in narrow terms of epithets and overtly discriminatory intentions. As Butler writes, "the court's speech carries with it its *own* violence, and... the very institution that is invested with the authority to adjudicate the problem of hate speech recirculates and redirects that hatred in and as its own highly consequential speech, often coopting the very language that it seeks to adjudicate" (*Excitable Speech* 54). And although the UC Hastings reenactment falls short of demonstrating this, one can infer from it that the greatest culprit is not Ebens or Nitz, but systemic racism itself, from the courts to techno-orientalist discourse of Detroit automakers. Thus, *Vincent Who?* and the UC Hastings reenactment offer two separate deployments of Asian American masochistic historiography as they look towards the future, offering up two opposed modalities for Chin's legacy: one that both melancholically and masochistically feeds off of Chin's murder, and another that masochistically engages its own movement to demonstrate a need for a more radical politics.

Judge Kaufman once stated in 1983, "the Asian community owes me some gratitude, for bringing their community together under one cause." If we are to accept the masochism demonstrated by *Vincent Who?*, Kaufman would indeed be correct. For better or for worse, despite the radical potential of masochism, it is that former masochism that has grown dominant in both Asian American political consciousness and Asian American cultural production. On at least some level, contemporary "Asian America" was interpellated in Chin's murder, an interpellation mediated by Chin's becoming-machine, and the machine's becoming-Asian. The identity itself owes its contemporary life to this double bind, this marriage that Vincent Chin officiated before his own actual wedding, between the technological and the Oriental, in which he becomes both the object of violence and the object of history, with Asian America itself gaining substance in his wake.

The becoming-machine of the Asian American sets a paradigm for the following chapter, which jumps ahead three decades to explore contemporary Asian American alternative literature. The next chapter explores the phenomenology of becoming-machine, its psychic interiority, and the means by which race is not only interpellated, but becomes a component of perception and spatiality itself.

Chapter 2 Screen Time

Affective Flatness and the Techno-Orientalization of the Self in Tao Lin's *Taipei* and Tan Lin's *Insomnia and the Aunt*

In 2011, columnist Wesley Yang published an article entitled “Paper Tigers” in *New York Magazine*, a confessional and often-masochistic reflection on Asian masculinity. In the opening pages, Yang writes:

Here is what I sometimes suspect my face signifies to other Americans: an invisible person, *barely distinguishable from a mass of faces that resemble it*. A conspicuous person standing apart from the crowd and yet devoid of any individuality. An icon of so much that the culture pretends to honor but that it in fact patronizes and exploits. Not just people “who are good at math” and play the violin, but *a mass of stifled, repressed, abused, conformist quasi-robots* who simply do not matter, socially or culturally.

I’ve always been of two minds about this sequence of stereotypes. On the one hand, it offends me greatly that anyone would think to apply them to me, or to anyone else, simply on the basis of facial characteristics. On the other hand, *it also seems to me that there are a lot of Asian people to whom they apply* (1-2, emphasis added).

Here, Yang spells out the terms in which he feels inferiority as an Asian American male – the stereotype by which he is perceived (“a mass of stifled, repressed, abused, conformist quasi-robots”), coupled with the sense that in fact, from his perspective, the stereotype holds at least a modicum (or more) of validity (“it also seems to me that there are a lot of Asian people to whom they apply”). The lived experience of living under the weight of dominant stereotype recalls the articulations already well-laid out in Black theories of racial subjectification, notably W.E.B. DuBois’ notion of double consciousness, but perhaps even more predominantly, the work of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In his oft-cited chapter, alternately titled “The Fact of Blackness” or “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” Fanon describes the moment of being hailed by a young girl on the street, the call of “Look, a negro!” immediately providing Fanon a phenomenological awareness of his own body, via an apparatus that Fanon called the “epidermal racial schema.” Importantly, writes Fanon, this schema under the white gaze is a “slow construction of my self as body in a spatial and temporal world.... It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world—definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world” (91). This epidermal racial schema describes the experiential structure of being made aware of one’s own raced body, and accordingly, the perceptions and positionalities accompanying that body in a white supremacist order.

Of course, the lived experience of Wesley Yang’s Asian American man differs wildly in terms of the historical and racial specificities that accompany Asiatic racial form, as opposed to that of Blackness. Yet, the phenomenological awareness of one’s own body as raced, as placed in a grid of racial intelligibility, follows an analogous, if not identical, mechanism. The interpellative hail of the little white girl, whether literal, unconscious, or discursive, produces an immediate, insecure consciousness of the misshapen body, and in the case of Asian American maleness, this body takes the form of machine-like. Additionally, to Yang’s overtly self-loathing dismay, there seems to be a “truth” to the stereotype to which he is being assigned. Not unlike

Frank Chin in the 1970s, who bemoaned Asian Americans complicit with white orientalist stereotype,¹ Yang anguishes over the fact that Asian Americanness may in fact consist of servility to the white racial order; the ultimate irony, then, is that Yang (again, not unlike Frank Chin) responds by performing a kind of masculinist assimilationism, writing: “Let me summarize my feelings toward Asian values: Fuck filial piety, Fuck grade-grubbing. Fuck Ivy League mania. Fuck deference to authority. Fuck humility and hard work. Fuck harmonious relations. Fuck sacrificing for the future. Fuck earnest, striving middle-class servility” (2). Without problematizing the notion of what “Asian values” are, Yang abjects the castrated racial position to which Asianness has been assigned, but accepting the terms with which orientalist white supremacy has essentialized “Asianness.” He is, in effect, attempting to escape the techno-orientalized robotic condition to which he defaults.

Importantly, it is his body that serves as the fulcrum of Yang’s angst. As his apparently shirtless, unhappy photo portrait in the “Paper Tigers” article exacerbates, it is the appearance of his body that signifies his apparent roboticism and mindless adherence to “Asian values.” The image of Yang’s face serves as synecdoche; while it is not the “zone of nonbeing” that Fanon has described Blackness, it is a zone of de-individuation and robotic unfeeling. As problematic as Yang’s article is, rife with a reinscription of orientalist tropes and embedded with misogyny, it gestures to the question of what it means to live in an Asian male body in the American racial system. And if Yang’s account yields any indication, then that body is, masochistically, inextricable from the techno-oriental mass. The contemporary Asian American male body, then, has a throughline to the techno-oriental interpellation of Vincent Chin.

As elaborated in the previous chapter, the becoming-car of Vincent Chin was a material node of techno-orientalism, the discursive optic through which Asianness and machineness enter a co-constitutive relationship within the U.S. racial imaginary. The Chin case demonstrates a 1980s-era anxiety that racialized a transnational economy that heralded the end of U.S. American industrialism, and how the oriental horde easily maps onto the fear of mechanization in the U.S. labor force at large. The condition of Asian American masochism, then, occurs within this context, the pleasure and pain of having become-thing, enmeshed in a process of subjectification that is necessarily premised upon the undoing of itself.

When considering Asian American masochism under techno-orientalism, I have thus far concentrated on a psychoanalytically-informed discussion of political social drama and its performative aftermath. However, in this chapter, I move more explicitly to the realm of affect: that is to say, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, “not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel” (240). Deleuze and Guattari’s elaboration of affect² gestures to affect as having a social, collective, and outwardly-disseminating function, a “stickiness” as Sara Ahmed would come to describe. However, I make the somewhat counterintuitive move to center this discussion of affect in Asian America neither with the work of Deleuze & Guattari or Tomkins, but Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernism*. Jameson, who of course encapsulates the postmodernity of the

¹ The 1974 anthology *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, co-edited with Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, is emblematic in this respect, although Chin’s tendency toward declaring the Asian American mainstream a group of “racial Uncle Toms” is consistent throughout his writings on race. See Daniel Y. Kim’s *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin, and the Literary Politics of Identity* for the definitive account of Chin’s

² One of several traditions of affect theory; another of which being that of Sylvan Tomkins, adapted later by Eve Sedgwick. For the purposes of this discussion, I open with Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation.

sociopolitical moment of the late 1970s and early 1980s, characterizes the condition of postmodernity³ as having the “waning of affect.” Jameson thus points to a kind of affective absence that arrives with postmodern schizophrenia, a blankness and an absence of “feeling.” However, this affective flatness bears with it a de-individuating power:

The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego--what I have been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more--the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling (15, emphasis in original).

Here, Jameson connects the “waning of affect” with the end of “style,” and with it, the “unique,” the “personal,” the “distinctive individual brush stroke.” The affective absence of postmodernity contrasts with Jameson’s description of modernity: in modernity, the individual monad struggles and screams under the alienation of industrial urbanity, whereas in postmodernity, the monad’s capacity to feel evaporates altogether. The waning of affect, then, bears the capacity to annihilate the individual monad of bourgeois personhood, suggesting a relationality instead premised upon the unfeeling and de-individuated mass.

Yet, in considering the condition of postmodernity, some scholars have already critiqued Jameson in not being attendant the dimension of race and gender, and that in fact, the postmodern condition is nothing in fact “new” to the historically marginalized: women, racialized subjects, queer persons, and so on. For example, Chela Sandoval has pointedly written that women of color within the United States have never had the privilege of access to the whole bourgeois ego in the first place.⁴ Nevertheless, Jameson’s formulation remains integral to diagnosing white majoritarian anxieties under the regime of postmodern culture, which has come to also characterize much of the cultural core of what has come to be broadly described in the contemporary moment as “neoliberalism.” In particular, Jameson’s discussion of the “waning of affect” becomes even more cogent in a U.S. mainstream moment dominated by smartphones and cyberculture, wherein the loss of analog “personal connection” and a nostalgia for non-mediated sociality run amok within popular culture and critique.

Moreover, I suggest that the “affect” that Jameson mourns (not unlike the “aura” that Walter Benjamin mourns in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction) is itself racialized. In “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down,” José Muñoz clearly elucidates that racial

³ Jameson would later revise his discussion of postmodernism in *Antinomies of Realism* (2013), although it is worth noting that he not only retains but centralizes affect and its corresponding phenomenology as one of the key pillars of realism.

⁴ “[F]ragmentation’ is neither an experience nor a theoretical construct peculiar to the poststructuralist or postmodern moments. Indeed, the fragmentation or split subjectivity of subjection is the very condition against which a modernist, well-placed citizen-subject could coalesce its own sense of wholeness.... Indeed, the condition recently claimed as the ‘postmodern splitting off the subject’ is one of the conditions that conquered and colonized Westerners were invited to survive under modernist and previous eras, if survival were a choice” (32,3)

normativity is performed and reiterated via affect: “normativity is accessed in the majoritarian public sphere through the affective performance of ethnic and racial normativity. This performance of whiteness primarily transpires on an affective register. Acting white has everything to do with the performance of a particular affect, the specific performance of which grounds the subject performing white affect in a normative life world” (68). Muñoz thus importantly demonstrates how race and its accompanying technologies of normativity are produced through affect, and that certain racialized affects can be conceptualized quantitatively relative to one another. Consequently, not only is affect racialized, but racialization itself is, at least in part, affective. In particular, emphasizes Muñoz, Latina/os are characterized by a kind of affective excess relative to whiteness, which presents the Latina/o subject as being affectively unruly under the white normative regime.

But when Jameson describes the “waning of affect,” I suggest that there is another, different racialized figure that haunts the moment of postmodernity: the Asiatic. That is to say, whereas the Latina/o figure is characterized by an “excess” of affect (which is, of course, more reflective of its visual indecipherability by the white gaze than any such “actual” excess), the techno-orientalized subject is characterized by its absence or deficiency. Within the terms established by Jameson, the techno-orientalized subject, associated with mass production and lack of feeling, is perhaps the uncannily cybernetic scion of postmodernity itself. Indeed, Stephen Hong Sohn has already pointed to the affective dimension of techno-oriental racialization: “In traditional Orientalism, the East often is configured as backwards, anti-progressive, and primitive. In this respect, techno-Orientalism might suggest a different conception of the East, except for the fact that the very inhuman qualities projected onto Asian bodies create a dissonance with these alternative temporalities. Even as these Alien/Asians conduct themselves with superb technological efficiency and capitalist expertise, their *affectual absence* resonates as undeveloped or, worse still, a retrograde humanism” (8, emphasis mine). In Sohn’s formulation, there is a temporal dissonance between the technologically hyper-advanced techno-oriental and the “retrograde” or “undeveloped” affectual absence associated with Asianness. On this nuance, I disagree slightly – alongside Jameson, I argue that the affective absence associated with Asiatic racial form is not reflective of a temporal retrograde as Sohn does, but a dystopian futurity which postmodernism ominously heralds. I contend that the “affectual absence” of Asianness heralds the “becoming-machine” described in the previous chapter, the animate but unfeeling body that relentlessly performs a kind of mechanical, uncreative labor long associated with orientalization in the Americas⁵. As I aim to demonstrate through this chapter, affect, or the lack thereof, is itself a technology of racialization.

In my discussion of Asian American affect, I am in dialogue with Jeffrey Santa Ana’s recent monograph *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotions*, which aims to explore how “the racial feelings” under US liberal capitalism “affect the perception of Asians both as economic exemplars and as threats,” and how “Asian Americans in their own cultural works characterize, accommodate, and resist their discursive portrayal as economic subjects in a capitalist culture of emotion” (5). Noting, following Michael Hardt and the later Fredric Jameson, that contemporary racial capitalism has moved towards an “affect economy” in which economic relations become emotionally charged, Santa Ana argues that Asians become

⁵ Although I have chosen to focus on a postmodern techno-orientalism, it is true that these aspects of mechanized Asiatic racial form in the western hemisphere go considerably further back to the late 19th century and early 20th century, and not exclusively to the United States. In Cuba in the early 20th century, for example, Alfonso Hernandez Catá described Chinese coolies as “mechanized meat.”

emotionally valued as both model minorities and threats under this new paradigm, and that their own emotional responses can potentially upend their roles under neoliberal capitalist schema. The examples of white resentment and Japanophobia in Detroit in the previous chapter illustrate much of Santa Ana's point, and many of his observations in such emotional-economic associations are quite apt. However, Santa Ana does not substantially distinguish between *emotion* and *affect*, as pivotal affect scholars such as Brian Massumi and Rei Terada, or even Fredric Jameson, have done. As Terada has written, emotion is conscious and psychological, whereas affect is located centrally in the body (4), which supports Massumi's assertion that emotion is individuated while affect is "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvi). Santa Ana's discussions center primarily around politicized anger or "feeling normal," which are more properly qualitative emotions held by subjects – that is, named emotions – rather than affects, as he often characterizes them. More akin to Muñoz's take on Latinidad than Santa Ana's case of racialized emotion, this chapter asks how Asianness – not as an essentialized identity but as a constructed structural position – can be understood *as an affective state itself*.

Still, I do in fact concur with Santa Ana that under contemporary capitalism, emotion and affect have exploded as primary terrains of valuation and exchange. Here, it is worth returning to Fredric Jameson, this time his more recent writings in *The Antinomies of Realism*, which revises his discussion of the waning of affect in *Postmodernism*. The waning of affect that inaugurates the "perpetual present" that he discusses in *Postmodernism* gives way to something else, that is, a "reduction to the body," inasmuch as the body is all that remains in any tendential reduction of experience to the present as such" (28). The body, then, becomes the site that "begins to know more global waves of generalized sensations, and it is these which... I will here call affect" (28). Within Jameson's more recent theoretical landscape, affect is not so much waning as it is the primary location of contemporary sensory presence.

And yet, I would argue that Jameson's affective "reduction to the body" is not a refutation of his earlier formulation of affective "waning," but rather, of the contemporary neoliberal subject's dependence on affect. This is particularly the case in this second decade of the 21st century, this condition of so-called postmodernity that has exponentially grown via the rise of ubiquitous digital technology and cyberculture. In *The Interface Effect*, Alexander Galloway powerfully argues that in such a computation and informatic-driven present, affect in fact explodes:

Profiles, not personas, drive the computer. Even as a certain kind of modern affect is in recession (following Jameson's famous argument about "the waning of affect" under postmodernity), there seems to be more affect today than ever before. Books are written on the subject. Conferences are devoted to it. The net is nothing if not the grand parade of personality profiles, wants and needs, projected egos, "second" selves and "second" lives. This is all true. So the triumph of affect is also its undoing. The waning of an older affective mode comes at the moment of its absolute rationalization into software. At the moment when something is perfected, it is dead (12).

Galloway's description of the proliferation of affect on the internet also reconciles the earlier Jameson with the later; that is, that the affect of modernity becomes "rationalized" into the computer interface. I suggest that we read Jameson's "waning of affect" not as a reduction of affect—when, in fact, affect is being proliferated and marketed at unprecedented levels—but

rather, as an *alienation from* affect, a growing inability to catch it and hold it down as it flies quickly through the air, or as it is quite literally codified. To return to affectual absence, the ostensibly “affectless” figure remains a particularly dystopian and uncanny one; this is a figure who receives but neither digests nor emits affect.

Asian Americans are notably “wired” in this regard; as early as 2001, the Pew Research Center has noted that “Asian-American Internet users are... the Net’s most active users” (Spooner), utilizing the Internet at a far higher rate than any other ethnic group in the United States. I will not sociologically conjecture here as to the reasons why, but I cite this fact in order to highlight that internet culture has, for whatever reason, become a large part of Asian American lived experience, and that as a consequence, Asian Americans have a particular investment in the technologically mediated episteme of postmodernity. Asianness itself – that is to say, the racializing apparatus that coheres meaning around the signifier of “Asian” – has become to some degree wedded to this mediation in the contemporary moment.

Rather than refuting the notion of the unfeeling, mechanical, techno-orientalized Asian, this chapter is more interested in exploring the lived, embodied experience of the Asian American man undergoing masochistic subjectification under the regime of techno-orientalized double consciousness. What, in other words, is the lived experience of the techno-orientalized in America? Furthermore, this chapter asks: can literal high technology operate as a Foucauldian “technology of the self” for such subjects, comprising objects of masochistic attachment under a racialized postmodernity? Moreover, this chapter interrogates the psycho-sensory substance of racialization itself: how does race survive and form the foundation of experience when demonstrations of racism (overt, structural, or otherwise) are conspicuously absent? I examine two contemporary works of literature by Asian American authors: the 2013 semi-autobiographical novel *Taipei* by “alt lit” author Tao Lin, and the 2011 experimental memoir *Insomnia and the Aunt* by multimedia artist Tan Lin. Both *Taipei* and *Insomnia and the Aunt* figure central Asian American characters who ostensibly conform to the “affective flatness” outlined by Jameson, blurring the boundary between the body and technologized mediation in the production of self. Unlike much of the canon of Asian American *bildungsroman* prose, these texts do not contain overt moments of racism and othering, yet they provide affective and phenomenological explorations of living in and perceiving a world in which one has long already been racialized. However, both texts treat the subject of race and Asian Americanness differently: whereas *Taipei* attempts postraciality, actively resisting identification of Asian American literature and grasping towards a disembodied whiteness, *Insomnia and the Aunt* explicitly examines the relationship between technological mediation and racial subjectification. Yet, both *Taipei* and *Insomnia and the Aunt* are equally racially attached to the computer or television *screen*, an object that haunts the techno-orientalized face in that it not only represents affective flatness; it displays affect flatly.

The Face, the Mass, the Screen: Phenomenological Technoscapes and Masochistic Coldness in Tao Lin’s *Taipei*

Tao Lin’s 2013 semi-autobiographical⁶ novel *Taipei* is a nihilistic demonstration of the affective flatness resulting from technological mediation. *Taipei* has garnered a degree of critical

⁶ Tao Lin has publically acknowledged the semi-autobiographical nature of *Taipei*. In an interview with Entertainment Weekly, he describes the process of writing *Taipei* as editing “25,000 pages” of his memory “into a 250-page novel.” As a consequence, he considers it his magnum opus, stating: “I used, as

attention primarily through this stylistic distinctiveness, and its unerring fidelity to remaining within the haze it constructs. In tracing the story of Paul, the young Taiwanese American “alt-lit” author (whom we can ostensibly identify as a proxy for Tao Lin himself), Tao Lin sketches Paul’s life as unapologetically hollow, consisting of a series of shallow surfaces and emotional alienation for which there is no true outside. Stylistically and topically, *Taipei* can be read as emblematic of Tao Lin’s oeuvre, and arguably of the “alt lit movement” for which Lin has come to embody. An extremely young “movement” at the time of this writing, the term “alt lit” was coined by author Cory Stephens, according to *The YOLO Pages* poetry anthology, in the summer of 2011 to describe “hipster” literature (6). Central to the “alt lit” aesthetic is an all-pervasive irony and enmeshment with internet culture, embracing the epistemology of its early 21st century First World moment. The editors of *The YOLO Pages*, for example, note “roughly half of the contributors of this book are under 25 at the time of publishing, having grown up with the internet as an integral part of their lives” (5). Tao Lin is one such contributor, but more than any other work from “alt lit,” his novel *Taipei* has achieved the widest distribution and critical attention.

As Tao Lin’s third and most widely-read full-length novel, *Taipei* stands as a controversial but undoubtedly provocative love story between Paul and a (presumably white) woman named Erin, also in her 20s, as the two partake of illicit drugs, acts of mischief, and various attempts of communication. Following in the footsteps of his previous novels *Eeeee Eee Eeee* and *Richard Yates*, *Taipei* has caught attention by way of Tao Lin’s characteristic affectlessness, persistent in his writing as a persistent, absolutely unceasing emotional alienation and detachment from his surroundings, although *Taipei* is Lin’s longest and most personal (if not, conventionally speaking, “intimate”) work. In this sense, he has been frequently compared to Bret Easton Ellis, similarly infamous yet celebrated for its flatness, nihilism, and sensory detail more sociopathic than sensual.⁷ But what is particular to Tao Lin’s work, and to *Taipei* in particular, is that this detachment is facilitated, in a very large way, by contemporary technology and social media (and, as I argue later, its almost unconscious attachment to racialization). Paul’s life is largely narrated in a series of mundane details of moving through the world via technology, but he gradually gains a kind of “genuine” face-to-face connection with his lover Erin while visiting his family in Taipei. As Clancy Martin writes in his review of *Taipei* in the *New York Times*, “Most of us take it for granted that we should focus on our conversations and the emotions they produce. But we take it for granted while sitting in a restaurant with a spouse, sending texts or checking Facebook or Googling the movie we’re going to see” (BR8).

A passage from midway through the novel is representative of Tao Lin’s creative project: In a café in Ann Arbor around 10:30 p.m., two days later, Paul realized, when he remembered Erin’s existence by seeing her name in Gmail, he’d forgotten about her that

source material, everything I know or have felt or experienced, or could imagine knowing or feeling or experiencing, up to this point in my life.” As a consequence, it may be fair, in a limited sense, to equate Paul with Tao Lin himself in this analysis.

⁷ In an interview with Kelley Hoffman of *Interview Magazine*, after the publication of his second novel *Richard Yates*, Lin addresses this comparison to Ellis with a degree of befuddlement, conceding that possibly he shares Ellis’ sense of humor, as well as a similar degree of empathy for his characters. However, Lin asserts that while Ellis considers his own characters “immoral,” Lin does not consider the morality of his characters at all; Lin states that he is unabashedly amoral in his valuations at large. Amusingly, Lin does not comment on the stylistic similarity of prose with Ellis.

entire day (over the next three weeks, whenever more than two or three days passed since they last communicated which they did by email, every five to ten days, in a thread Erin began the day she dropped him off at the airport, Paul would have a similar realization of having forgotten about her for an amount of time). Around midnight he drove his rental car to a row of fast-food restaurants near the airport and slept in a McDonald's parking lot. When he woke, around 2:45 a.m., he bought and ate a Filet-O-Fish from the McDonald's drive-thru. While trying to discern what, from which fast-food restaurant, to buy and eat next, he idly imagined himself for more than ten minutes as the botched clone of himself, parked outside the mansion of the scientist who the original Paul paid to clone himself and paid again to "destroy all information" regarding "[censored]" (109).

Like the passage above, the rest of *Taipei* is effectively a series of dry details, fleeting observations, and non sequiturs, doing so with a stubborn contemporaneity that feels less a prescriptive "commentary" on the "early millennial" generation (referring roughly to 20- and 30-somethings in the second decade of 21st century) and more of a descriptive immersion within the ontology of technologically mediated existence. Tao Lin is, after all, a member of this generation, being born in 1983 and 30 years old at the time of *Taipei*'s publication. In this passage, as in most of the novel, technological mediation has become naturalized as a means of accessing knowledge, and of existing in the social world; in the moment above, Paul only remembers the existence of his "by seeing her name in Gmail," then proceeding to describe at length in the parenthetical about how the initial email thread had begun. Tao Lin then delves into the miscellany of Paul's consumption of fast food, bereft of sensory detail, but plunges the reader into Paul's imaginary musings of being a "clone of himself."

If we take this passage as representative of the novel, then it may seem confusing, at first glance, to consider *Taipei* as speaking to the issues of Asian American subjectification at all. After all, Tao Lin unambiguously eschews categorization as an "Asian American writer."⁸ In a 2007 interview with Jessa Crispin of Bookslut, Tao Lin responds to a question about being Asian American with an aggressive post-raciality: "I think a person who has an identity-crisis about being both Asian and American, or a person who starts a magazine for Asian-Americans, or anything like that -- if they aren't doing it in order to make money -- is prejudiced, if prejudiced means treating people differently based on abstractions and not concrete, factual, and specific evidence from reality. If a person has 'Asian pride' they are racist, I think, in most people's definition of racism, because it's the same as saying, 'Asians are better than Germans, Canadians, and Africans.'" Tao Lin's evaluation of "Asian pride" as "racist" is, of course, reflective of a kind of reactionary colorblindness that has come to characterize the hegemony of early 21st century "postraciality," uncritically equivocating the performative recuperation of a marginalized identity with the violence of white supremacy. Tao Lin's colorblindness reifies, in the words of Brandi Wilkins Catanese, "a fiction that divorces itself from the processes of history... since many institutions in our culture were created through concerted inattention to nonwhite culture in

⁸ This eschewal is not necessarily unique, since a number of writers of Asian American descent have made similar disavowals. For example, Ping Chong, discussed in the last chapter, has focused the majority of his work on non-Asian American subjects and often resists being clustered in the same category as David Henry Hwang and Philip Kan Gotanda. Similarly, Chang-Rae Lee turned many heads in the literary world with *Aloft*, which centers an Italian American family with barely any mention of Asian Americanness whatsoever. However, neither Chong nor Lee has expressed the kind of open hostility to the Asian American label as Tao Lin, who has decried it as outright "racist."

order to normalize whiteness” (36). And yet, perhaps unwittingly, *Taipei* is something of an artifact of Asian American techno-orientalization, and in fact demonstrates a complex relationship between this technological abandon and racialized, masculine masochism. For *Taipei*, race lurks as something of an inconvenient specter, always working to thwart the novel’s own attempts to transcend it, and it often manifests itself through engagement with digital technologies.

For example, returning to the passage quoted above, it is telling that Paul imagines himself science-fictionally as “the botched clone of himself,” which is certainly evocative of the (techno-)orientalist image of the mass-produced, non-individuated Asiatic horde. The “botched clone” is also suggestive of an affective relationship to the haze in which Paul finds himself, reflecting on his lover’s presence through checking email, sleeping in a parking lot, and consuming fast food with what seems to be a deadpan hipster self-amusement, reflecting an alienation from his own feelings, provoking the wonder if his thoughts and feelings are indeed “his own” or the “original’s.” Furthermore, the “botched clone” also, according to Paul’s imagination, wishes to confront (or kill) the scientist who created him in the style of a Frankensteinian Oedipal drama. There is thus a silent, unexpressed violence implied in the cold, seemingly unfeeling state of being massified and de-individuated.

Indeed, this “botched clone” reference is one among many of similar massified, easily orientalisable metaphors. Throughout the novel, Paul makes a number of references to feeling “like a zombie,”⁹ “cyborg-like,”¹⁰ “robot-like,”¹¹ and so on, with each conjuring an image of an orientalized, de-individuated mass. *Taipei* never disavows or distances itself from such imagery; rather, it embraces its very ontology, the prose insistently remaining a deadpan neutral. Although these figures are not *necessarily* orientalized—particularly given their presence in non-orientalist texts of similar aesthetic (such as that of the previously mentioned Brad Easton Ellis)—*Taipei* tends to describe Asian figures in similar terms, suggesting a homologous relationship between the Asian and the massified nonhuman. Indeed, Tao Lin seems at least partially aware of the orientalizing racialization of this imagery; when Paul reflects on the city of Taipei, early in the novel, he is fully aware of – and in fact does not challenge – the racialized notion of the orientalized mass:

Because his Mandarin wasn’t fluent enough for conversations with strangers—and he wasn’t close to his relatives, with whom attempts at communication were brief and non-

⁹ “he [Paul] observed neutrally that, though he was drooling a little and probably the only non-dancing person in the room, no one was looking at him, then moved toward the room’s iPod with the goal-oriented, zombie-like calmness of a person who has woken at night thirsty and is walking to his refrigerator and changed the music to ‘Today’ by the Smashing Pumpkins” (74), “Erin asked how Paul felt and he murmured ‘zombie-like’ without moving his head” (160).

¹⁰ “In his state of medium euphoria, with intensely dull eyes and an overall cyborg-like demeanor, Paul stared briefly at the cofounder of *Vice* before turning and moving away with an earnest, uncertain feeling of disappointment” (112).

¹¹ “due to 2mg of Klonopin remained poised, with a peaceful sensation of faultlessness, physiologically calm but mentally stimulated, throughout the night, as if beta testing the event by acting like an exaggerated version of himself, for others to practice against, before the real Paul, the only person without practice, was inserted for the actual event” (65), “‘I don’t think I’ve ever told anyone. I don’t think I cared if anyone knew. I was just like, ‘I saw a UFO.’ I think I was extremely bored. I was like a bored robot’” (104), “...reacted to Paul’s robot-like extroversion with what seemed like barely suppressed confusion” (112).

advancing and often koan-like, ending usually with one person looking away, ostensibly for assistance, then leaving—he'd be preemptively estranged, secretly unfrienable. The unindividualized, shifting mass of everyone else would be a screen, distributed throughout the city, onto which he'd project the movie of his uninterrupted imagination. Because he'd appear to, and be able to pretend he was, but never actually be a part of the mass, maybe he'd gradually begin to feel a kind of needless intimacy, not unlike being in the same room as a significant other and feeling affection without touching or speaking (17).

This early passage demonstrates a complex breadth of Paul's relationship to Taipei, and to Asianness, in general. Shy of lamenting his lack of Mandarin fluency, Paul's second-generation Asian American status renders Taipei inscrutable; Paul's relatives are described as "koan-like," and as a result of his alienation, he'd be both "preemptively estranged" and "secretly unfrienable." Tao Lin's choice of "unfrienable" is furthermore consistent with the novel's fidelity to interface-mediated existence, utilizing "friend" in the verb form as popularized by the dominant social media website Facebook. Then, the description becomes unapologetically (techno-)orientalist, describing Taipei's crowd as an "unindividualized, shifting mass," which is also evocative of Wesley Yang's "mass of faces that resemble it" quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Perhaps unintentionally, this passage, alongside the others, suggests an intriguing connection between orientalist massification, affect, and digital technology, one that is congruous with Vincent Chin's becoming-car of the previous chapter. Here, however, Paul – unlike Wesley Yang – imagines a curious and uncanny dis/identification with the faceless (or, alternately, same-faced) Asiatic mass; his second-generation status prevents him from fully joining it, although he can racially "pretend" to, achieving a curiously alienated intimacy that Paul finds comforting or even pleasurable, if somehow "needless." Paul's liminal status as Asian American thus produces a desirable ennui, through which he can experience intimacy precisely by being a stranger, individuated by virtue of his Americanization, with the outward appearance of being a part of the mass, and with it, bearing flat affect and mass-reproducibility.

Moreover, I'd like to draw special attention to the *screen*, Paul's image of choice to describe his imagination of the Taiwanese horde. In Paul's fantasy, the mass of Asians *becomes* the screen itself—in this case, the movie screen. Part of Paul's desire, then, is to join the screen, which is simultaneously the undifferentiated mass and the cognitive prosthetic into technological mediation. This is also significant since the screen, either overtly or implicitly, is ubiquitous throughout the novel, seamlessly merging with Paul's sensory experience of the world. This becomes heightened as Paul interacts more with *computer* screens—that is, virtual interfaces. Such an interface, writes Alexander Galloway, is "less... a surface" and more "a doorway or window," and "is not something that appears before you but rather is a gateway that opens up and allows passage to some place beyond" (30). The presence of the screen in *Taipei* – whether that is the screen of his smartphone, or his MacBook – is rarely mentioned as an actual, material object with which Paul interacts except, notably, when referring to the mass of undifferentiated Asians. Rather, as a doorway interface, the screen opens what Maurice Merleau-Ponty has called the "body schema" into the digital world. Merleau-Ponty describes the "body schema" as "a *compendium* of our bodily experience, capable of giving a commentary and meaning to the internal impressions and the impression of possessing a body at any moment" (113, emphasis in original), and "a total awareness of my posture in the intrasensory world" (114). Importantly,

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "body schema" dissociates the physical body itself from the felt experience of having a body, which also paradoxically opens the possibility of having a felt sense of the body extend beyond the body itself.

To Paul, the physical world and the digital world are phenomenologically indistinguishable. Just as Paul remembers Erin's existence through Gmail (which is analogous to Paul being aware of his posture when given the appropriate stimulus), Paul experiences his social world through the terms of digital mediation. Such experiences occur a multitude of times throughout *Taipei*, two examples of which are below:

"Paul," said Erin, and grasped his forearm. They stopped walking. More aware of Erin's perspective, looking at his face (and not knowing what expression she saw or what he wanted to express), than of his own, Paul didn't know what to do, so went "afk," he felt, and remained there—away from the keyboard of the screen of his face—as Erin, looking at the inanimate object of his head, said "if I did I would tell you" and, emphatically, "I'm not lying to you right now" (106-107).

"Jesus, look," said Paul pointing at an eerie building far in the distance, thin and black, like a cursor on the screen of a computer that had become unresponsive. He imagined building-size letters suddenly appearing, left to right, in a rush—*wpkjgijfhtetiukgnlm*—across the desert (151).

In the former passage, Paul goes "afk" – an early 2000s chat room acronym standing for "away from keyboard," signifying idleness from an actively live online social interaction – when he and Erin argue over a fairly inconsequential lie Erin had told.¹² In the latter passage, Paul notices a building as he and Erin walk to a rental car, which they subsequently drive to a Las Vegas wedding chapel to be rather spontaneously married. In both segments, interface with the computer screen serves as the first referent to describe Paul's sensory experience. In the first, "afk" becomes the metaphor to describe what is likely the evacuation of all affect altogether for Paul, a sudden absence and dissociation from the present moment. The metaphor also serves to performatively naturalize the referent, effectively expecting the reader to understand precisely what kind of affectual absence is being described. As Tao Lin spells it out – "away from the keyboard of the screen of his face" – the keyboard roughly stands in as Paul's sentient consciousness, while the screen becomes, again, the exterior access point for affect. When being "afk," Paul's head is even rendered an "inanimate object." Consequently, Paul's sudden technologized "idleness" makes him somehow thing-like, undergoing a kind of becoming-computer.

Meanwhile, in the second passage, digital mediation infiltrates Paul's actual visual field. As Paul looks out to the distance, the prose relates a building to a computer image: the unresponsive cursor. The cursor – that is, the arrow that a computer user manipulates across the screen – is the very phenomenal extension of the user's will in interacting with a visual computer interface, the omnipresent thing that allows the visual field of the screen to become variously graspable. In a sense, the cursor is a virtual prosthesis for the hand (which, of course, is that which moves the cursor, via mouse or trackpad), and of the body more generally; as Maurice

¹² Erin had initially claimed Paul was the only one Erin had told about her experience wearing purple and glitter in 4th grade, in order to attract UFOs. In this scene, Erin realizes she had told one of her other friends, as well; Paul then accuses Erin of lying.

Merleau-Ponty reminds us, “It is never our objective body that we move, but our phenomenal body... since our body, as the potentiality of this or that part of the world, surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them” (121). Of course, Paul doesn’t perceive just a normal cursor, but an *unresponsive* one, implying that the building does not move despite his semi-conscious willingness to move it in his mind. And then, reflexively, Paul imagines a string of letters the size of the building itself across the desert, suggesting that for Paul, the visual field of the material world and the visual field of the screen blur altogether. For Paul, in other words, all the world – including his own face – is a screen.

Returning to the earlier passage, in which the orientalized mass of koan-like Asians becomes “the screen” of Paul’s imagination, we can ascertain that for Paul, there is something Asian about the screen itself. That is, the screen, as the thing that renders objects flat for display or interaction, is homologous with the affective flatness with which Asiatic racial form has been associated. Despite Tao Lin’s attempts to distance himself from race, and his own eschewing of the discourse of “Asian pride,” *Taipei* finds itself thoroughly embedded in race by way of the screen, which serves simultaneously as Paul’s self, other, and lens of perception. The more computerized or screenlike Paul becomes in a particular moment, the more he accesses the Asianness he paradoxically eludes.

This felt relationship to orientalism recalls Sara Ahmed’s argument that orientalism has a phenomenological, felt dimension. “Orientalism,” writes Ahmed, “involves a form of ‘world facing’; that is, a way of gathering things around so they ‘face’ a certain directions” (118). In effect, Ahmed asserts that the Occident forms phenomenologically through the organization of collective bodies facing towards an imagined, constructed Orient far beyond the (Eastern) horizon that is always, to varying degrees, objectified and desired. As a consequence, “[t]he orient is then ‘orientated;’ it is reachable as an object given how the world takes shape ‘around’ certain bodies” (120). Through Ahmed’s formulation, we can consider how orientalism has both vectored and spatialized aspects, that the imagined Orient is simultaneously distant (“over the horizon”) and graspable (“*just* over the horizon”).

Intriguingly, the notion of Orient-as-distant-yet-reachable takes on a second valence when applied to Paul and his Asian American positionality. In his description of Taipei, Paul seems to assume the mainstream “occidental” position of describing the oriental mass/horde, yet this hordeness is both simultaneously desirable and something with which he can uncannily but only incompletely identify. That is to say, because of his lack of Mandarin fluency paired with his phenotypic likeness (that is to say, his Asian Americanness), Paul finds the Orient *culturally* both inscrutably distant and reachable. Yet, similar to the hypothetical Occidental position, it is the Orient’s inscrutability that makes it appealing, except that for Asian American Paul, who looks like those he considers inscrutable, the appeal lies in the intimacy that comes from a cultural/racial failure. His face, like the “unindividualized mass” of Taipei itself, is a screen, the machine that renders objects flat for display.

In considering both Tao Lin/Paul’s face-as-screen-as-Asian, and Wesley Yang’s indistinguishable quasi-robot face, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of “faciality” in relation to affect, as well as Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of the face. Giorgio Agamben conceptualizes the face more generally as the embodiment of communication and human sociality. Agamben argues: “My face is my *outside*: a point of indifference with respect to all of my properties, with respect to what is properly one’s own and what is common, to what is internal and what is external. In the face I exist with all of my properties (my being brown, tall, pale, proud, emotional...); but this happens without any of these properties essentially identifying

me or belonging to me” (98, emphasis in original). That is, for Agamben, the face is the point of access to the sociality of the external world – “only where do I find a face do I encounter an exteriority and does an *outside* happen to me” (99) – which enables the possessor of the face to not only be a subject, but an object (the outside *happens* to them). Agamben implies that this facialized objecthood is integral to sociality more generally. Additionally, Agamben argues, “The face is not a *simulacrum*, in the sense that it is something dissimulating or hiding the truth: the face is the *simultas*, the being-together of the manifold visages constituting it, in which none of the visages is truer than any of the others” (98). In this regard, Agamben does not conceptualize the face as a kind of mask, an “inauthentic” obfuscation of interiority, but rather an assemblage of the multiple affects that roughly coheres into the dynamic conceptualization of one’s face.

In contrast, theorizing faciality in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari note that the face not only possesses a hegemonic whiteness, but literally *is* whiteness: “The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes. The face is Christ. The face is the typical European, what Ezra Pound called the average sensual man, in short, the ordinary everyday Erotomaniac” (176). With whiteness, the face simultaneously signifies divinity (Christ) and sensuality and feeling (“average sensual man”); whiteness comes to embody both the holy and the virile ideals. “Faciality,” then, is the apparatus by which faces are judged to pass or fail in relation to the ideal white face. As a consequence, Deleuze and Guattari continue, “Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face” (178). Yet, the face becomes something into which one effectively assimilates: “You don’t have a face as slide into one” (177), write Deleuze and Guattari, formulating the face as an ideal that is dynamically approached rather than fixed and concrete.

Deleuze and Guattari are thus more pessimistic than Agamben, insisting on the face’s already-racial normativity, while Agamben locates the properties of social categorization on the face while de-essentializing their signification. Also, roughly speaking, Agamben emphasizes the social objecthood that accompanies the face, while Deleuze and Guattari are focused on the assemblage (approximately, the “subject”)’s becoming-face, of moving towards an affective normativity. Appreciating Deleuze and Guattari’s attention to faciality’s technology of normalization, I consider whether Agamben’s assertion that the face is not “simulacrum” holds completely true. Although Agamben is correct to assert that the face is not inherently a dissembling mask, the face may be considered a simulacrum in relationship to the racial normativity described by Deleuze and Guattari. That is, if the face “*is* the White Man,” then the nonwhite face that strives towards recognition-as-face is, necessarily, a simulacrum of sorts, already-inauthentic by way of its nonnormative racialization.

Considering this notion of faciality alongside Alexander Galloway’s observation that “there is no ‘faciality’ with the computer” (12), I would argue that this face-as-simulacrum forms the affective foundation of techno-orientalism itself. Wesley Yang’s lamentation of the quasi-robot Asian face is, in effect, a lamentation that the Asian face cannot properly express the sensuality and affect to which the white face has unmediated, assumed access. The Asian face, as “barely distinguishable from a mass of faces that resemble it,” is also simulacrum, marked by a perceived uncanny reproducibility (which is, obviously, only perceived as uniform due to its deviance from white normativity). Tao Lin’s Paul, meanwhile, would likely agree in this assessment, but unlike Yang, Paul finds intimacy in being among faces that are not strictly, by Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation, “faces,” even as Paul’s cultural proximity to whiteness (via

Americanization) renders him alienated from them. Paul, unlike Wesley Yang, seems to find comfort in sharing the same deviation from white faciality precisely while Taipei remains emotionally inscrutable (and thus, orientalized).

Intriguingly, Paul seems to anticipate this comforting alienation whenever he encounters other Asian bodies, even Asian American ones. Following the norm of white Anglophone literature, Tao Lin always racially marks Asians in *Taipei* (unlike white characters), and their presence often implies a foreignness that is not commented upon, even if that foreignness ends up being false. The most notable example occurs when Paul, drug-addled and eating food and Adderall with (racially unmarked, presumably white) friends Fran and Daniel, notices a group of Asians while on the way to pick up a DVD in Daniel's apartment:

On the walk to Daniel's apartment, to get *Drugstore Cowboy*, dozens of elderly, similarly dressed Asian men were standing in a loosely organized row, like a string of Christmas lights, seeming bored but alert, on a wide sidewalk, across from the Bar Matchless. Daniel asked one of them what movie they were in and the Asian man seemed confused, then said "Martin Scorsese" without an accent when Daniel asked again.

Around forty minutes later Paul said "that looks like the same group of Asians... we saw earlier," realizing with amazement as he saw Bar Matchless that they had unwittingly walked to the same place (68).

Throughout the above description, the group of Asian men is described in conformist terms ("similarly dressed," "standing in a loosely organized row, like a string of Christmas lights") and Paul reductively racially marks them ("group of Asians"). Yet, the group of Asian men implicitly defies expectations; in response to Daniel's largely nonsensical (presumably, drug-influenced) question "what movie they were in," the Asian man responds "without an accent." The Asian's accentlessness (or rather, to be linguistically precise, his possessing the same mainstream American accent) contradicts the expectation established by the orientalist foreign conformity implicit in the description. Then, when "the same group of Asians" is encountered again, they signify a familiarity, that Paul and Daniel have "been there" before as the two young men, disoriented, try to navigate around the city. Not unlike racial form itself, the Asians in the line cannot be avoided. They persistently exist proximal to Paul despite his attempts to go elsewhere. They are, furthermore, not dissimilar to Paul in the sense that they are "without an accent," that is, presumably Asian American, despite the implication of Paul's assumption of their foreignness. They are, in other words, what Sau-Ling Wong has termed "racial shadows," the figures upon whom undesirable Asianness is projected, thus "render[ing] alien what is, in fact, literally inalienable, thereby disowning and distancing it" (78).

Later in the novel, when Paul first actually arrives in Taipei, Paul is riding the bus with Erin and his father, surrounded by highly technologized imagery, which makes him pause and reflect on technology more generally. Notably, his contemplation is inflected with a postmodern, cyberpunk dystopianism:

It was around 10:30 p.m. Paul stared at the lighted signs, some of which were *animated and repeating like GIF files...* and sleepily thought of how technology was no longer the source of wonderment and possibility it had been when, for example, he learned as a child at Epcot Center, Disney's future-themed "amusement park," that families of three,

with one or two robot dogs and one robot maid, would live in self-sustaining, underwater, glass spheres by something like 2004 or 2008. At some point, Paul vaguely realized, technology had begun for him to mostly only indicate the inevitability and vicinity of nothingness. Instead of postponing death by releasing nanobots into the bloodstream to fix things faster than they deteriorated, implanting little computers into people's brains, or other methods Paul had probably read about on Wikipedia, until it became the distant, shrinking nearly nonexistent somethingness that was currently life—and life, for immortal humans, became the predominate distraction that was currently death—*technology seemed more likely to permanently eliminate life by uncontrollably fulfilling its only function: to indiscriminately convert matter, animate or inanimate, into computerized matter, for the sole purpose, it seemed, of increased functioning, until the universe was one computer.* Technology, an abstraction, undetectable in concrete reality, was accomplishing its concrete task, Paul dimly intuited while idly petting Erin's hair, by way of an increasingly committed and multiplying workforce of humans, who receive, over hundreds of generations, a certain kind of advancement (from feet to bicycles to cars, faces to bulletin boards to the internet) in exchange for converting a sufficient amount of matter into computerized matter for computers to be able to build themselves (166-167, emphasis mine).

Again, in this passage, we see Paul's visual field utilizing computerization as his primary referent ("lighted signs... animated and repeating like GIF files," which are short online soundless animated images that play on loop). But this is also one of the rare moments of the novel that seems, at least ostensibly, critical of technology itself. Paul indulges a Heideggerean anxiety about the capacity for technology to become not just a human means to prosperity (represented by the science fictional underwater glass spheres and the life-sustaining nanobots) but a means for its own end. When Paul notes that technology is "more likely to permanently eliminate life," it is through the conversion of all other matter "into computerized matter." Considering Paul's consistent self-technologization throughout the entirety of the novel (appearing even in this passage as the street lights as "GIF files"), it is abundantly clear that Paul himself undergoes this very process, becoming "computerized matter" itself. This conversion is, furthermore, heightened in Taipei and, presumably, East Asia more generally: "As the bus moved into denser parts of Taipei... Paul felt like he could almost sense the computerization that was happening in this area of the universe, on Earth" (167)—that is, that in Taipei, he draws closer to singularity.

Thus, Taipei and Paul undergo parallel self-inflicted techno-orientalizations, conversion into "computerized matter." Such conversion invokes what Martin Heidegger has termed "Enframing" in his oft-cited text "The Question Concerning Technology." According to Heidegger, Enframing is both the essence of modern technology and "the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve" (23). That is to say, Enframing is material and perceptual conversion of the real – consisting of largely inert objects – into "standing-reserve," which is, loosely, resources and objects that are utilizable. The danger of modern technology, warns Heidegger, is the conversion of human beings themselves into standing-reserve. Although on a historical level, such conversion has already literally happened on a wide and apocalyptic scale via the trans-Atlantic slave trade (an unsurprising oversight for the active Nazi Party member that Heidegger was), Heidegger's Enframing is nevertheless instructive in elucidating the relationship between Paul and his technologically mediated existence. By becoming increasingly

technologically mediated, Paul effectively Enframes his own consciousness and his own body; the fact that Paul sees a distant building as “a cursor” suggests this very shift. Furthermore, the descriptions above suggest that Taipei’s Enframing exceeds even that of Paul’s, and with it, the techno-orientalist associations with robots, clones, and zombies.

Yet, the fact that Paul feels an “intimacy” with such technologization implies a comfort with precisely that mode of affectless alienation with which he associates Asianness. Paul’s relationship to techno-orientalized Taipei, and by extension to the fugue of computer-mediated abandon more generally, is coldly masochistic. But from where does this relationship emerge? Interestingly, in the second chapter of the novel, Paul reflects upon his adolescent relationship with his immigrant mother, wherein he exhibited some powerfully masochistic tendencies. In high school, Paul becomes extremely awkward and self-conscious, often paranoid that others are making fun of him. He begins to think of himself in rather mechanical terms: “When he heard laughter, before he could think or feel anything, his heart would already be beating like he’d sprinted twenty yards. As the beating slowly normalized he’d think of how his heart, unlike him, was safely contained, away from the world, behind bone and inside skin... as if to artfully assert itself as source and creator... and later, after innovating the brain and limbs and face and limbs, to convert into productive behavior—its uncontrollable, indefensible, unexplainable, embarrassing squeezing of itself” (40). Paul’s adolescent self, in other words, conceptualizes his heart as unruly, involuntarily pulsing beside itself when anxious, but ruling his brain and body as if they comprised a machine (“innovating... to convert into productive behavior”). So, in response, he begins to ask his mother to punish him severely, in an attempt to psychologically remedy himself.

In Paul’s sophomore or junior year he began to believe the only solution to his anxiety, low self-esteem, *view of himself as unattractive, etc. would be for his mother to begin disciplining him on her own volition, without his prompting, as an unpredictable—and, maybe, to counter the previous fourteen or fifteen years of “overprotectiveness,” unfair—entity, convincingly not unconditionally supportive. His mother would need to create rules and punishments exceeding Paul’s expectations, to a degree that Paul would no longer feel in control.* To do this, Paul believed, his mother would need to anticipate and preempt anything he might have considered, factoring in that... he probably already expected, or had imagined, any rule or punishment she would be willing to instate or inflict, therefore she would need to consider rules and punishments that she would not think of herself as willing to instate or inflict. Paul tried to convey this in crying, shouting fights with his mother lasting up to four hours, sometimes five days a week. There was an inherent desperation to these fights in that each time Paul, in frustration, *told his mother how she could have punished him, in whatever previous situation, to make him feel not in control—to, he believed, help solve his social and psychological problems—it became complicatedly more difficult, in Paul’s view, for his mother to successfully preempt his expectations the next time* (41, emphasis mine).

In this early passage, Paul believes that his mother’s punishments are capable of curing him of social anxiety, paradoxically by robbing him of social control. So extreme is his desire for punishment that he angrily chides his mother for *not* punishing him; hilariously, his mother ultimately fails to carry out his wishes, finding strictness and punishment utterly counter to her

actual tendencies (which also, incidentally, counters the “Tiger Mother” discourse of Asian mothers mentioned at the start of this chapter).

Paul’s insistence that his mother severely punish him is masochistic, particularly according to the Deleuzian tradition. Drawing from the literary works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Gilles Deleuze argues against the Freudian model in which the father plays the most pivotal role; the early Freud positions the male masochist in the feminine mother’s position, to be submissive and beaten by the father. In contrast, drawing from Sacher-Masoch, Deleuze argues that the mother-as-torturer – not the father – is the crucial figure in the symbolic order of masculine masochism, who operates to expel the father from the masochistic subject: “Finally, he [the masochist] ensures that he will be beaten; we have seen that what is beaten, humiliated, and ridiculed in him is the image and the likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father’s aggressive return. *It is not a child but a father that is being beaten*. The masochist thus liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part” (66, emphasis in original). In so writing, Deleuze articulates a masculine masochism that relies upon a powerful femininity that effectively exorcises the power and authority of the father rather than submitting to it.

In Paul’s account of his childhood, his father is only briefly mentioned,¹³ with much more of his early experience dominated by being placed in rudimentary English as a Second Language courses and, later, feeling social anxiety. This omission suggests the relative emotional absence of Paul’s father, which, incidentally, mirrors the social anxiety that Paul feels in his adolescent years. This social anxiety, particularly given Paul’s experience a 1.5 generation Asian American growing up in a Mandarin-speaking household, can indeed be read as a racialized anxiety over the father, of inheriting a masculine Asianness that does not read properly in the white U.S. milieu of normative gender performance. Thus, Paul appeals masochistically (although unsuccessfully) to his mother in order to properly assimilate into the heterosexual economy, to be born anew with his psychology corrected.

Yet, as Deleuze describes, such masochism in fact idealizes coldness – that is to say, the flat affect that I have been discussing throughout this chapter. Deleuze describes coldness as “not the negation of feeling but rather the disavowal of sensuality” (52). Masochistic coldness, then, can be understood as deviation from normative faciality, a disavowal of the affects that signify a fully animate and expressive whiteness. Masochistic coldness entails the persistence of a rich inner life while converting the body into an inert, inanimate object, rendering the face into a screen, affectively “going afk.” Technological mediation, then, becomes the means through which Paul actualizes the masochistic ideal he had sought throughout his childhood and adolescence. In doing so, he embraces the condition of becoming the racial-technological excess of postmodernity, ultimately taking pleasure from the flat affect of coldness, from becoming-screen, all the while ostensibly disavowing the relationship of race to narrative.

Of course, my analysis of *Taipei* is, after all, a counter-reading to what I am sure are Tao Lin’s own intentions. Tao Lin would likely argue that *Taipei* would still be equally resonant if the central character was not Asian American, even as the presence of techno-orientalized Asiatic racial form persists throughout the novel’s pages. Yet, much of what Tao Lin seems to inadvertently write and explore regarding Asian Americanness is explicitly and intentionally expounded upon by another Asian American writer whose name differs by only one letter: Tan

¹³ “Paul’s father was 28 and Paul’s mother was 24 when they alone (out of a combined fifteen to twenty-five siblings) left Taiwan for America” (36). This is the only mention of Paul’s father during the childhood reflection in Chapter 2.

Lin. Through Tan Lin's *Insomnia and the Aunt*, we find a second explicit example of the relationship between technological mediation, phenomenological embodiment, affect, and racial becoming.

She Becomes Furniture: Television, Race, and Memory in Tan Lin's *Insomnia and the Aunt*

Multidisciplinary artist and academic Tan Anthony Lin jokes that he is often confused with Tao Lin. On his Tumblr blog, Tan Lin writes:

Tan Lin instead of Tao Lin
McNuggets instead of Adderall
Ambient Stylistics instead of Alt Lit
Jogging instead of Internet Poetry
Lulu instead of Scribd
x instead of ' '
BIZAARO WORLD WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN IT 'COLLIDES'

Of course, the truth is that Tan Anthony Lin, born in 1957 in Seattle, Washington, is the far more senior of the two writers, although he must contend with the contemporary popularity of the similarly named alt-lit upstart. Unlike Tao Lin, Tan Lin is not, demographically speaking, a member of the "post-1965" wave of Asian American authors, having closer generational commonality with Asian American writers prominent in the 1990s like Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Jessica Hagedorn, and Karen Tei Yamashita (although like Hagedorn, seemed initially separate from pre-established Asian Americanist discourse). Yet despite the wholly justifiable need to distinguish the two men and their careers, a thematic resonance between the two authors nevertheless persists.

Loosely, his work has been characterized as "ambient literature," in which Tan Lin aims to pursue an aesthetic of "reading distractedly." In fact, throughout his oeuvre of poetry, Tan Lin frequently pursues questions of mediation and technology, utilizing internet searches and other forms of online detritus to form pastiches of cyber-expression.¹⁴ This philosophy is also strongly reflected in his 2010 book *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking*, about which Tan Lin states that he "was interested in the book as dispersed ambient textuality, meta-data, or maybe just the allusiveness of the bibliographic that is referenced by a title, which I suppose the book itself and its ecosystems of reading" (Sanders). In this sense, Tan Lin's literary work aims for particular moods and fugues related to being swarmed with data and information, trying to locate the "ambiance" of being surrounded by media at large.

For the purposes of this discussion, I turn to Tan Lin's short volume entitled *Insomnia and the Aunt* (2011). Whereas Tao Lin's *Taipei* is a semi-autobiographical novel, Tan Lin's *Insomnia* is a fictive memoir, and out of all of Tan Lin's works, perhaps the most directly conversational about race and Asian Americanness. Curiously, Tan Lin's dreamlike, affectively insomniac text more consciously invokes and explores the themes of race, affect, and mediation

¹⁴ One of Tan Lin's most celebrated works to this effect is his book 2007 *HEATH*, which consists of a wide variety of media including blog posts, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, and handwritten notes. *HEATH* and a number of other texts utilize a series of footnotes consisting of Google searches to emphasize their status as "meta-text." This also applies to the central Tan Lin text of this chapter, *Insomnia and the Aunt*.

that are only latently present in Tao Lin's *Taipei*. Furthermore, *Insomnia and the Aunt* is able to deploy the affect of technological mediation to the very practice of becoming Asian American, utilizing its ambient mood to capture the felt experience of becoming-television.

Insomnia and the Aunt is a slim forty-four pages of prose intermittently interspersed by black-and-white images (visually similar to Tan Lin's preceding *Seven Controlled Vocabularies*) – the former a nonlinear reflection of Tan Lin reflecting on his fictive aunt, the latter a collection of iconic television images and presumed photographs from the author's past. In an interview with the Asian American Writers Workshop, Tan Lin states, "*Insomnia* is an ethnographic and sociological accounting, i.e. a fiction. This fiction concerns a group of people, Chinese people in America, and examines how Chinese people in America become Chinese people in America. And the answer is by watching TV" (Foote 2). *Insomnia* reflects upon a fictional childhood of Tan Lin, in which he spends time with his half-Chinese, half-English aunt who manages the Bear Park Motel in remote Concrete, Washington. In these summers, the narrator would spend entire nights with his aunt, literally watching television beside her for hours on end, reflecting on the nature of his aunt's presence in the shared space. In framing the prose to come, the narrator spends the first page contextualizing his aunt and uncle's trajectory, arriving from China to Washington State and opening a Chinese restaurant. Then, as the narrator describes:

Their first restaurant went out of business, they moved to Seattle to open another one, I think it was called Ming's Garden, but they got tired of serving people American Chinese food, so in the early 80s they decided to close the restaurant down and travel east, *into* the wilderness. They settled in a place near North Cascades National Park, near an Indian reservation. My aunt has always told me, in an inconsequential sort of grammatical inversion, that this is "the story of your lives" only backwards, from America to the real America, from China to somewhere you've never been before. And like most Orientals in the mid-seventies (or "Asian people" as they have been called since the mid-nineties), there was never the slightest bit of emotion on her face when she told me this story. Someone said "The Oriental, we are good at killing emotions," and I think that person was right (8, emphasis in original).

In this early paragraph, the narrator's aunt and uncle move away from the metropolitan center of Seattle (and, presumably, from the state's primary concentration of Chinese immigrants) and into "the wilderness," associated with "the real America." The "realness" of North Cascades National Park is implied by its proximity to an Indian reservation, implying a greater closeness with an essential "Americanness" by virtue of its proximity to indigeneity. We can thus initially understand the setting of *Insomnia and the Aunt* to be remote and closer to the bucolic "natural" than to the synthetic, evoking a sense of frontier Americana on the razor's edge of settler-colonial Manifest Destiny.¹⁵ But it is notable that in this framed telling of his aunt's narrative, the

¹⁵ With its setting, *Insomnia and the Aunt* resonates with that of Tseng Kwong Chi's *Expeditionary Series* of photographs, in which Tseng inserts himself into vast, frontier landscapes of North America. As Iyko Day argues in *Alien Capital*, Tseng's exaggeratedly Chinese, self-orientalized presence in the photos subverts the universalism and settler-colonial romanticism of these photos, deploying a disidentificatory "Chinese drag" that highlights "the managed interplay of life, degeneration, and death as a central feature of settler colonialism and projected onto nature" (82). In *Insomnia*, the setting plays a similar role, gesturing to a kind of campy frontier Americanness, although its role is secondary to the exploration of the television set and the flattening of affect.

narrator comments that “there was never the slightest bit of emotion on her face,” and then proceeds to racialize it, finding truth in the notion that “the Oriental” is “good at killing emotions.”

As an immigrant Chinese American, the narrator’s aunt begins to serve as a quasi-allegorical figure of Asianness in America whom the narrator utilizes as a reference point to his own sense of self. Her affective flatness is also already resonant with the “going afk” of *Taipei*, but rather than interface with the internet, the aunt is more fixated upon the television screen. Of course, there seems to be considerable difference between the relatively passive engagement with the television screen and the more active interactivity with the computer or phone screen—namely the latter’s “holding power,” to borrow a phrase from Sherry Turkle. Yet, I would argue that the televisual and the informatic screens bear more similarity in terms of seizing its viewer/user in the liveness and presence contained in its temporality. Besides the fact that, as Philip Auslander has convincingly argued, television’s ontology is ultimately rooted in live performance and the ideal of transporting the home audience into the theatrical liveness of the studio, television programming is organized around a concept of information overload and “flow.” As Raymond Williams has written, television commercials are not so much “interruptions” of the programs as they are part of a larger experiential (and affective?) whole, a “flow, in which the true series is not the published sequence of programme items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences compose the real flow, the real ‘broadcasting’” (91). Phenomenologically speaking, the television screen produces a similar tidal wave of information as the internet in *Taipei*, and correspondingly, an affective flatness that animates (or perhaps, de-animates) the central character’s felt experience of being racialized.

The effect of such distraction and mental wandering is an impairment of focus, and an imprecision of memory. Throughout *Insomnia and the Aunt*, the narrator attempts to remember his aunt’s visage but cannot do so adequately. He has only one photo of her that seems somehow unreal, and it is unreal partly due to the asymmetry of her Asianness with the narrative’s setting:

The only photograph of my aunt that I have managed to hold onto through the years has her wearing a white cowboy hat and dark sunglasses that seem out of place in the wilderness, and that signal the sort of disruption or lie that I associate with Asians in the movies or in Ohio where I grew up, or Asians in fast food restaurants like McDonalds, where I have never eaten and where I have never seen a Chinese person eating. I have watched hundreds of movies with Asians and fake Asians in them, and the one thing that makes them all the same (except the white Asians) is that the Asians never stare into your eyes through the glass of a TV screen and you are never allowed to look too deeply into theirs. I think it is for this reason that whenever I think about my aunt, and TV for that matter, I can never remember my aunt’s eyes (they appear to belong to someone else), and think instead of Robert Redford, who said in an interview that it is necessary for the body to lie to the mind (not the other way around) when acting and that the various strata of lying are continually searching for each other in the wilderness that most people call the truth and my aunt calls television. For my aunt, TV can never really lie because it is on all the time, unlike the theatre, where there are all sorts of changes of scenery and which as a result goes on and off and is thus the perfect medium for telling lies one after another. But in my aunt’s motel, the TV never goes off and all these changes are not changes at all; they’re commercials (10-11).

To both the narrator and the aunt, both truth and deception take on curious dimensions in relationship to the image. Beginning with the image of his aunt with the cowboy hat and sunglasses, the narrator notes that “seem out of place in the wilderness” and immediately racializes that asymmetry. His aunt’s apparel is a “disruption” or a “lie” somehow congruent with Asians in movies or in fast food restaurants. Here, Tan Lin’s description is curiously vague: somehow, the Asian in the fast food restaurant is somehow a lie, and it is not entirely clear if this Asian is untrue because she doesn’t exist (“I have never seen a Chinese person eating”), or if, ontologically, the Asian eating American fast food is somehow a contradiction. My reading inclines towards the latter; “Asians in the movies,” for example, actually exist, and parallels the structure of “Asians in fast food restaurants like McDonald’s.” This implies that the narrator is aware, at least in the abstract, that Asians are in fast food restaurants – perhaps through televisual mediation – but that somehow their presence is equally asymmetrical and unsettling.

Then, the narrator considers the eyes of Asians in cinema, stating that “you are never allowed to look too deeply” into them. There is not a clear sense of who is doing the “allowing” in regards to this prohibition, although it is likely some relationship between a US American cinematic norm of not focusing on Asians’ faces to access their psychic interiority (“the Asians never stare into your eyes through the glass of a TV screen”), and a disciplinary function that insists an aversion from the eyes altogether. The eyes, the primary visual locus of faciality and intersubjective interiority, are somehow inscrutable and illegible to memory, if they are read as Asian. This televisual racial logic extends so thoroughly to the narrator that he cannot, no matter how hard he tries, remember his own aunt’s eyes, or perhaps, that he can remember what they look like but distrusts the authenticity of their appearance in his memory – “they appear to belong to someone else.” His aunt’s eyes, then, are not her own, perhaps because the narrator lacks the capacity to conceptualize her eyes-as-eyes, and by extension, her face-as-face, to reference back to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion that the face “*is* the White Man.” Tellingly, the narrator invokes one of the most emblematically handsome white men of all, Robert Redford, who comes to mind instead of his aunt’s eyes. Redford’s quote that acting consists of the “body lying to the mind” implies a precedence of bodily exteriority over psychic interiority when taking on the act of performance. As the narrator describes Redford’s description of acting, “the various strata of lying are continually searching for each other in the wilderness that most people call the truth and my aunt calls television,” he subtly invokes various traditions of theater and performance theory in conceptualizing the relationship between the performance and the “authentic” – Erving Goffman’s well-known model of the “front stage” and “back stage,” for example.¹⁶ The body becomes a pastiche of various “strata of lying” – that is to say, performed personae, but for the aunt, this occurs not in the wilderness of truth, but in television. That is to say, for the aunt (and also, arguably, the narrator), the raw material of embodied affectual expression primarily resides within the world of TV. Furthermore, the TV is somehow less “deceptive” than theater; the commercial obfuscates the theatricality otherwise witnessed in the staged scene change of drama (which is consistent with Raymond Williams’ characterization of

¹⁶ As described in Goffman’s well-worn text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the “front stage” is a collection of personae and behaviors that cater to particular public settings, while the “back stage” is the ostensibly-authentic, although what becomes clear from this foundational work of performance theory is that the “authentic” is itself also actually performative.

“flow,” cited earlier in this chapter). For the aunt, the never-ending presence and liveness of the television¹⁷ provides the very basis for its authenticity.

The narrator, furthermore, seems to be skeptical of when his aunt actually does demonstrate affective exuberance. Not too long after he arrives at the motel, his aunt is described as “crying in front of the lobby window, which is back lit like a movie set” (10) and then proceeds to dramatically take his bags to the same room he always stays. However, according to the narrator, her choreography is scripted; every time he comes to visit, she does exactly the same thing: “She will cry in exactly in the same manner, in front of the neon NO VACANCY sign in the window, with the same uncontrollable wailing and tears and half-Chinese words I do not understand” (10), “as if my aunt’s life were endlessly re-passing a single point in time, like an actor in a sitcom or a car going past the same highway exit night after night on its way home” (10). It becomes clear, as the repeated late-night TV-watching binges illuminate, that there is something imitative, machine-like, and somehow “inauthentic” about her melodramatic display, that she is likely parroting the emotional abandon that she witnesses on television.

Within these passages and elsewhere, Asianness is already-fake. This is not in the sense of Asian stereotypes being asymmetric with an essentialist Asian “reality”; rather, it is that Asianness indexes fakeness itself, in that Asian faciality does not project proper affective expression as normalized by the television. This sense of essential artificiality mirrors *Taipei* and its repeated references to clones and androids as analyzed above, except that in *Insomnia and the Aunt*, the racialization is overt. Moreover, just as the face “is the White Man,” the aunt’s television is America, while the Asian face is somehow less properly animate. By “animate,” I invoke the work of Mel Y. Chen, who considers how the highly nebulous notion of “animacy” undergirds cultural logics that hierarchize not only human life, but nonhuman life and so-called “inanimate” objects; that is, animacy is “an often racialized and sexualized means of conceptual and affective mediation between human and inhuman, animate and inanimate, whether in language, rhetoric, or imagery” (10). Chen’s work effectively demonstrates the means by which animacy and the distinctions it engenders functions as a technology of vertical ordering, but also gestures to how the animate and the racial become mutually constitutive, whether through an excess of affect (like Muñoz, cited in the beginning of this chapter), its apparent absence, or a substantially qualitative aberrance. In this sense, Chen explores the theoretical possibility for things to possess, or at least become imbricated within, affect, and thus to become racialized along such an axis. Conversely, a human’s racialized thinglikeness can be understood on an affective basis.

Perhaps, as the narrator suggests in the opening page of *Insomnia and the Aunt*, “Orientals... are good at killing emotions” because of a proximity to being racialized as thinglike, and by extension, somehow “fake” humans. Although in that opening passage, the narrator uses the word “emotions,” but it is the narrator’s read of his aunt’s expressions that provokes this

¹⁷ I turn again to Philip Auslander, who writes: “Although the question of authentic television form remained unresolved, early writers on television generally agreed that television’s essential properties as a medium are *immediacy* and *intimacy*” (15) and that “Unlike film, but like theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present. This was literally the case in the early days of television when most material was broadcast live. Even now that most television programming is prerecorded, the television image remains a performance in the present in an important sense” (15). Thus, according to Auslander, television has a medium ontology of liveness, and by extension, ambiance. But unlike theater, in which the actors must break or change scenes, television could feasibly be left on indefinitely without an interruption of “flow.”

thought – that is to say, it is not so much emotion but affect, the exterior shimmering of feeling. Consequently, what the narrator interprets as the “killing” of the aunt’s feelings is not necessarily the absence of feeling, but rather the predetermined failure of the Asian face to be properly disciplined into the animacy of whiteness. The television then becomes the means by which that discipline is always aspired to but never actually achieved. As a consequence, the aunt is figured as perpetually in self-defeating transit, paradoxically attempting to escape the thinglikeness of Asianness by becoming the thing that is the television. Perhaps this could very well be the very essence of the Asian American condition: becoming thinglike in one respect (model minority) to escape being thinglike in another (inscrutably foreign).

Furthermore, in the process towards affective assimilation via the TV, the aunt undergoes a forgetting, allowing her own consciousness to become ahistorical, and conversely, the narrator encounters difficulty in remembering the aunt, except through a technologically mediated thingification:

For an immigrant like my aunt, America is not the images on a TV, it basically is the TV, which is why she decorates it with paper doilies, vanilla incense sticks and stuffed Garfields. This is also why my aunt thinks all TV, even live TV, is canned, and why she thinks America is basically not a place or even an image, but furniture. For my aunt, the live broadcast of the Vietnam War of my youth and her early middle ages resembled a re-run. My aunt accordingly has very few memories of violence or even racism in America. TV has made her forget all these things. Likewise, it is very hard for me to remember her even though I miss her intensely. The more I miss her the more she becomes furniture or a TV commercial for Tide detergent (19-20).

To the aunt, America *is* the TV, and the TV in turn is understood as not just the series of images it displays, but as a material, physical object (hence her decoration of the device). Moreover, the narrator then implies that it is the physicality of the TV that makes the aunt believe that all TV is canned; it is the literal materiality of the television that confers its hyperreal uncanniness. Paradoxically, it is the artifice of its “cannedness” that makes the television somehow more authentically American, since “authentic” Americanness becomes defined by its thingness and objecthood. But importantly, from the narrator’s standpoint, the aunt *herself* becomes thinglike in his memory; she becomes “furniture” or “a TV commercial for Tide detergent.” Notably, the awareness of the television as furniture, and then the conversion of the aunt into furniture, is objectifying, but not necessarily for commodity consumption. Intriguingly, the narrator’s longing for his aunt, and the cloudiness of his memory, while melancholic, falls short of a desire for the consumption of more goods. It is not the case, for example, that the narrator expresses a desire to acquire more Tide detergent to compensate for the loss of his aunt; rather, the presence of the detergent is the *effect* of a mediated cathexis. In any event, this thinglikeness operates to obfuscate, delete, or rewrite memory on some level, with the aunt detaching herself from racism, which is, interestingly, mentioned and even assumed but never overtly illustrated. Not unlike *Taipei*’s Paul, the aunt experiences race not through the overt confrontations of racism, but through the already-racialized frames of mediatization itself.

In his interview with Asian American Writers’ Workshop, Tan Lin states regarding television watching in *Insomnia*, “Mediation is surreal, but also utterly natural.... From a standpoint that is not necessarily mine, my aunt does not really exist. This makes perfect sense to me; she is an emanation of a TV set. But the same is true of the TV too. It has no life apart from

my aunt” (2). Although their stylistic strategies vary, *Insomnia* and *Taipei* share in common, to varying degrees, a naturalization of mediation – the ambiance of *Insomnia* allows thought and television images to blur into one another seamlessly for the first person narrator to produce a non-narrative meditation, while Tao Lin’s *Taipei* utilizes a cold close third person to demonstrate the phenomenological extension of Paul’s sense of embodiment and of self into the digital landscape (and vice versa). However, *Insomnia* effectively completes what *Taipei* merely gestures towards, a full psychic interiority of the techno-mediated Asian American subject that is both surreal and natural. The aunt and the television are enabled to only exist in relation to each other; the aunt, as the figure of becoming-Chinese American, is always liminally traversing from ontological fakeness to the object of furniture that promises normativity and belonging.

Part of *Insomnia*’s success in this regard is naturally due to Tan Lin’s intentional conceit to engage with Chinese American subjectivity, but it is also worth considering that the screens in *Taipei* and the screens in *Insomnia* are every so slightly different. Although, as I have argued, *Taipei*’s Paul seeks out masochistic coldness through his engagement with digital technology, Alexander Galloway argues that “[t]o be ‘informatically’ present in the world, to experience the pleasure of the computer, one must be a sadist” (13). The fugue of the online interface is perhaps more sadistic than masochistic despite its coldness, inviting the user to inflict changes within the boundaries of its screen as a form of omnipotent telekinesis. Meanwhile, *Insomnia*’s television screen is more fundamentally an instrument of masochism in which the viewer’s relationship is almost gloriously passive, more fully de-animating the subject than *Taipei*: whereas in *Taipei*, Paul would imagine himself as the botched clone or the screen of koan-like massified Asians, *Insomnia*’s aunt would become furniture itself.

Furthermore, *Insomnia* thwarts the sadism of interactivity through its usage of URLs in the footnotes. *Insomnia* metafictionally performs a form of internet fugue through its footnoting of search engine results. There are ten footnotes in the text, nine of which include short, tangentially related quotes from online internet articles, complete with internet hyperlinks. For example, after the narrator explains that his aunt “has two or three American voices” (24) and that the “first voice is the English practiced by a Chinese person and it sounds like an answering machine” (24-26), the fifth footnote, indexed after “machine,” written on the bottom page 26, states (and I quote verbatim):

I can still hear his **voice** – Simpler Living – Naomi Seldin ...

Feb 25, 2009 ... There are 16 messages on my cordless phone/**answering machine**. ... It **sounds like** you’re honoring your father’s memory in the right ways. ...

blog.timesunion.com/simplerliving/16-messages/6151/ - Cached

The appearance of this footnote is not precisely a clarification or a citation of an in-text reference, as a footnote in an academic text would be, but rather, more of a free association. The presence of the word “Cached” after the URL also directly indicates that this is meant to be read as a result from a Google search.¹⁸ The URL, which is still live at the time of this writing, links to a blog post by Naomi Seldin describing her experience mourning her father by keeping his

¹⁸ Before 2011, “Cached” and “Similar pages” were standard links alongside search results on the Google search engine, the former of which allowed users to access cached, previously-saved versions of websites that were no longer strictly live. Since 2011, the links were removed from the individual search results.

messages on her answering machine. This citation foreshadows the narrator's mourning of his aunt that, at this point of the text, has not yet actively begun. But it is worth noting that this link must be manually typed into a browser's URL bar, rather than merely "clicked," since, of course, the book is a physical book. In this way, *Insomnia and the Aunt* hoists the phenomenology of internet browsing so characteristic of Paul in *Taipei* onto its internet-savvy reader, who may momentarily rue the fact that this book is material rather than a clickable webpage. This also paradoxically draws attention to the physical materiality of the book itself and its metatextual limitations as such. Whereas *Taipei* provides a portrait of a user primarily on his interface, *Insomnia and the Aunt*, conjures an interface for the readers themselves. This technique ultimately serves Tan Lin's objective of creating an "ambient novel," producing a state of informatic distraction, teasing the reader to mentally wander in much the same way one would wander an online interface, but ultimately resists the actualization of this wandering precisely through its materiality, its thinglikeness (contrasting here with the ethereal digital interface that it imitates).

Thus, the digital sado-masochism portrayed in *Taipei* is both dismantled and refined in the televisual masochism of *Insomnia and the Aunt*. Nevertheless, both *Taipei* and *Insomnia* provide invaluable portraits of Asian American becomings within the regimes of cold, flat screens. However, the racialization of affective lack does not necessarily remain stable; the consignment to such coldness and flatness can lead to resentment and total reconfigurations of the subjectivity as an oppositional response. Such is the pursuit of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Green *Ressentiment*

Greg Pak's *Hulk*, Moral Masochism, and Asian American Ethics

The first major live-action motion picture rendition of Marvel Comics' *Hulk* was played by a Taiwanese American. Although Eric Bana performed the human form of the titular computer-generated protagonist of Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003), the iconic green superhuman form of the Hulk was, in fact, performed by Ang Lee himself. As demonstrated in the short behind-the-scenes documentary *The Incredible Ang Lee*, Lee decided to don the motion capture suit himself when he decided that it the most efficient way for him to convey the emotional nuances of the Green Goliath's choreography as he smashed and battled his way through the various obstacles in the superhero's path.

In a sense, Ang Lee's superhero caper is an Asian American film, which is one of many ways in which it has been largely misunderstood. The 145-minute film, although high-grossing, was largely disparaged by both critics and audiences alike; the critical consensus was ultimately that the film "had too much talking, not enough smashing" (RottenTomatoes.com), called "leaden and pretentious" by Salon.com and "incredibly long, incredibly tedious, incredibly turgid" by A.O. Scott of the New York Times. Part of the film's negative reception drew from a set of asymmetric expectations: the popular conceptualization of Marvel Comics' Incredible Hulk is that of unthinking, brainless brawn associated with speaking in all capital letters the signature phrase "HULK SMASH." Although Ang Lee's take on the Hulk was widely criticized for being too brooding and tormented, his "art house" treatment of the Green Goliath was perhaps more faithful to the affect of the source material than many audiences and critics have realized. Even in the early stages of the Hulk (inaugurated by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1962), the Hulk had been understood as a fundamentally tragic, tormented figure, combining the fleshy abjection of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with the melancholic masochism of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The basic premise of the iconic Marvel Comics superhero is that the Hulk is the uncontrollable alter-ego of super-genius physicist Bruce Banner, a modern-day Oppenheimer whose exposure to his own bomb would cause him to uncontrollably mutate into the Hulk, an inarticulate muscled monster driven primarily by rage. Central to the mythos of the Hulk is his near-limitless strength, which grows even more proportional to his anger. Under the supervision of writers Bill Mantlo and Peter David in the 1980s, the Hulk was established as one of Banner's alternate personalities, the result of developing dissociative identity disorder (DID) from child abuse suffered at the hands of his father. Consequently, the aesthetic of Ang Lee's tormented, somber *Hulk* demonstrates an affective fidelity to the core of the *Hulk* narrative.

Furthermore, this brooding melancholia is a familiar affect to Asian American masculine cultural production, a parallel heightened by Lee's invisible performance of the *Hulk* himself. By embodying the Hulk while simultaneously being replaced by him, Ang Lee reproduces an Asian American masculinity that seeks to undo castration yet disavows its own presence.¹ Although it

¹Perhaps most emblematic of this strategy is the work of Frank Chin. For example, *Chickencoop Chinaman* (1972) problematically dwells on the recuperation of the Asian father while remaining skeptical of the representational possibilities of Asianness itself, which has been "corrupted" by the feminizing force of orientalism. This leads to Chin's valorization of other modes of non-Asian masculinities that he inhabits yet decidedly avoids "mimicking," such as the cowboy masculinity of John Wayne.

would be a reach to say that Ang Lee's *Hulk* speaks directly to Asian American cultural politics, I open with this image of Lee to consider an intriguing Asian/American male affinity for the Hulk. This is not to say that Lee's racial position was the central factor motivating his donning of the mo-cap suit, but the image nevertheless visually crystalizes the narrative parallel between the Hulk and Asian American masculine racialization. Banner, not unlike the waves of professional East Asian immigrants after 1965 immigration reform and the rise of H1B visas in the 1990s, is a scientist. That is, he is proximal to technology in much the same way that the techno-orientalized model minority is. However, like such STEM-affiliated Asians, Banner's radical quasi-racial abjection prevents him from full, unmediated entry into American social life and capital, demonstrated quite potently in the 90s by the social drama that was the Wen Ho Lee crisis, in which the Chinese American nuclear physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory was publicly and falsely accused of espionage for the People's Republic of China.²

This masculine Asian American affinity for the Hulk extends to the primary author examined in this chapter, Korean American independent filmmaker and comic artist Greg Pak. Pak is a rare multimedia cultural producer who has held considerable creative sway over a number of mainstream science fictional franchises, yet has remained firmly committed to considering issues of race and representation even within these highly commercial media. Born in 1968 in Dallas, TX, trained at NYU's graduate film program, and the recipient of Rhodes Scholarship in 1991, Pak has produced a corpus of work for both the page and the screen both explicitly and implicitly engaging with questions of Asian American identity and cultural politics. His first film "Fighting Grandpa," dealt with the relationship between his Korean immigrant grandparents, while his short "Asian Pride Porn," starring playwright David Henry Hwang, satirically imagines a porno laden with politically progressive Asian American gender politics. His highly acclaimed 2003 film *Robot Stories*, starring veteran Japanese American actor Tamlyn Tomita, heavily features Asian Americans in relationship to androids in a post-cyberpunk near future. But since 2004, Pak has distinguished himself as a comic book writer, beginning at Marvel Comics with the series Warlock, authoring a number of titles including *X-Men*, *Iron Man*, and *Hercules*, as well as writing for the relaunch of DC Comics' *Batman/Superman* and Dynamite Entertainment's *Battlestar Galactica* comics.

It was Pak's run of *Incredible Hulk*, especially in the *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk* storylines from 2006-2007, that firmly sutured the Green Goliath to Asian American cultural politics through a thematic engagement with racial *ressentiment*. In the Asian American superhero collection *Secret Identities*, Pak himself explains: "[I]n a funny way, one of the most obvious expressions of my interest in race and diversity is hiding in plain sight in the *Planet Hulk* epic I wrote for Marvel. In *Planet Hulk*, the Green Goliath fights—and then bonds with—a group of alien gladiators whom everyone else sees as monsters. But all these different aliens end up proving themselves. So behind this crazy sci-fi storyline is an evisceration of racism" (55). Under Pak, the Hulk becomes the figure of radicalized Asian American masculinity *par excellence*, as well as its philosophical deconstruction, even though the Hulk is not himself Asian. Furthermore, I have already alluded before in the preliminary example of Ang Lee's film, the Hulk has already had a peculiar affinity with what Colleen Lye has called "Asiatic racial form"; Pak's authorship of the Hulk solidifies that attachment through his own identity as author,

² For a particularly rigorous treatment of the Wen Ho Lee affair, see Colleen Lye, "The Literary Case of Wen Ho Lee." *Journal of Asian American Studies*. 14.2 (June 2011): 249-282. In Lee, Lye articulates the cultural figure of the Asian American scientist, one who becomes enmeshed in an ambivalence between model minority complacency and Asian American "consciousness-raising."

his long-standing interest in Asian American cultural politics, and through the very narrative of his run with the Hulk.

Moreover, Pak does more than provide an Asian Americanist imagining of the Hulk; as I will soon demonstrate, Pak's Hulk intervenes into Asian American cultural politics. Whereas in the last chapter, the characters of *Taipei* and *Insomnia and the Aunt* phenomenologically contended with becoming-machine, Pak's Hulk becomes the figure of the resentful rejection of this paradigm. Yet, Pak's Hulk offers deconstructive critique of masculine *ressentiment* that has persisted throughout Asian American cultural politics, and gestures beyond towards an ethos of masochistic bottoming. Pak demonstrates that it is when the *Hulk*, the embodiment of a politics of woundedness, is at his most masochistic, that he demonstrates both the destructive and recuperative potentials of masochism.

Planet Hulk, World War Hulk, and the Limits of Ressentiment

To summarize, *Planet Hulk* begins with the Hulk's expulsion from Earth by his superhero (and, notably, intellectual) colleagues Reed Richards (Mr. Fantastic), Tony Stark (Iron Man), Black Bolt, and Dr. Stephen Strange, forcibly deporting the Hulk from Earth due to his unpredictable capacity for wanton destruction. The Hulk lands on a planet called Sakaar, which is ruled by a ruthless Romanesque empire of humanoid Sakaarans called Imperials, who in turn have enslaved a diverse swath of aliens as laborers, gladiators, and servants, all of whom treated as racially abject and monstrous. The bulk of *Planet Hulk* consists of a messianic Spartacus narrative: Hulk rises to become the revolutionary leader of the enslaved gladiators, overthrowing the dictatorial emperor, and even becomes crowned King alongside his warrior lover Caiera. In the few days that Hulk reigns as monarch, he brings peace and prosperity to the people of Sakaar, reconciling long-warring factions, his green blood capable of fertilizing the once-barren soil. But his reign horrifically and abruptly ends when the ship that brought Hulk to Sakaar explodes in an apocalyptic blast, massacring the majority of the newly liberated population, including Hulk's wife and unborn son. Once again enraged and grief-stricken, and blaming his superhero-scientist colleagues for planting the bomb on the ship, Hulk mounts an invasion of Earth to avenge his wife and followers, resulting in the *World War Hulk* storyline, pitting the Hulk against the rest of Earth's superheroes. The Aristotelian tragedy³ of *World War Hulk* ends with the revelation that it was not his human colleagues who planted the bomb, but rather Hulk's disciple Miek, whom Hulk taught the value of unending retributive rage. Miek, whose hive mother was murdered (thus ending the reproductive futurity of his entire race), decided that a Hulk of postwar reconciliation was not true to the Hulk's mission and essence, and thus gave Hulk an incentive towards violence once more. At the revelation of Miek's betrayal, Hulk self-loathingly surrenders to the Earth forces, allowing himself to be struck by a focused laser beam from orbit, reverting to his human form to be imprisoned.

Planet Hulk and *World War Hulk*, while not strictly allegorical to Asian American politics, nevertheless share key narrative characteristics with Asian American cultural production besides a self-identified Asian American author explicitly engaged in such themes. Central to this *Hulk* arc is his status as abject – Hulk is literally ejected and deported from Earth by his colleagues – which speaks to Karen Shimakawa's argument that Asianness has been peculiarly

³ The *Planet Hulk/World War Hulk* narrative follows a fairly traditional Aristotelian tragedy structure in which the hero is doomed by his tragic flaw (*hamartia*), and catharsis emerges from the hero's downfall as a result of this flaw.

subject to a historical regime of exclusion in the US and “must be radically jettisoned in order to constitute ‘Americanness’” (10), legally codified in such infamous legislation as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese Americans through Executive Order 9066 in 1942, and so on. Indeed, the fact that half of the cabal who had plotted to exile him – Stark and Richards – are not just white men but fellow *scientists*, echoes Asian American anxieties of merely ambivalent acceptance of Asian professionals in STEM fields, again reflected in the aforementioned Wen Ho Lee case. It is, in effect, rage at the deception of the model minority, that the promise of inclusion via adherence to respectable becoming-machine is broken. To solidify this link between the Hulk and Asian American even further, Pak designed and wrote a new character, supergenius Korean American teenager Amadeus Cho, who becomes a Hulk sympathizer. Cho models the Asian American reader’s sympathy with the Hulk, arguing that the Hulk is more victim than perpetrator of violence, and equally accomplished in heroism as his more socially-accepted colleagues.

But if we read *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk* as Asian American literature as I suggest we do, then the motivation undergirding the Hulk’s crusade in *World War Hulk* gains even greater significance. Specifically what motivates Hulk throughout the second phase of interstellar epic is *ressentiment*, loosely translated as “resentment.” In referring to *ressentiment*, I draw particularly from the Nietzschean tradition of *Genealogy of Morals*, which was most eloquently adapted to contemporary identity politics by Wendy Brown. In the Nietzschean tradition, revenge against oppression becomes the primary motivator of the man of *ressentiment*, who, for Nietzsche, is best epitomized by the Jew. Consequently, Nietzsche characterizes *ressentiment* as a moral logic emergent from “slave morality,” premised upon contempt for the privileged oppressor. Crucially, Nietzsche problematizes the logic of *ressentiment* as imagining unmediated agency on the part of both the oppressed and the noble, that morality assumes goodness in “choosing” to be weak, evil in “choosing” to be strong: “This type of man *needs* to believe in an unbiased ‘subject’ with freedom of choice, because he has an instinct of self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified.... [The subject] facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak and oppressed of every kind could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their particular mode of existence as an *accomplishment*” (I, 13: 28-29).

At first glance, the Nietzschean critique of *ressentiment* seems deeply reactionary, given the theory’s implicit devaluation of the subjective position of the marginalized. Frederic Jameson’s commentary on *ressentiment* is perhaps most emblematic in this regard, describing *ressentiment* dismissively in *The Political Unconscious*: “this ostensible ‘theory’ is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation, at the apparently quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat” (202), and that the theory itself is autoreferential, its appearance its own expression of *ressentiment*. Indeed, the most troubling problematic of Nietzsche’s original formulation of *ressentiment*, besides its anti-Semitism, is its lack of explicit understanding that systematic power relations can or should be altered; Nietzsche concentrates his critique precisely on the marginalized, and Jameson is quite correct in observing that Nietzsche’s critique of the “man of *ressentiment*” paradoxically makes himself a “man of *ressentiment*,” as well.

Yet, Jameson overlooks two crucial, productive dimensions in Nietzsche’s admittedly problematic formation. First, Nietzsche’s discussion of *ressentiment* focuses not on material disparity (as Jameson implies with “lower-class agitation”), but on categories of social identity that are not necessarily proletarianized – the nineteenth century Jew, in particular. Although, as

Rey Chow states, “The ethnic has, in many ways, been conceived implicitly as a proletarian, a resistant captive engaged in a struggle toward liberation” (41), oppressed religio-identity categories, rather than class conflict, are the primary object of Nietzsche’s critique. Thus, Nietzsche’s theory focuses not on the *dispossessed* and *exploited* per se, but on the *marginalized*, two typically-intersecting but not synonymous categories – the former being primarily material in its cultural metrics, the latter being primarily identitarian. That is not to say that the two cannot inform one another – Chow compellingly demonstrates how Marxian theorization of the proletariat deeply informs theories on ethnicity, for example – but rather, that Nietzschean *ressentiment* more actively troubles the specificity of identitarian ethnic resentment. Here, Sianne Ngai’s distinction between *ressentiment* and envy is useful; while both affects importantly target inequality as their locus of contempt, “envy makes no claim whatsoever about the moral superiority of the envier, or about the ‘goodness’ of his or her state of lacking something that the envied other is perceived to have. Envy is in many ways a naked will to have” (34). Thus, according to Ngai, envy (rather than *ressentiment*) possesses a particularly productive deconstructive potential in relation to social inequality, but especially when that inequality is materially manifested. Yet, envy has limitations in relation to race; as Ngai states, “‘race’ names the struggle in which it is most taken for granted that no degree of acquiring what the envied other has—money, education, phallus... will ever culminate in the other and one becoming indistinguishable” (173). Although Ngai does not state this, it is perhaps fair to say that *ressentiment*, rather than envy, functions as a dominant cultural logic of racial identity politics, given its tendency to moralize the position of the oppressed and its refusal to claim the dominant position of whiteness.

Secondly, I would argue that the most fruitful dimension of Nietzsche’s theory is not so much his condemnation of the oppressed position of “the slave,” but rather, his perhaps-unintentional critique of individualist agency vis-a-vis inequality. The morality of Nietzschean *ressentiment* depends precisely on agency, on resenting the strong for *choosing* to be strong, and praising the weak for *choosing* to be weak. As Wendy Brown argues through Nietzsche, *ressentiment* becomes the primary basis of contemporary identity politics, establishing a psychic economy of past victimhood in order to legitimize the moral force of a minoritized subject position. But as Brown aptly observes:

[I]n its attempt to displace its suffering, identity structured by *ressentiment* at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection. This investment lies not only in its discovery of a site of blame for its hurt will, not only in its acquisition of recognition through its history of subjection (a recognition predicated on injury, now righteously revalued), but also in the satisfactions of revenge, which ceaselessly enact even as they redistribute the injuries of marginalization and subordination in a liberal discursive order that alternately denies the very possibility of these things and blames those who experience them for their own condition. Identity politics by *ressentiment* reverse without subverting this blaming structure: they do not subject to critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes, nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes. Thus, politicized identity that presents itself as a self-affirmation appears as the opposite, as predicated on and requiring its sustained rejection by a ‘hostile external world’ (70).

Thus, according to Brown, an identity politics of *ressentiment* thus *requires* the sustenance of rejection, exclusion, and injury. Through Brown, we can understand Nietzschean *ressentiment* as a critique of a particularly *identitarian* articulation of oppression, of a group with a vested interest in retaining its preexisting subject position. But importantly, as Brown indicates, the identity politics of *ressentiment* targets the socially privileged for “choosing” to be privileged. Not only does this position moralize power relations; it does not adequately model the role of power in subjectification, which implicates all of its subjects through fields of power relations. Throughout this dissertation, I have been primarily following a Foucauldian model of subject formation, and here, Foucault’s well-known description of power bears citation from *A History of Sexuality Vol. 1*: that is, “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system” (92). That is, power is not simply “owned” by the subjects who are “in power,” but rather, it circulates throughout an entire system, and in fact produces knowledge, meaning, and subjects through establishing its own fields of intelligibility. Sociologist Claire Jean Kim adapts Foucault’s models of power to produce a theory of “racial power,” and her description is useful to this discussion:

I conceive of racial power not as something that an individual or group exercises directly and intentionally over another individual or group but rather as a systemic property, permeating, circulating throughout, and continuously constituting society. I do not use the phrase “White racial power” because it erroneously suggests that Whites possess and deliberately exercise racial power against others when in fact Whites, too, are constituted *qua* Whites by the operation of racial power. While Whites are undeniably the primary beneficiaries of racial power, they are also its subjects (9).

Thus, since Kim asserts that power is primarily a circuit that governs intelligibility, it constitutes subjects themselves, including those who are ostensibly “powerful” (or, in contemporary parlance, “privileged”). In contrast, the identity politics of *ressentiment* is sutured to an ethics of individualist agency, obfuscating the complex relationality of subjectification and relying upon a conceptualization of power in which its “wielders” fully and agentically come into their own strength. *Ressentiment*, in fact, merely repeats the logic undergirding individualist accountability that buttresses the moral justification of racism in the first place—a logic that Kim’s Foucauldian model of racial power seeks to undo.

Nevertheless, Nietzschean *ressentiment* has undergirded Asian American cultural politics, and even the signifier “Asian American” itself. As I have belabored in the Introduction, Asian American literary narratives and cultural politics have tended to valorize “resistance” through a glorification of the “bad” (Nguyen) or “ideal critical” (Lee) subject, who arrives upon political consciousness through traumatic encounters with white racism.⁴ In *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow problematizes the notion of political consciousness as inherited from Lukács, noting that Lukács contradictorily idealizes the subject

⁴ Examples abound, although some of the most iconic and canonized would be Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (1946), John Okada’s *No No Boy* (1957), and many of the writings of the *Aiiieeeee!* anthology co-edited by Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Wong, and Jeffery Paul Chan (1974). See the Introduction to this text for a fuller explanation.

who labors in what has come to be known more generally as “standpoint theory.” The oppressed status of the proletariat provides the worker with both an inherent capacity for resistance, and imbues a moralizing sense of “humanity” (the latter of which strikingly parallel to *ressentiment* itself). According to Chow, this description of the proletarian has adapted easily to the minoritized ethnic, who is similarly trapped by history (40), and thus possesses an inherent nobility by virtue of having been oppressed and excluded – again, as in *ressentiment* (and, as in *ressentiment*, gains additional depth by virtue of its identitarian shape). Compellingly, Chow argues that the Lukácsian moralizing essentialism of the oppressed subject, the inner human “soul” that gives the subject the capacity to resist and pursue social justice, is entirely parallel to the “calling” described in Max Weber’s description of the Protestant ethic of capitalism (43). That is to say, “precisely this narrative of resistance and protest, this moral preoccupation with universal justice, is what constitutes the efficacy of the capitalist spirit. Resistance and protest, when understood historically, are part and parcel of the structure of capitalism; they are the reasons capitalism flourishes” (47). The moral idealization of the subject who has become aware of her own oppression – whom we can associate with “the man of *ressentiment*” – is itself complicit with the moral logics of capitalism. Moreover, despite his dismissal of Nietzsche’s *ressentiment*, Jameson similarly critiques the emergence of Lukácsian idealization of the standpoint in “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project,” stating that “‘the moment of truth’ of group experience—itsself negative and positive all at once, an oppressive restriction which turns into a capacity for new kinds of experience and for seeing features and dimensions of the world and of history masked to other social actors—is prolonged by an epistemological articulation that translates such experience into new possibilities of thought and knowledge” (“History and Class Consciousness” 70). Rather, argues Jameson, the various relativistic standpoints of oppressed groups should instead be situated relative to the broader “common object” of their theorization—that is, late capitalism.

Furthermore, Nietzschean *ressentiment* possesses congruity with the racial melancholia described by Anne Cheng, which feeds upon racial injury in an unconscious, libidinal manner. One difference between *ressentiment* and melancholia is affective; *ressentiment* pivots primarily upon revenge and anger, while melancholia is a perpetual elongation of grief (additionally, this distinction can easily be problematically gendered). Furthermore, while *ressentiment* gestures towards a futurity, in reality it is as tethered to the repetition of trauma; meanwhile, melancholia refuses resolution altogether. The agent of *ressentiment* glorifies their position of structural weakness in order to seek revenge, while melancholia grips hold of the oppressed subject’s “moment of truth” and seeks to rehearse it.

Taking Brown and Chow together, the critique of *ressentiment* and the narrative of “political consciousness” that accompanies its awakening can remain, in fact, productive. A Nietzschean critique of *ressentiment*, rather than being an “expression of annoyance” to invalidate demands for redress from the oppressed, can instead be appropriated to demand that a cultural politics of resistance go even *further*. As the following close reading of Greg Pak’s Hulk will demonstrate, it is masochism, not *ressentiment*, that offers such political possibilities.

The Ontology of Hulkness: *Ressentiment* as Masculine Superpower

Notably, the very ontological basis of the Hulk-as-Hulk is grounded in *ressentiment* to such an extent that the Hulk is the very embodiment of *ressentiment* itself. This may seem counterintuitive, as Nietzschean *ressentiment* establishes weakness as proximal to godliness,

whereas the Hulk is frequently declared “the strongest there is.” But the Hulk’s physical strength is derived precisely from emotional and physical woundedness: as the Hulk and his associates are fond of repeating, the angrier the Hulk gets, the stronger – indeed, the more Hulk-like – he is. Such is codified in one of the Hulk’s other names earned on Sakaar: the Green Scar, which draws attention to the Hulk’s status as wound itself.

The Hulk’s hypermasculine hyper-physicality is thus an expression of the Hulk’s (and, additionally, “puny” Banner’s) much more troubled psychic woundedness, exacerbated in Pak’s interpretation by an added layer of literal exclusion and racialization. It is also important to note here that this *ressentiment* is an especially masculine one, with the moral economy of *ressentiment* expressed through physical violence and contests of dominance between the Hulk and other men. Despite the presence of powerful warrior women such as Caeira and the gladiator Elloe, Pak’s run on the *Hulk* unfortunately does not ultimately challenge the superhero genre’s tendency towards male-centrism. Nevertheless, in suturing *ressentiment* to masculinity, Pak’s work opens both to critique. After all, the hyperbolic bulk that is the Hulk’s body is so staggeringly male, so excessive, we can even consider it a drag performance of masculinity. That Banner is in actuality a scrawny, nerdy man – a wiry frame also often stereotypically associated with Asian men – demonstrates the performative dimension of the Hulk, a monstrous hypermasculinity that borders on the absurd. It is analogous to the imagined, aspirational hypermasculinity of straight Asian American men within Asian American cultural nationalism (for which Frank Chin and the *Aiiiiiiii!* group are oft-cited as epitomizing), as most thoroughly catalogued and analyzed by David Eng, Daniel Y. Kim, Nguyen Tan Hoang, and Celine Parreñas Shimizu.⁵ Of course, as David Eng neatly summarizes, “Paradoxically, this reification of a strident cultural nationalism, with its doctrine of compulsory heterosexuality and cultural authenticity, mirrors at once the dominant heterosexist and racist structures through which the Asian American male is historically feminized and rendered self-hating in the first place” (21); in other words, that Asian American hypermasculinity validates the very conditions of the racist emasculation to which it responds.

Importantly, the Hulk’s hyperbolically hypermasculine build – visually, a horizontally distinctive shape despite his seven-foot stature – adds to his monstrous abjection, a consistent feature since the beginning of the Hulk comics. His build contrasts with the more normative physicalities of his white male peers such as the heavily-muscled but legibly attractive Tony Stark and Black Bolt, as well as the wiry, lanky Reed Richards and Stephen Strange. The Hulk’s excessive mass, a physicalization of overcompensation, does not earn him assimilation or acceptance into the white masculine order. Of course, this is far from the Hulk’s aim; after all, the Hulk is aggressively anti-assimilationist, and his excessive, unruly bulk, stands almost as a parody to the normative masculine muscle of the superhero genre. More importantly, the Hulk’s monstrous hypermasculinity is a symptom of *ressentiment*, a limitless, revolting strength proportional to his limitless, revolting hurt.

Planet Hulk and *World War Hulk* quite explicitly demonstrate the (classically) tragic futility of *ressentiment*, largely through its treatment of the Hulk’s protégé Miek. Miek, an insectoid Sakaaran native who matures (and physically metamorphoses) from wide-eyed youngster to embittered adult (complete with a thick, armor-like carapace) through the course of *Planet Hulk*, comes to personify the harsh consequences of Hulk’s moral logic. In particular, the discourse between the Hulk and Miek demonstrate that *ressentiment* is not only an affect, but a

⁵ See David Kim’s *Racial Castration*, Daniel Kim’s *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow*, Nguyen Tan Hoang’s *A View From the Bottom*, and Celine Parreñas Shimizu’s *Straitjacket Masculinities*.

definitive dimension of subject formation for both of them. In an early stage of the Hulk's slave revolt, the young Miek discovers the Imperial general who had massacred his hive (but had since defected against the Red King), he asks Hulk, whom he calls "Two-hands," for moral guidance.

Miek: Two-hands... what saying you?

Hulk: Why ask me? You know what you want. You brought us here to get it.

Miek: But what... what would **you** doing?

Hulk: I'd never stop making them pay.

This exchange between the Hulk and his protégé speaks to the temporality of *ressentiment*. Miek's present progressive tense merges with the subjunctive ("what would you doing"), inquiring into an action that is both hypothetical and already-occurring. This merger of the progressive with the subjunctive implies a unity between the hypothetical future and the action of the present. Then, the final subjunctive line of the Hulk, accompanied by a shadowy, grimacing half-frontal image of the Hulk's face, consolidates the transitive action of revenge into a state of being; to "never stop" implies a permanence, a constant commitment to a masculine economy of violent recompense ("making them pay"). From Miek's perspective, the Hulk is already-revenging because the Hulk is the Hulk, and Miek correspondingly grows into adulthood through his mimeticism of the Hulk's moral philosophy.

Yet, although the Hulk effectively occupies the place of the father for Miek in the first half of *Planet Hulk*, it is Miek who in turn comes to embody a perverse superego of *ressentiment* for the Hulk, particularly after Miek matures into his massive (and less anthropomorphic) adult form. In the *World War Hulk* edition of *Incredible Hercules*, Miek reflects on his role with the Hulk; in an inner monologue addressed to the Hulk alongside a montage of corresponding events that had occurred throughout *Planet Hulk*, Miek muses: "Because you need me. Because every once in a while, you start to think that maybe it's time to stop. That all you want is to be left alone. But every time you almost gave up, Miek was there, reminding you who you are. The humans' shuttle >kikikik<⁶ killed Crown City, killed your queen and child, and you just wanted to die. But Miek reminded you you were made for vengeance." Here, Miek conceptualizes the Hulk in essentialist, static terms ("who you are," "made for vengeance"), conceptualizing himself as a guarantor of that tragic fatalism. In this sense, Miek becomes the radicalized masculine ethnic chauvinist; as Miek has learned through the development of his "consciousness," properly oriented and vectored anger towards one's oppressor is a necessary prerequisite for authentic identity. As a consequence, Miek conspires to set the bomb that kills Caeira and the bulk of Sakaar's population at the conclusion of *Planet Hulk*. As Miek explains to Hulk later at the climax of *World War Hulk*:

"Never >kik< stop making them pay." That's what you taught me. That's why I >kik< killed them. That's why you'll kill me.... I always have to remind you, because you always forget. Like when you found your >kik< queen, all you wanted was peace. But that's not who you are. You >kik< conquered Sakaar. >kik< Killed the Red King. We should have slaughtered his people. But you let them live. So I watched them load an old

⁶ This and similar phrases appear throughout Miek's speech in the *Hulk* comics as onomatopoeias for science fictional insectoid noises, or perhaps xenobilingualism. They do not appear to have concrete linguistic content for the Anglophone reader, however.

warp core onto that shuttle. They thought it would kill you. But I knew it would just remind you of what you were made for (*World War Hulk* #5).

For Miek, a Hulk who is not angry is not a real Hulk at all; thus, his actions personify the very logic of *ressentiment*. To a certain degree, Miek is correct; the Hulk's very defining premise, his superhero power, is the proportional relationship between his rage and his power. Moreover, the classically tragic structure of the *Planet Hulk / World War Hulk* narrative demonstrates the self-defeat implicit within *ressentiment*, the impossibility of achieving a state of thriving livability inasmuch as identity requires a wound. Miek's actions literalize Brown's supposition that *ressentiment* identity politics require the persistence of woundedness to retain the coherence of the "resistant" subject. But of particular symbolic import here is the misplacement of Hulk's rage: his first instinct is to blame the white male scientist conspirators who were unambiguously behind his initial expulsion. The Hulk attributes the devastation to those who had perpetrated the originary act of exclusion. This is demonstrated powerfully at the conclusion of *Planet Hulk*, after the shuttle's bomb explodes and the Hulk melodramatically holds the slain body of Caeira in his arms. Amidst the swirling smoke in the ruins, the faces of Reed Richards, Iron Man, Dr. Strange, and Black Bolt gradually form (and gain color) in the background, bringing the clear objects of the Hulk's ire into focus.

The ambiguous attribution of the atrocity speaks to the crisis of ambiguity for racially triangulated Asians in America. In the Asian Americanist pursuit of radicality, of the "ideal critical subject," white racism is targeted as primarily a barrier for Asian Americans, and the classic *bildungsroman* of Asian American political consciousness occurs through the recognition of the presence of this oft-unseen force. In *Planet Hulk*, the Hulk and Miek undergo parallel but distinct variations of this *bildungsroman*: the Hulk himself transitions from an asocial, misanthropic antipathy to one imbued with political purpose, one in which his monstrousness is no longer just the justification for abjection, but rather the basis of a revolutionary sociality among his fellow former slaves, which parallels the foundation of Asian American panethnic organization (that is, until the bombing reverts him back to pure *ressentiment*). As Viet Nguyen states, "anti-Asian racism makes us all Asian, rather than singularly ethnic, and that Asian America as a category or identity is effective in a *defensive* posture" (9). This politicization is reflected in the multiracial nature of the Hulk's revolt; Hulk and his group of former gladiators are all of different species but come to cohere in a coalitional identity – "Warbound" – when confronting a single racial oppressor, reflecting the responsive, defensive nature of a panethnic identity such as Asian Americanness (or, alternately, of the coalitional solidarity of the 1968 Third World Liberation Front, which was again united against a common white opponent). Meanwhile, Miek transitions *to* asociality, idealizing the Hulk who is at his most powerful, insisting that the Hulk's very identity remain tethered to the violence of *ressentiment*. Miek represents the insistence on woundedness and the permanence of revolutionary upheaval; however, I would argue that Miek's most problematic mistake is not his incapacity to forgive (which would be the clearest and most trite conclusion to draw from Pak's *Hulk*), but rather his incapacity to grasp the systemic nature of racial oppression. Miek's engagement with racial injury, in accordance to the Hulk's *ressentiment*, is premised upon an individualist moral economy of justice and punishment, ultimately leaving the actual logics of racialization and slavery unchallenged.

As the narrative shifts from *Planet Hulk* to *World War Hulk*, the racial politic surrounding the Hulk shifts, as well. Ultimately, the slave uprising on Sakaar in *Planet Hulk*

unambiguous, given the dominant society's status as a racial dictatorship wherein the pink-skinned Imperials equally enslaved and massacred their racial others. However, the bombing of Crown City results in a shift in this clarity: the Hulk and his Warbound travel to Earth to combat Earth's superheroes – all of whom of course possess their own fandoms and own long-entrenched histories as primary protagonists – in *World War Hulk*, which taints the moral clarity of the Hulk's crusade. The art style shifts correspondingly, as well: in *Planet Hulk*, primarily penciled by Carlo Pagulayan and Aaron Lopresti, there is a beautifully lush vibrancy of color, brighter palettes, and generally more idealized figurations of the characters; in contrast, John Romita, Jr.'s *World War Hulk* art features darker palettes, harsher, sharper, angled penciling. Pagulayan and Lopresti's artwork produces an operatic spectacle appropriate to the simpler, black-and-white delineations of conflict in *Planet Hulk*, while Romita's harsher, less idealized style produces the effect of making the reader more aware of the comic-as-comic, of the artifice of cartoon abstraction, within the ambivalent *World War Hulk*. The romantic revolutionary fantasy of *Planet Hulk* is a space where *ressentiment* is necessary, thriving and sustained by a community of like-oppressed peoples, and its off-world setting allows for an easily manageable and uncontroversial allegory for racial oppression on Earth. However, the transition to Earth correspondingly necessitates the imperfect adaptation of this politic into a "real-world" setting, one in which the (other) white male superheroes of the Marvel Earth are held responsible. The transition from Sakaar to Earth reflects the transition, described by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, from racial despotism to racial hegemony, from naked race relations to more diffuse ones. Accordingly, under racial despotism, resistance could be easily consolidated as oppositional: "Originally framed by slave revolts and *marronage*, by indigenous resistance, and by nationalisms of various sorts, and later by nationalist and equalitarian racial freedom movements, oppositional racial consciousness and depth as *racial resistance*. Just as racial despotism reinforced white supremacy as the master category of racial domination, so too it forged racial unity among the oppressed" (131, original emphasis). However, as domination gives way to hegemony, the discourse of liberal colorblindness comes to neutralize and obfuscate race relations, producing ambiguities for racialized subjects regarding the persisting presence of racial subjugation. In the state of ambiguous hegemony, on Earth in *World War Hulk*, *ressentiment* serves as a nostalgia for racial despotism, for the subjugated but more obviously legible position of the slave. Utilizing Omi and Winant's terminology, we can loosely associate *Planet Hulk's* Sakaar narrative with that of racial dictatorship, and the Hulk's invasion of the Earth in *World War Hulk* with that of racial hegemony, the former reflecting an historical moment of clearer lines of opposition, the latter reflecting a setting of dispersed culpability.

Furthermore, this transition from unambiguous to ambiguous status of subjugation is additionally reflective of the shifting of Asian American cultural politics throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, marked by a transition from violent exclusion to neoliberal model minority inclusion, with the history of the former given primacy in the pedagogical fostering of Asian American "consciousness." The model minority positioning of Asians in America, regardless of how "mythological" or ideological the racial formation, nevertheless retains the discursive capacity to performatively actualize, and yet many strong pedagogical and narrative traditions of Asian American Studies will often attempt to dismiss the notion through the historical incident of exclusion or internment, even when the Asian American subject in question is not historically contiguous with those early Asian American communities. It is a cultural politics of predetermined culpability by individual white agents; it is how the bomb was, and always had been, set by Tony Stark and Reed Richards.

The metaphor is particularly rich especially given that the Hulk's colleagues are still guilty on another level; although Miek had framed the Hulk's human compatriots, the Hulk's very circumstances on Sakaar – both tragic and triumphant – are ultimately the consequence of the nonconsensual exile enacted by his four colleagues, after all. Thus, exclusion, or abjection, still ultimately frames the *Planet Hulk* narrative and serves as the primary frame of intelligibility for the Hulk. Furthermore, Asian American cultural politics, in locating white racism within white subjects and positioning Asian America as primarily a victim, rather than articulating racial power as a circuitous flow through which any “subject” can participate regardless of position, all-too-often ignores its own complicity with, and even reliance on, white racism and capital for its own coherence. In relation to the Hulk, recall that Banner, while the victim of the other scientist superheroes' exclusion due to his green-skinned abjection, is also the creator of a weapon of mass destruction, as heinous a contributor to the military-industrial complex as arms manufacturer Tony Stark (Iron Man) is. Although it was not *his* weapon that incinerated his pregnant wife, Banner was certainly responsible for the creation of weapons like it, the Hulk himself being a direct repercussion of that weapon. Consequently, the Hulk is systemically complicit in an analogous industry as that which killed his loved ones.

Yet, as I explore below, there are two crucial moments in the *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk* arcs in which the Hulk shifts from a logic of *ressentiment* to that of masochism. I begin with the climax of *World War Hulk*, in which the Hulk becomes that which had created him to begin with: a bomb.

Bomb, Bottom, and the Racial Shadow: From *Ressentiment* to Masochism

As the tragic hero confronted with his hamartia (tragic flaw), the Hulk *becomes* a bomb immediately after Miek's confession; John Romita Jr.'s art displays a Hulk who begins to glow and emanate a green science-fictional radioactivity; soon the entire US eastern seaboard is awash with his essence. When Richards tells the Hulk, “Bruce. It's – it's all right. We'll help you this time—,” the Hulk interrupts with “Stop. Without you, none of this would have happened. I'll hate you forever. Almost as much as I hate myself.” The Hulk's transformation into that which had originally created him, and that which killed his wife and unborn child – parallels the moment when his self-contempt and self-punishment reaches its apogee. Moreover, in becoming the bomb, he threatens to explode into a male orgasm of violence, a Lacanian *jouissance* stemmed from a torturous psychic pain.

The exquisite exploding Hulk, the orgasmic Hulk of radioactive discharge, only arises when psychic punishment is at its peak and he fully confronts his own complicity in the death of his loved ones. Although the Hulk is at his most pained, he is also at his most powerful, when he is self-critical, and moreover, when the culpability of oppression cannot be easily individualized. In including himself as a target of punishment upon the tragic confrontation of his hamartia, the Hulk shifts from *ressentiment* to moral masochism, and in doing so, crucially illustrates the differences between the two moral and affective economies. Whereas *ressentiment* thrives off the perceived injustice inflicted upon the subject, masochism feeds off of punishment – such is the case in Sigmund Freud, Theodor Reik, and Kaja Silverman's respective traditions of moral masochism. Paradoxically, this distinction furthermore places masochism, not *ressentiment*, in the domain of the social deconstruction; the central flaw of *ressentiment* is its tendency towards individuation, seeking out individual Others who had agentially “chosen” to be powerful, while the subject of masochism, in Silverman's words, “loudly proclaims that his meaning comes to

him from the Other, prostrates himself before the gaze even as he solicits it, exhibits his castration for all to see, and revels in the sacrificial basis of the social contract” (*Male Subjectivity at the Margins* 206). While *ressentiment* actively hates the oppressive Other, it implicitly disavows its absolute reliance upon it, thus actually magnifying this relationship; in contrast, masochism proclaims this reliance, and in doing so, deconstructs it. In the case of the Hulk, masochism both exposes and stages the power relation of racial subjugation; the Hulk’s becoming-bomb illustrates the uncomfortable erotics that *ressentiment* disavows. As a consequence, continues Silverman, “The male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing to be sutured or recompensed. In short, he radiates a negativity inimical of the social order” (206). In effect, this refusal of recompense disrupts the entire moral economy of *ressentiment*.

Consequently, moral masochism is, in actuality, aligned with what Michel Foucault has termed “counter-conduct.” In the latter years of his career, Foucault theorizes “conduct” as an apparatus of governmentality, considering the multivalent resonances of “conducting others,” “conducting oneself,” “lets one be conducted,” et cetera as a means by which governmental power is not just collective and external, but individualized and internal. In Foucault’s *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, counter-conduct is a mode of intervening within power relations, playful and subversive in its operations (while never being completely “outside” of conduct itself), often assuming an ethics of deliberate failure. Notably, Foucault’s first example of counter-conduct is Middle Ages asceticism, a counterintuitive choice due to the fact that asceticism seems to be directly associated with the essence of Christianity (204-205). Yet, Foucault argues that asceticism in fact subverted the logic of pastoral power, as “asceticism is an exercise of self on self; it is a sort of close combat of the individual with himself in which the authority, presence, and gaze of someone else is, if not impossible, at least unnecessary,” (205). In this sense, asceticism is perhaps desubjectifying, a form of subjective self-destruction that weakens the hold of the subjectifying gaze (or, alternatively, the interpellating hail). “Second,” continues Foucault, “asceticism is a progression according to a scale of increasing difficulty.... And what is the criterion of this difficulty? It is the ascetic’s own suffering” (205). The metric of asceticism’s “progress,” then, is suffering itself, the capacity for the ascetic to inflict pain on oneself, and establishes a telos in which suffering only magnifies over time.

The resonances of moral masochism, as summarized Silverman, with Foucault’s asceticism are clear, sharing “an exercise of self on self” and an intentional temporal vector toward increasing suffering. But whereas *ressentiment* also seeks suffering, doing so to feed the revenging subject, moral masochism instead seeks out suffering as an ethical self-punishment. If moral masochism is, additionally, a counter-conduct, then it is one that disrupts “the processes implemented for conducting others” (*Security, Territory, Population* 201); in this case, the field of power relations that determines the subject’s normative relations to pleasure and pain.

In the conclusion of *World War Hulk*, the Hulk threatens to explode only when it is clear that his superhero colleagues, Miek, and the Hulk himself are all actors within a wider, nebulous flow of power. Unlike in *ressentiment*, the Hulk realizes here that he is not “outside” the province of subjection, but thoroughly enmeshed in it. Correspondingly, as the Hulk becomes-bomb, he begins to radiate, de-territorializing the boundaries of his body. It is this self-punishment, rather than the punishment of the individuated Others, that maximizes the Hulk’s reach.

However, in *Planet Hulk*, the Hulk’s masochistic tendencies include more than this overt, expressive masculinity. The Hulk demonstrates the recuperative capacity of masochism, and

bottoming and pain, through the Hulk's engagement with the alien species known as the Spikes. Among the many alien species depicted on Sakaar, the Spikes are the most abject and horrifying: historically reviled and perceived on Sakaar as a semi-sentient species of pathogen that could transform its victims into zombielike abominations, the Spikes are revealed to be normally benign energy beings who traverse the vacuum of space, but have been enthralled as a biological weapon by the Imperials. Once the Hulk learns that the Imperials coerced and manipulated the Spikes into terrorizing the diverse population of Sakaar to serve as a unifying, scapegoated enemy, he enlists their help in the final stages of the slave revolt.

In *Planet Hulk*, the Spikes are faceless, massified, inscrutable, and literally yellow; if the Hulk reflects Asian American masculine *ressentiment*, the Spikes are emblematic of the Oriental horde. In some respects, the Spikes resonate with what Sau-Ling Wong has termed the "racial shadow," the figure upon whom undesirable Asianness is projected, thus "render[ing] alien what is, in fact, literally inalienable, thereby disowning and distancing it" (*Reading Asian American Literature* 78). A consistent trait in Asian American cultural production, the "racial shadow" is the orientalized figure against which the Asian American subject is defined, scorned largely because the racial shadow confirms the stereotypes projected by white supremacy, or because the Asian American subject has internalized such attitudes (a critique famously problematized by David Henry Hwang's first play, *FOB*). Similarly, the Spikes, in their faceless, yellow hordeness, are so completely abject to be (initially) legible as subjects, constituting an apparently chaotic threat to the Hulk's resistance until he discovers the exiled Spike elders. In *Planet Hulk*, however, the relationship between the Hulk and the Spikes is not quite analogous to the trope defined by Wong; although he initially battles them, the Hulk does not exactly disavow or dissociate from the Spikes. Still, the Spikes are a curious member of the alliance, the abject-of-the-abject, the entities who are so utterly beyond legibility as subjects, and whose assistance proves indispensable to the victory of the revolt.

But the most crucial aspect of the Spikes occur post-victory, during the Hulk's short reign as monarch: the Hulk sits upon his throne and spends seven straight hours allowing the Spikes, still insatiably hungry, to feed off of his body, so that they are no longer driven to consume the other people of Sakaar. In allowing the Spikes to feed off of him, the Hulk enters a self-canceling economy of weakness and strength. The Spikes penetrate his body in multiple points, draining him and inflicting considerable pain, but this pain also paradoxically feeds the rage that sustains his strength and, by extension, his existence as the Hulk. Unlike nearly every other instance in which the Hulk is subjected to hurt, the Hulk instead submits willingly and does not retaliate as in *ressentiment*. Instead, Hulk is in effect the sexual bottom, the penetrated, his strength demonstrated not through his destructive capacity but his perhaps-feminine capacity to endure, in a Christlike, messianic manner.

Paired together, Hulk's self-sacrifice to the Spikes in *Planet Hulk* and his orgasmic self-destruction in *World War Hulk* gesture towards a cultural-political imagination beyond *ressentiment*, beyond an idealization of radical resistance and a contempt for the privileged. Through the fantasyscape of the *Incredible Hulk*, Pak demonstrates the political limitations of a racialized masculinity premised upon *ressentiment* while opening the possibilities of a racial subjecthood founded upon self-punishment. The self-punishing masochistic Hulk, the Hulk of Foucauldian counter-conduct, as opposed to the Hulk of outwardly-directed *ressentiment*, enacts what Nguyen Tan Hoang calls "a politics of bottomhood," characterized not by a wielding of power, but a surrendering of it: "we do not always have to attribute resistance and subversion to gay Asian American bottomhood in order to justify its existence and accord it serious analysis. In

certain circumstances, bottoming entails the gleeful surrendering of power; its pleasures do not always depend on resistance and subversion. Even if we ascribe a transgressiveness to bottomhood, as many gay male critics rightly do, part of this transgressiveness involves the very relinquishment of power” (20). Thus, according to Nguyen, a (masochistic) politics of bottomhood reflects not the direct wielding of a power, as in *ressentiment*, but possibly the abdication of it, or perhaps the reconfiguration of its terms. Bottoming becomes a way of experiencing power while not being its agent. The mode of masochistic bottoming is the *feeling* of power – the Foucauldian calculus of force-relations – and thus *awareness* of it, through the body, coupled with its possible deterritorialization. To quote Darieck Scott, “This is a politics of the bottom, a desire to (a will to) love and live the bottom for its bottomness without surrendering to or ceding the lion’s share of the pleasure to the top—indeed, in a way flamboyantly, exuberantly *ignoring* the top except insofar as he dutifully presses on the levers of pleasure” (254, emphasis in original). It is a politics that is, according to Scott, “genuinely queer” (254), upending the normative associations between penetrator/penetrated and empowered/dispossessed. The psychic and physical penetrability of the Hulk can either result in the diffusive if uncontrollable masculine chaos of becoming-bomb, or in the moving gesture to nourish the Spikes, the most racially abject and most traumatizing symbols of historic conflict.

If we understand the Spikes as the “racial shadow” of abject Asianness, the Hulk’s willing surrender to their penetration reflects, additionally, a surrendering to the stereotype, to the inconvenient reflection of abjection. The Spikes literally fill the Hulk with their tendrils, their infectious orientalism, and it is only by the Hulk’s own superpower, acquired through the violence of self-immolation, that the Hulk can voluntarily withstand and nourish their hunger. Greg Pak’s Hulk, in this brief moment of messianic tenderness, reminds us of the possibilities of a reparative ethics, made possible only when the figure of *ressentiment* becomes a figure of masochism.

Afterword: Cho-Hulk and the Burden of Representation

Greg Pak’s *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk* offer an important parable for Asian America to move forward, but in late 2015, Greg Pak returned to Marvel Comics to pen the *Hulk* once more, but this time, the Hulk is not Bruce Banner, but his Korean American supporter, Pak’s creation, Amadeus Cho; Cho extracted the Hulk’s essence from his mentor Banner with nanites in order to save Banner from an overdose of radiation, and then installed the Hulk into himself. Following in the footsteps of African Americans Monica Rambeau, Miles Morales, and Sam Wilson donning the roles of Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, and Captain America respectively, Amadeus Cho serves a groundbreaking nonwhite replacement for a previously white top-tier Marvel superhero.

After approximately a year of *Totally Awesome Hulk*, Pak’s positioning of Cho as the new Hulk produces a fascinating set of contradictions. On the one hand, the Cho-Hulk lends additional evidence to my argument that the Hulk has a peculiar resonance with Asian American masculinity. Yet, it is immediately apparent from the first issue that *The Totally Awesome Hulk* shares far more tonal commonality with the comics centering around Amadeus Cho than that of the Hulk; Cho-Hulk is both distinctly Asian (and Korean) American and, curiously, of considerably less anger. As a consequence, *The Totally Awesome Hulk* is considerably lighter and more comedic than the violent epics in *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk*. The opening sequence, for example, features teenaged Cho eating a series of hamburgers and fries on a beach

boardwalk as a two-headed turtle monster emerges from an ocean wave, threatening a young Asian American toddler and his bikini-clad African American babysitter. Cho swiftly transforms into the Hulk (who now sports board shorts and gelled hair) and battles the creature to highly slapstick, comedic effect, all the while flirting with the babysitter. Unlike Banner's Hulk, Cho's Hulk seems to retain all of Cho's character aspects, including his eloquence, humor, adolescent prurience, and additionally lacks the Hulk's characteristic rage.

However, in the next three issues, the Hulk begins to assume a blatantly masochistic position. Starting in Issue 2, the Hulk begins battling a new foe, Lady Hellbender, an alien Viking-esque warrior woman from the planet Seknarf Nine who has come to Earth to collect monsters. Intriguingly, as Cho-Hulk (at one point, nicknamed "Chulk") battles her, they develop sexual tension, with the Hulk usually finding himself in a compromised, submissive position to her. The covers of issues 2 and 4, drawn by Frank Cho and colored by Sonia Oback, illustrate this masochistic Hulk quite blatantly.

In Issue 2, a muscled, red-headed, and corset-armored Hellbender stands triumphant, wielding a sword in her left hand with a club slung over her right shoulder, her foot resting on the head of the Hulk, who is comically face-down and defeated amidst rocky debris. In Issue 4, Hellbender is straddling the Hulk and cradling his submissive face, about to kiss, while the Hulk's arms and torso are completely bound up in chains, flames dancing in the background. The background text of Issue 4 reads, "Hulk and Lady Hellbender sitting in a tree..." with a talk bubble above the Hulk completing the rhyme, "K-I-S-S-I-N-G..."

It has not been common for *Hulk* comic covers to depict its hypermasculine protagonist in such compromised and feminized positions, let alone at the mercy of a woman, and eroticized. The images on these covers neatly summarize the relationship between the Hulk and Hellbender as depicted in the comics themselves, one in which the Hulk is more comfortably masochistic and submissive, rather than being driven by the moral economy of *ressentiment*. And although *The Totally Awesome Hulk* is far more lighthearted and comedic,⁷ lacking both the angst and aesthetic virtuosity of *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk*, it can be seen as an actualization of masochism's eventual triumph over *ressentiment* and melancholia, corresponding with the actualization of the Asianness of the Hulk himself. And while placed into a number of masochistic encounters with Lady Hellbender, the Amadeus Cho Hulk does not come close to experiencing the level of self-loathing or anguish as Banner Hulk; in fact, it is revealed that his transformation of the Hulk is consciously activated by a control panel on his wrist, rather than the internal force of *ressentiment*. The moments of the Banner Hulk's masochism superseding *ressentiment* were rare, while for Cho Hulk, this is a default position, and he seems more actualized for it.

Curiously, the masochistic Cho Hulk may be Pak's *prescriptive* Asian American masculinity, while Pak's *ressentiment*-driven Banner Hulk may be Pak's *descriptive* Asian American masculinity. In this sense, *The Totally Awesome Hulk* provides the positive outcome of my very argument about Pak's earlier Banner Hulks. The tradeoff, however, of the positive outcome, the role model, is the disappearance of the productive anguish that produced the conditions of its appearance. I suspect that the comparative thematic depth of *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk*'s Asian Americanness—that is, the gripping dialectic between *ressentiment* and masochism—is perhaps owed ironically to Banner's ostensible whiteness, since Pak is not

⁷ It is exceptionally amusing in this regard, particularly through the presence of Amadeus' supergenius sister Marie Curie Cho, who operates a flying mobile command center masquerading as a gourmet Korean barbecue food truck.

tethered to any mode of Asian American idealization (although again, it is curious that this idealization manifests as masochistic). This suggests one final layer of masochistic dissonance: that is, that Greg Pak's Hulk can be most resonantly Asian when he is not. Or, to be more precise, a disidentificatory Hulk is a more critically engaging Hulk than an identificatory one. Inasmuch as Pak's Hulk *performs* narrative Asian Americanness rather than phenotypically *representing* it, he is freer to critically interrogate the psychic and affective life of racialization. Or perhaps, that Banner-Hulk feels more affectively Asian American precisely because his Asian Americanness requires a degree of imagination, lying just slightly out of reach, like the pleasure that awaits just beyond the torturer's whip.

In this chapter, I have engaged with a Hulk alternating between revenge and self-punishment; in the next chapter, I explore this latter half more explicitly, particularly in relation to comparative racialization. How, precisely, is racial self-punishment performed? How does it transmogrify into a disciplinary technology of subjectification? By exploring the recent plays of playwright Philip Kan Gotanda, I explore the masochistic cultural politics of coalition, merely euphemized here briefly in the Hulk, but brought to the fore quite literally on the theatrical stage.

Chapter 4
An Asian is Being Whipped
The Afro-Asian Super-Ego in the Theater of Philip Kan Gotanda

“You are not White and that is what matters to some men.”

-Learned Jack, from Philip Gotanda’s *I Dream of Chang and Eng*

“Three years they lock you up. And now you’re standin’ there defendin’ that White boy over me.”

-Earl, from Philip Gotanda’s *After the War*

“How does it feel to be a solution?”

-Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*

On August 20, 2012, the Asian American left was rocked by allegations that Richard Aoki, the Japanese American gun-runner for the Black Panthers and renowned community activist, was an FBI informant. Activists and Asian American Studies scholars – most notably Aoki’s biographer Diane Fujino, Scott Kurashige, and artist Fred Ho – sprang to action to defend Aoki’s record and reputation against the accusation by historian Seth Rosenfeld, who had claimed that Aoki had been recruited by the FBI in the 1950s and continued to inform the Bureau of various radical groups’ activities throughout the 60s. To this day, despite increasingly mounting evidence that Aoki had collaborated with the powers that be, many Asian Americans refuse to acknowledge the possibility, or insist that perhaps he was a double-agent that came around to believing in the causes he was associated with, well until his suicide at age 70 in 2009 (which, notably, occurred not too long after his potentially incriminating interview with Rosenfeld). Kurashige pondered shortly after Rosenfeld’s allegations: “My best guess based on the available evidence is that Aoki—like other young people of all races and especially people of color—developed a new identity during the mid-to-late 1960s, renouncing earlier attempts to fit into America and moving instead to be a Third World revolutionary.”

The actual veracity of the accusations against Aoki is not my concern here; what I mean to illuminate by invoking the recent controversy surrounding Aoki is not whether he “really was” an informant, but rather the symbolic sacredness that he as a figure has acquired within the Asian American consciousness, which has in turn impelled his defense. As Tamara Nopper has insightfully written: “For many of us, Aoki was an anti-model minority in the crudest sense: a working-class, socially rebellious Asian American who politically claimed his minority status and committed his entire adult life to racial activism. Aoki, then, was the perfect hero for leftist Asian Americans as his biography spoke to two simultaneous desires that animate contemporary Asian American scholarship and activism. The first is being acknowledged by other people of color that we are racial minorities and not white or honorary whites. The second is proving to Blacks that we do not hate them or have structural power over them” (3). Aoki-as-symbol has been canonized through his performance of solidarity with the politicized Black masculinity of the Panthers, combating key racializing rhetorics deployed against Asian Americans, namely the model minority construction, and the “emasculated” Asian American male. Although Aoki the person died in 2009, 2012 witnessed his tragic symbolic death, the demise of one of the most visible personifications of Black/Asian solidarity in the United States, and of the fact that Asian Americans are both oppressed and resistant to that oppression.

I begin with this allusion to Aoki because the potential destruction of Aoki-as-myth in many ways parallels the demographic, and indeed epistemic, shift of Asian America from its radical conceptual birth as the Asian American Movement in the 1960s (Wei, Espiritu) to its mainstream political consolidation as “an institutional (academic and governmental) sociological category” (Lye 95) in the 1980s, and finally to the contemporary moment in which the “Asian American” is figured as “the ideal subject of neoliberal ideologies under global capitalism” (Jun 129). As David Palumbo-Liu has written in *Asian/America*, “[t]he nature of Asian American social subjectivity now vacillates between whiteness and color. Its visibility is of a particular texture and density; its function is always to trace a racial minority’s possibilities for assimilation.... Asia/America resides *in transit*, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of *both* a ‘minority’ identity and a ‘majority’ identity” (5). With high median incomes, broad access to education, and deepening ties to transnational capital and prestige—that is, with the actualization of the model minority stereotype—it is becoming increasingly clear that theorists of Asian America, at least to some degree, require a shift away from the politics of *ressentiment* detailed in the previous chapter. Yet, for radical Asian American activists, scholars, and artists still committed to antiracism and justice – contentious both those terms may be – there remains the question of how to formulate a radical Asian American positionality within such a multidimensional milieu, a task that was dealt a moral blow by the revelations surrounding Richard Aoki. As explicated by such scholars as Laura Pulido, Daryl Maeda, and Rychetta Watkins, Asian American radicals and leftists like Aoki in the late 1960’s and 70’s aligned themselves with a broader Third World politic that positioned themselves as fellow nonwhite, colonized peoples, taking a particular affinity towards Blackness. For example, Maeda elaborates on Asian American performance of Blackness among the Red Guards and Frank Chin’s *Chickencoop Chinaman*: “Performances of blackness catalyzed the formation of Asian American identity. Far from being mere mimics, however, Asian Americans who began to consider their own racial positioning through contemplations of blackness went on to forge a distinct identity of their own.... Thus, they inserted Asian Americans into a racial paradigm, arguing that Asian Americans constituted a racialized bloc subject to the same racism that afflicted blacks” (75). However, in the particular neoliberal landscape of the contemporary moment, such expressions may read as idealistic at best, or quixotic at worst, particularly given that it is difficult to equate Asian American racialization as quite the same as that which “afflicted blacks.” The desire for a contemporary Asian American radicality opposed to whiteness is thus haunted by a cruel pragmatism that bespeaks of the chilling possibility of the model minority as an achieved material reality. It is haunted by the possibility that Aoki has been an informant all along, and that perhaps, metaphorically, so have we all.

Building upon the previous chapter, which examined the clash between *ressentiment* and moral masochism of being consigned to model minorityism, this chapter considers the means by which Blackness has operated as both a psychic haunting and a disciplinary technology for the production of Asian American masculine subjection. I address this question by examining two relatively recent theatrical works of playwright Philip Kan Gotanda, *I Dream of Chang and Eng* and *After the War (Blues)*. As a Sansei artist who has personally engaged with the Asian American movement since its formative years, Gotanda offers unique insights and struggles surrounding Asian America through his cultural production, presenting a critical glimpse into the Asian American literary imagination. I argue that in his plays *After the War* and *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, Gotanda positions Blackness as a moral center of racial subjugation, offering Asian Americans the political choice of either aligning in solidarity with blackness, or seizing

upon the opportunity for model minorityism aligned with whiteness. Blackness, not unproblematically, offers a utopian alternative to the becoming-machine, but one that remains masochistically out of reach. Gotanda's plays stage and variously contend with the Afro-Asian super-ego as a framework for an Asian American anti-racist ethics.

Solidarity, Masculinity, and the Black Super-Ego

For the last several decades of Asian Americanist scholarship, there has been a revival of Afro/Asian academic "solidarity" work, much of it ultimately concerned with broader politico-ethical project of Asian American Studies at large, exemplified by such works as Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk* and *Everybody was Kung-Fu Fighting*, Bill Mullen's *Afro-Orientalism*, Daryl Maeda's *Chains of Babylon*, and Ho and Mullen's *Afro-Asia*. As Colleen Lye observed in 2008, the "neo-Bandung allegiance of this Afro-Asianism" (1732) may be reflective of Asian American Left's growing anxiety about its potentially reactionary positioning within the U.S. racial order. Lye writes: "Despite this Afro-Asianist project's more open recognition of the relevance of Asian embourgeoisement to its own desire for a renewed resistance politics, however, it is not yet clear whether the retrieval of Third Worldist genealogies accomplishes something more than a nostalgic response to the rise of Asian capitalism on a world scale and to the thinning claim of Asian American intellectuals to any representative function" (1732). That is to say, much of the optimistic Afro-Asian solidarity work produced in the last few decades speak to the yearnings for a radical, resistant Asian American positionality that was much more visibly and clearly articulated as an anti-imperial, anti-racist project in the 1970s. In many ways, as Asian American Studies underwent its so-called "transnational turn" (or "denationalization") in the 1990s, heralded by Pacific Rim discourse and such diaspora-focused works as Lisa Lowe's groundbreaking "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity," there was growing anxiety within Asian Americanist scholarship that the field would cease its radical orientations. This anxiety is best captured by Sau-Ling Wong's controversial 1995 essay "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," in which she affirms the value of performatively "claiming America," which she loosely defines as "establishing the Asian American presence in the context of the United States' national cultural legacy and contemporary cultural production" (17). In effect, Wong's insistence is largely to keep the focus on the presence of Asians in the United States (and, by extension, the Americas at large) precisely because exclusion—both material and epistemic—has been a hallmark of anti-Asianism since the early chapters of Asian American historical narrative (beginning most blatantly with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act). To retain the Americanist focus on Asian America, then, is to claim space in US American history and to counteract the pervasive perpetual foreignness that stems from both yellow peril and orientalist optics.

It is noteworthy, however, that Wong draws upon an Afro-Asian comparison in order to illustrate her point, drawing a comparative racialization between Asianness and Blackness in relation to foreignness. Noting that Black Studies was also moving towards a transnational diasporic frame—Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1995) being most emblematic of this shift—Wong asserts that the differing racializations of Asianness and Blackness attach different valences to denationalization: "A shift from an African-American domestic to an African diaspora perspective might be more politicizing for African-Americans, while a corresponding move might be depoliticizing for Asian Americans" (18). African origins, Wong writes, can offer "a powerful means of undoing the cultural amnesia attempted to impose" (18), while

denationalization with Asian America “may exacerbate liberal pluralism’s already oppressive tendency to ‘disembody,’ leaving America’s racialized power structure intact” (18-19). This is largely since Blackness in the United States has long been associated with a kind of “culturelessness,” seen in terms of deficiency and lack, whereas Asianness has been not so much “cultureless” but inscrutably foreign.

Additionally, Wong also invokes Elliott Butler-Evans’ argument that “Rodney King was beaten [in Los Angeles in 1991] as a member of an American minority, not as a member of the black diaspora” (18) in order to demonstrate that local minoritarianism—in this case, racialization within the specific national context of the United States—is the impetus of racial violence, rather than a sense of diasporic origin. Thus, argues Wong, even in the case of anti-black violence, it is local racial otherness—that is to say, nonwhiteness—that should be of the highest political and analytic priority, rather than diaspora, which is in Wong’s view at most a secondary impetus for racial violence. Consequently, argues Wong, “coalitions of Asian American and other racial/ethnic minorities within the U.S. should take precedence over those formed with Asian peoples in the diaspora” (18). The primary line of alliance, according to Wong, should then be around shared marginalization, rather than shared origin.

Wong’s argument against denationalization, then, contains not only an anxiety over the potential loss of Asian American Studies’ anti-racist critique, but also an anxiety over the loss of alliance with blackness. I would furthermore infer that within Asian American anti-racist critique, these two are largely intertwined. That is to say, Asian Americanist critiques of racism have historically entailed an alliance with Blackness, or alternately, an imitation of Blackness. As Daryl Maeda compellingly recounts in *Chains of Babylon*, some of the early militant, often-hypermasculine expressions of Asian American movement building followed Black models: “Performances of blackness catalyzed the formation of Asian American identity. Far from being mere mimics, however, Asian Americans who began to consider their own racial positioning through contemplations of blackness went on to forge a distinct identity of their own” (75). This was certainly the case among the Asian American Red Guard Party, which assumed the “garb, confrontational manner, and emphasis on self-determination” (73) of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. Consequently, says Maeda, the Red Guards “inserted Asian Americans into a racial paradigm arguing that Asian Americans constituted a racialized bloc subject to the same racism that afflicted blacks” (75). Maeda also notes the curious irony that Frank Chin, who once was dismissive of the Red Guards as performing a kind of yellowface, would also point to Black masculinity as a means of recuperating Asian American masculinity in the face of the emasculation of whiteness.

Wong’s argument is much in the same spirit of these earlier Asian Americanist adaptations of Black masculine militancy (although Wong, following Elaine Kim, is far more critical of the misogyny upon which such an adaptation depends). To be anti-racist, then, is to perform Blackness. And certainly, in the cases of the burgeoning years of Asian American movement-building, Black masculinity in particular. Although Frantz Fanon powerfully declares Blackness a “zone of nonbeing” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Blackness becomes the social position of the absolute being of the racialized. This position has entrenched in Afro-Pessimism, an emergent school of contemporary Black Studies scholarship—officially inaugurated by scholars Frank Wilderson III and Jared Sexton—operating from the postulate of Blackness as a mode of social death, and essentially inextricable from slaveness (Wilderson 10-11). Also prevalent in Afro-pessimism is a tendency toward Black exceptionalism, insisting that race relations best be understood not from a white/nonwhite binary, but a Black/nonblack one; Jared

Sexton, in his essay aptly titled “People of Color Blindness,” argues that the latter half of the enslaved/free binary is “better termed *all nonblacks* (or, less economically, the unequally arrayed category of nonblackness), because it is racial blackness as a necessary condition for enslavement that matters most, rather than whiteness as a sufficient condition for freedom” (36). The result of Sexton’s argument is ultimately an anti-coalitional stance, one that centers antiblackness as the locus of racial subjugation at large.

The Afro-pessimism of Wilderson and Sexton has been taken to task by a number of scholars,¹ including Iyko Day, who writes: “According to Sexton, no other oppression is reducible to antiblackness, but the relative totality of antiblackness is the privileged perspective from which to understand racial formation more broadly. But unlike the way feminist and queer critical theory interrogate heteropatriarchy from a subjectless standpoint, Sexton’s entire point seems to rest on the very specificity and singularity—rather than subjectlessness—of black critical theory’s capacity to understand race. The privilege of this embodied viewpoint similarly relies on rigidly binaristic conceptions of land and bodily integrity” (112). That is, Sexton requires an ossification of the subject, and an essentialist equivalence between the body and the subject, in order to make claims to Black exceptionalism. Moreover, Day makes reference to the “subjectlessness” of feminist and queer critical theory, a valuation most assertively pushed by Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson in *Strange Affinities*², that difference in women of color feminism and queer of color critique is “not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a clear-eyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued, which can cut within, as well as across, racial groupings” (11). This heterotopian woman of color feminist model, according to Hong and Ferguson, furthermore counters the epistemology of “ideal types” that undergirds the logics of cultural nationalisms that we see equally in Afro-pessimist and Afro-Asian coalitional thought (namely, the resistant Black subject), seeking instead a cultural politics that acts “as a rejection of the ways in which bourgeois and minority nationalisms create idealized identities” (11) altogether.

Nevertheless, the foundationalism of Black antiracism persists, including within some strands of (particularly masculine) Asian American thought, in which the politicized Black man figures as the “ideal type” of racial resistance. Daniel Y. Kim illustrates this very dynamic in his superb reading of Frank Chin’s masculine political project, we can conditionally regard as emblematic of Asian American masculinity since, as Kim rightfully notes, Chin’s literary specialty is “the self-loathing, masochism, and the melancholy that define Asian American masculinity” (143). Noting that Chin lambasts Chinese Americans as occupying an “Uncle Tom” role within the racial drama of liberation—that is, “as being just like *certain* kinds of blacks” (34), Kim asserts that “[t]o be an Asian American is to be like an African American who wants to be white—it is to be trapped in the perpetual motion of a failed racial mimesis” (34-35). As Kim insightfully argues, Chin’s masculinist assertion is simultaneously homophobic and homoerotic, violently rejecting the heteronormatively-understood emasculation of Asian men

¹ Within Black/African American Studies, the most notable confrontation of Afro-pessimism has been an ongoing critique from Fred Moten, who forcefully argues that Black life, rather than Black social death, should be the locus of critical attention; Moten also argues that it is not *social* death that constitutes Blackness, but *political* death (“Blackness and Nothingness,” 2013).

² Although a similar description of women of color feminism (centrally focused on the works of Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Barbara Smith, and other luminous intersectional scholar-artists of the period) has been similarly characterized as such by Donna Haraway in her iconic “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.”

produced by the white optic, while simultaneously homoerotically investing in the aesthetics of Black masculinity: “Lacking an ethnically distinct ideal of virility of 'their own' with which they can identify, Asian American men are left imitating 'styles' of masculinity that belong, properly speaking, to men of other races.... But the 'solution' that Chin prescribes for this problematic interracial mimetic desire that threatens to homosexualize Asian American men... is not the eradication of this desire, but rather its melancholic intensification via the aesthetic.” (36). Within the Chin masculine framework, then, there is an imperative not to sidestep the mimesis of Black masculinity, but rather to loathe oneself for the impossibility of attaining it.

Within the anti-racist paradigm upon which Asian American Studies and the Asian American Movement were founded, we can characterize Blackness as occupying the position of a kind of racial super-ego, the disciplinary apparatus of the Asian American psyche to the id of assimilation and the fulfillment of the model minority. Sigmund Freud’s well-known tripartite model of the ego, super-ego, and id maps astonishingly accurately onto the Asian American masculine political consciousness. The super-ego, according to Freud, is the ego-ideal, which works primarily to suppress the pleasure principle sought by the id and substitute the Oedipal complex. However, the super-ego is not merely a clone of the disciplinary apparatus of the Father; according to Freud, the super-ego’s “relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: ‘You *ought to be* like this (like your father).’ It also comprises the prohibition: ‘You *may not be* like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative” (641-642, emphasis in original). The super-ego is thus a kind of inverted disidentification, one that simultaneously produces an aspirational ideal and the moral boundaries to achieving that ideal (in psychoanalytic terms, the Oedipal sexual objectification of the mother). Similarly, as Freud notes, the super-ego “answers to everything that is expected of the higher nature of man” and thus “contains the germ from which all religions have evolved” (643).

In a similar sense, the anti-racist Asian American masculine political project has positioned Blackness as the Father figure idealized by the super-ego, as that which one “ought to be like” while simultaneously placing prohibitions on that mimesis. Blackness – and Black masculinity in particular for the Asian American masculine subject – becomes the anti-racist ideal to be approximated but not appropriated. Again, Daniel Y. Kim’s analysis of Frank Chin is indispensable here. Chin’s now-canonical *Chickencoop Chinaman* (which, among other things, presents a Black boxer as a father figure ideal for the Asian male protagonists who eventually fails to live up to the ideal) not only demonstrates the complex dynamics of the Black super-ego, but the masochism to which the Black super-ego leads:

Although [*Chickencoop Chinaman*] insists that the Asian American artist will never be able to stand shoulder to shoulder... with his African American brothers if his attitude toward them is one of fawning adulation, it also seems to suggest the impossibility of finding another model for an authentic minority tradition. Where the narrative tends, then, is toward a masochistic repetition of the predicament in which Tam finds himself at the opening of the play—that of having no non-white ideal of racialized masculinity to claim as his own other than those that are associated with African American culture. If Asian American men are thus resigned to “faking blackness,” as Kenji puts it, then the message that the reading of *The Chickencoop Chinaman* seems to convey is that they should at least fully acknowledge and embrace the self-hatred that is expressed in their abject relationship to black culture (Kim 201-202).

In Kim's estimation of *Chinaman*, Black masculinity is an ideal that must not be imitated, precisely because that imitation precludes actual fraternity with Blackness, as a consequence of the performative femininity (and queerness) that such fawning engenders. Yet, since Black masculinity remains the only viable nonwhite ideal, Chin's ideal Asian American masculinity is a masochistic self-flagellation that acknowledges the failure and impossibility of measuring up to Blackness. Kim then concludes that Chin, in fact, finds something "generative" in this self-punishment; that is to say, "the illusion of virility" (202) that is ultimately predicated upon an inwardly-directed sadism directed towards femininity, queerness, and other "failures" of the ideal masculine Father.

Although Asian Americanist anti-racism would not necessarily remain committed to the homophobia and misogyny—not to mention the masculine essentialism of Blackness—that subtended the work of Chin, Sau-Ling Wong's essay is evidence that the super-ego relationship to Blackness nevertheless persisted in the 1990s, and the Asian Americanist responses to the Richard Aoki incident demonstrate its persistence in the second decade of the 21st century, the time of this writing. Furthermore, in the face of what Lye has called "Asian embourgeoisement," this anxiety becomes increasingly anxious as Asian Americans are themselves recognized as tools—and possibly active agents—in the anti-black paradigm. Susan Koshy succinctly articulates how Asian embourgeoisement is, in effect, an aspiration to white power itself, even if ethnic particularity remains in place: "[W]hile many middle-class immigrants may disidentify white whiteness as culture and adopt an ethnic particularist position, they may simultaneously identify with whiteness as power through their class aspirations.... Thus what has now emerged is a seemingly more congenial dispensation that allows for *cultural difference* even as it facilitates *political affiliations* between whites and some nonwhites on certain critical issues such as welfare reform, affirmative action, and immigration legislation" (186, emphasis in original). Insofar as Blackness remains the antithesis of whiteness, according to Koshy, the Asian American model minority aspiration to U.S. normative property relations and meritocracy is also an aspiration to "whiteness as power," and, by extension, antiblackness. Parroting the model minority position, Vijay Prashad writes in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, "I am to be the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America. I am to be a weapon in the war against black America. Meanwhile, white American can take its seat, comfortable in its liberal principles, surrounded by state-selected Asians, certain that the culpability for black poverty and oppression must be laid at the door of black America" (4-6). In effect, Prashad acknowledges rather than disavows the increasingly exacerbated model minority positioning of Asian America, noting the weaponization of model minority discourse against Blackness. Prashad then turns to solidarity with Blackness as an ethico-political imperative, writing: "Solidarity is a desire, a promise, an aspiration," writes Prashad, "It speaks to our wish for a kind of unity, one that does not exist now but that we want to produce" (197). Importantly, adds Prashad, solidarity also entails the uncomfortable examination of one's relative privileges in relation with other groups: "Solidarity must be crafted on the basis of both commonalities and differences, on the basis of a theoretically aware translation of our mutual contradictions into political practice. Political struggle is the crucible of the future, and our political categories simply enable us to *enter* the crucible rather than tell us much about what will be produced in the process of the struggle" (197).

Whereas Chin configures Blackness as an aspirational masculine ideal, as an "ideal type," and Wong envisions alliance with Blackness as a metric of anti-racist resistance, Prashad

implicates the subject position of Asian America itself. Writing a decade after the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Prashad fears that Asian America has slipped into stronger alliance with whiteness. This “neo-Bandung” nostalgia that Lye describes, that Prashad’s writing typifies, can be understood as a proverbial battering of the hatches against the id, for the Afro-Asian vanguard perceives Asian America as existentially threatened by the temptation of assimilation and material success that model minority interpellation diabolically offers. In this sense, the Afro-Asian super-ego operates as a moral-repressive function to an Asian American cultural political imperative for inclusion, since it has located exclusion and abjection as the central foci of Asian American racialization (see Chapter 3).

To clarify, I am critical of this turn, and yet, like Lye, I fully concur with its political necessity. The Afro-Asian super-ego has the potential to radically and productively question the Asian Americanist paradigm of inclusion, disrupting the Asian American longing for inclusion into U.S. normativity. Yet, the Afro-Asian super-ego is premised upon an impossibility of mimesis, placing the father as the new masculine ego-ideal that the Asian American subject never attains. Notably, this form of masochism differs from that of the first two chapters, in which the ideal, following Deleuze’s reading of Sacher-Masoch, is the “new sexless man” that banishes the father and favors the mother in his place. Rather, this is Freudian moral masochism, a shame-driven pursuit of suffering in which the “ego reacts with feelings of anxiety (conscience anxiety) to the perception that it has not come up to the demands made by its ideal, the super-ego” (Freud 280). In fact, the shame is over failure to achieve the demands of the emblematic “bad subject,” the Black ideal, configured in the Asian American gaze as the Father.³

Yet, despite its limitations within this masculine paradigm, shame has a potent capacity to produce an awareness of one’s sense of subjectification. Drawing from Sylvan Tomkins’ work on affect to produce a model of affect theory for queer and performance studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that “shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstructing and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating” (36). Thus, states Sedgwick, “one is *something* in experiencing shame, though one may or may not have secure hypotheses about what” (37). Shame, as an affect that typically floods in response to a “wrong” pleasure, compels the subject to turn inward while at the same time, “aims toward sociability” (37), gesturing to new capacities for community building and solidarity; this is, in turn, at the core of moral masochism.

Finally, Sedgwick writes, “Shame... transformational shame, *is performance*. I mean theatrical performance” (38). According to Sedgwick, it is in performance that shame lives its fullest life, existing between the interiority of absorption/subject formation and the exteriority of theatricality. By theatricalizing this Afro-Asian superego and the shame it precipitates, the recent plays of Philip Kan Gotanda are able to not only present, but actualize the shame of anti-black model minorityism while simultaneously and pessimistically demonstrating the structural impossibility of completely disrupting it. Through various deployments of characters that represent the Afro-Asian super-ego, Gotanda subtends the paradoxical position of aspiring to a Black ethics outside of white supremacy, while it always necessarily remains out of reach.

“What would Learned Jack think?”: Shame Before Blackness in *I Dream of Chang & Eng*

³ A profound irony, given Hortense Spillers’ indispensable 1987 essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” which positions the Black mother in the position of the father.

One of the most important Asian American playwrights of the 20th and 21st centuries, Philip Kan Gotanda's dramatic work spans from 1978 to the present day of this writing. Esther Kim Lee groups Gotanda with David Henry Hwang, Velina Hasu Houston, and Jeannie Barroga as one of the central figures of the "second wave" of Asian American playwrights⁴ whose work came to prominence in the 1980s, characterized by their "attitude and preparedness" (126) and "professional training as actors, playwrights, and designers" (126). These playwrights also wrote at a time in which the likes of Frank Chin had already laid the groundwork for Asian American theater, and Asian American theater institutions such as East West Players and the Asian American Theater Workshop had already been established. "With formal training in playwriting and a tradition to follow," writes Lee, "the second wave playwrights found the job title 'Asian American playwright' not at all strange or novel, a contrast to the first wave writers who practically invented the term" (126). Yet, despite his being one of the most celebrated figures of this "second wave," Gotanda is a slight exception to this characterization, emerging more from a music background than a theatrical one, and was in fact completing his law degree at the University of California, Hastings at the time he was writing his first play, a musical entitled *The Avocado Kid*. Unlike his peer, friend, and frequent collaborator David Henry Hwang, Gotanda would rise to prominence primarily through Asian American theater institutions; "Whereas Hwang found his big break at the Public Theater and worked mainly in mainstream venues on the East Coast," writes Lee, "Gotanda began and developed his career as a playwright at Asian American theatre companies, especially the Asian American Theater Company in San Francisco" (139). Through such institutions, Gotanda would go on to write and stage a vast and widely-celebrated oeuvre, such as *Yankee Dawg You Die*, *The Wash*, *Fish Head Soup*, *The Ballad of Yachiyo*, *The Wind Cries Mary*, *The Dream of Kitamura* among others. Gotanda's work would eventually earn him mainstream recognition that would solidify his place among the greatest US playwrights of the late 20th and early 21st century, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an award from the Dramatists' Guild, the Asian American Theater Company's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Gotanda's work is formally diverse, although one of his specialties has been the traditional American family drama and the naturalistic, character-driven writing that attends the genre, applying the technique to the particularities of the Japanese American household; this is most notably showcased in such plays as *The Wash*, *Fish Head Soup*, *A Song for a Nisei Fisherman*, and *Sisters Matsumoto*. Interestingly, the play that has arguably garnered the most critical attention within Asian American Studies has been *Yankee Dawg You Die*, a comedic dialogue between an older-generation Asian American actor whose career has consisted of playing a wide range of stereotypical roles, and a newer-generation idealist actor who accuses his predecessor of a racial treason. However, since the turn of the 21st century, Gotanda has been increasingly interested in turning his gaze outward from Asian America and towards other narratives of color, particularly Blackness. His 2006 play *Yohan*, for example, centers around an interracial marriage between a Japanese American woman and an African American man. In this chapter, I focus on two of his most recent works of similar sentiment: 2011's *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, and the 2007 *After the War*, restaged in 2014 as *After the War Blues*.

With its world premiere in 2011 produced through UC Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, *I Dream of Chang and Eng* is simultaneously one of

⁴ The "first wave" consisting of Frank Chin, Momoko Iko, and other playwrights who worked in the 1960s and 70s with East West Players, Asian American Theater Workshop, and others. See Lee's indispensable *A History of Asian American Theater* for a thorough historical overview.

Gotanda's most recent yet oldest works. The play is an ambitious biographical sketch of Chang and Eng Bunker (b. 1811, d. 1874), the "original Siamese twins" who spectacularly toured the United States in "freak show" fashion until eventually settling down in North Carolina to become "Gentleman Farmers." The twins, who were born in Siam to a mostly ethnically Chinese family in 1811 before being picked up to tour the West, "were so well known as public figures and so ubiquitous as conjoined twins that the term 'Siamese twins' eventually came to describe all such twins even, anachronistically, those who had lived before they did" (Cynthia Wu 2). Given their historically emblematic status, they have proven to be an intimidatingly massive subject upon which to write; Gotanda has stated that he has worked on this play for over thirty years before finally premiering the version directed by Peter Glazer in the spring of 2011. In an interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Gotanda explains that he had originally aspired to an epic historical fidelity to the Bunkers' lives, conducting extensive research of the twins, but ultimately decided to embrace a fictionalization of their lives⁵, resulting in a play that occasionally suspends realism (such as allowing the twins to at times metaphorically separate by detaching their Velcro cord). Ultimately, the play is a meditative account of the brothers, proto-Asian Americans who capitalize upon their "freak" status to eventually profit from spectacularizing their otherness to White American audiences, but also struggle with the ontological paradox of being conjoined, desiring a space for privacy and intimacy especially as they marry the two White American Yates sisters and father a total of 21 children.

The epic biographical play confronts disability, sexuality, and the spectacle of the racialized body, but for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the relationship of Chang and Eng to blackness. In part due to the dramaturgical process at UC Berkeley, and decidedly free from strict historical constraints, Gotanda decided to add a crucial supporting character to the narrative, a queer Black sailor named Learned Jack. Throughout the play, Learned Jack assumes various roles across gender, always figuring as the Black character in each scene, but his "core" character of Learned Jack is a free Black crewman of the English vessel *Sachem*, which transports Chang and Eng to the United States for the first time in Act 1. Chang and Eng board the ship as "precious cargo" and quickly befriend Learned Jack and his white lover and crewmate, Good John. The two sailors are equally inclined towards maritime vernacular as they are towards indexing markers of formal education, swearing and quoting Coleridge. As the banter continues, Chang and Eng begin to ask Learned Jack questions regarding his background. Eng tells Learned Jack: "You do not make sense." When Jack asks for explanation, Eng continues by saying "Your father was an American slave," and Chang finishes the thought with "You speak the King's English." Learned Jack first compliments the twins on their insight – "You see 'neath the skin of things." – and proceeds to explain that his father, who "never took to being owned," fought as a Tory against his slaveholders, and was freed as a reward and brought to London. Consequently, adds Jack, his father raised him "with a keen sense of justice" (18).

Jack, John, and the twins then have a brief but telling discussion on the respective conditions of their existence, and eventually race (18-19):

⁵ From the article: "I wanted to include everything," Gotanda says by phone from his Berkeley home. "I did all kinds of research and was deeply invested in the whole political and cultural backdrop from their birth to Chinese parents in Siam in 1811 to their arrival in Boston nearly 20 years later. But then I just let go and decided to write whatever I write and not worry about history."

...
"This is a reimagining of their lives," the playwright says.
(*"Philip Kan Gotanda's 'I Dream of Chang and Eng'"*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 March 2011)

LEARNED JACK: Do you abide by the way you are?
 CHANG: We are special.
 ENG: The heavens want us together more than not.
 LEARNED JACK: What if the heavens do not give a damn?
 ENG: Do you abide by the way you are?
 LEARNED JACK: I abide by the way I am. I do not abide by the way others see I am.
 ENG: How do others see you?
 LEARNED JACK: What comes of you if they cut you apart?
 CHANG: The King's physician said we would die.
 GOOD JOHN: So would we...
 ENG: How do others see you Mr. Jack?
 LEARNED JACK helps GOOD JOHN up --
 LEARNED JACK: We make land soon. You will enjoy Boston. As you come into harbor it smells of a spit roasted lamb, spiced with offerings from an Irish Shantee.
 CHANG: You show us Boston.
 LEARNED JACK: Boston is a free city but my father is in me and I will not abide by a nation that buys and sells men. We will not step onto land there.
 ENG: By all accounts you are treated no different than the white sailors. You are paid an equal wage, move freely above and below the decks --
 LEARNED JACK: I am a *Black Jack*. Only at sea. You may think America knows you. It does not.
 ENG: We are not Black.
 LEARNED JACK: You are not White and that is what matters to some men. Come dear John, come awake now—
 LEARNED JACK holds GOOD JOHN—
 LEARNED JACK: —They have not seen the likes of you in color of skin or shape of body. It is yet to be seen what you are in America's eyes.

The beginning of this exchange opens with a question of “abiding by what you are” – Chang and Eng defer to “the heavens,” and thus fate, as the source of their otherness; they are consigned to their position as “freaks.” When the question is turned to Learned Jack, however, he makes a critical distinction between exterior reception and interior selfhood, abiding by “who he is” but not by others’ perspectives of him. Learned Jack is notably evasive when the twins persist in asking him what that perspective is, but Jack invokes the violence of racism when he refuses to take them to see Boston, making the political decision to not step foot on US soil so long as the slave trade continues. When the twins naïvely insist on Learned Jack’s equal status, Jack clarifies that he is a “Black Jack. Only at sea,” pointing to the queer maritime space as the only one in which he can be, to some degree, free.

Then, Learned Jack fatefully warns the twins of racism, stating that America does not know them. When Eng insists that they are “not Black,” Learned Jack immediately responds with “You are not White and that is what matters to some men.” The exchange reflects two separate conceptualizations of racism, with Eng pointing to their nonblackness as a potential source of freedom from racial subjugation, and Learned Jack highlighting their nonwhiteness. Symbolically speaking, it is Learned Jack who extends the first invitation to solidarity, recognizing commonality in structural positions against a common white hegemony. When Learned Jack adds that “They have not seen the likes of you in color of skin or shape of body. It

is yet to be seen what you are in America's eyes," he highlights the foreignness of Chang and Eng, their unknowability, foreshadowing their inevitable orientalization. Furthermore, Learned Jack is a kind of veteran to racism by virtue of his blackness; he possesses a "wisdom" surrounding the racist "truth" of America, offering benevolent warning to a fellow nonwhites, extending solidarity. Chang and Eng in turn feel indebted to Jack, and to some degree, responsible to him and what he stands for, especially in later scenes.

Unfortunately, for all of Learned Jack's discussion of interiority and exteriority, Learned Jack lacks a degree of interiority himself, existing primarily as a moral counterpoint to Chang and Eng's trajectory. Paradoxically, he takes on some of the characteristics of the so-called "magical negro," a term popularized by filmmaker Spike Lee and described by Matthew Hughey as "a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation" (544). Learned Jack is decidedly not uneducated, and Chang and Eng are decidedly not white, but Learned Jack assumes a similar role as a "magical negro" nonetheless, freely offering wisdom and clarity to the wayward Asian subjects, ironically regarding racism itself. His lack of interiority also allows Chang and Eng, and by virtue the audience, to project an idealization of anti-racist subjectivity, and Learned Jack correspondingly reappears throughout the play in different forms to remind Chang and Eng of this idealization.

As the play continues, especially as Chang and Eng encounter both horrific American racist violence and the privileges associated with being Southern landowners, there arises a question of whether their nonblackness or their nonwhiteness is the more determining aspect of their racialization. In one scene, shortly after putting on a show in their 1835 nationwide tour, Chang and Eng are captured by a massive lynch mob, mistaken for "Indians" despite their insistence that they are "the famous Siamese twins," saved at the last minute by a White gentleman Joshua who vouches for their status as international celebrities. As relief settles over the two of them, they catch a glimpse of two hanged figures who disturbingly match the description of Learned Jack and Good John on the darkened stage. Breaking the realism of the scene, the two victims, metatheatrically embodied by Jack and John, reveal themselves to Chang and Eng. When Chang asks Eng, "Are we colored or abominations?", Learned Jack replies with a familiar "You are not white." When Eng replies that they are now famous, Learned Jack warns them: "Before they had no name for you. Beware. They have seen the likes of you now and America knows what you are" (43). Here, the lynched Learned Jack points to the danger of interpellation, of the named subject who remains fixed within the white American gaze. Learned Jack thus marks this shift from orientalized inscrutability, of being outside the grid of racial intelligibility altogether, to the state of being "known" by America. They are "known," of course, insofar as "knowing" is itself a technology of otherness and categorization, of which Blackness has been an object par excellence. Of course, it is also crucial that it is Learned Jack who invokes this didactic refrain. Learned Jack becomes a sage of racialization, the fact of blackness that providing him a bare insight into the mechanics of race with which Chang and Eng slowly comprehend.

Perhaps the most crucial, and tragic, moment in Chang and Eng's relationship to blackness occurs in the scene "Chang and Eng and Slavery." At this point of the play, Chang and Eng begin to settle into their burgeoning role as wealthy landowners in the American South, a privilege of course foreclosed to Blacks. Chang and Eng's future father-in-law Father Yates

opens the scene mid-conversation, explaining that “We are in the South. It is how things are done here.” He proceeds to extoll the economic benefits of slavery, explaining that a massive investment will lead to a significant payoff as the slave continues to work for free. Chang is clearly somewhat uneasy about this, and a crucial interaction transpires between Chang, Eng, and “Canaan,” Father Yates’ slave who is, once again, metatheatrically doubled by Learned Jack:

CHANG: There were slaves in Siam.

ENG: They were indentured workers not slaves.

CHANG: They were Chinese. Chinese slaves.

No response --

CANAAN moves to the other side of the mirror --

CHANG: Just like us.

CHANG and ENG face the mirror, looking at their imagined reflections .

CANAAN stares back at them.

ENG: We are free men.

CHANG: They will figure out what we are. They will have a name for us.

ENG: It is the only way to make a profit. It is what they do here.

Canaan steps through the mirror and hands Eng a *letter* --

CANAAN: (As Learned Jack commenting on his slave character) For you *massa* --

ENG and LEARNED JACK/CANAAN look at each other for a

beat --

LEARNED JACK exits.

When Eng, after hesitation, replies “We are free men”, Chang responds by invoking Learned Jack’s previous line: “They will figure out what we are. They will have a name for us.” Eng insists that slavery is the only means to make a profit, but Learned Jack/Canaan, in a bitter moment indexing awareness of their betrayal, addresses Eng as “massa.” In this moment, Chang and Eng’s nonblackness trumps their nonwhiteness; they stare into the mirror to imagine themselves occupying the space of whiteness, and such a transition necessitates the betrayal of Learned Jack and of blackness. Their complicity and perpetuation of slavery facilitates their acceptability, and eventually their marriage to the Yates daughters. Their decision to purchase and exploit enslaved Africans mirrors Toni Morrison’s insightful indictment of immigrant antiblackness, that new immigrants participate “freely in this most enduring and efficient rite of passage into American culture: negative appraisals of the native-born black population. Only when the lesson of racial estrangement is learned is assimilation complete.” Learned Jack’s presence in the mirror as subjugated property is the ultimate signifier of Chang and Eng’s ascension into American society, but also highlights the sense of moral failing on the part of the twins, haunting them with guilt, that by participating in slavery, they are by extension enslaving their comrade and former mentor. But also, Chang locates himself and his brother in the “slave” position, pointing out the slavery in Siam to which they themselves had been consigned. Chang’s comment also broadens the culpability of slavery beyond whiteness, while Eng’s reply (“They were indentured servants”) simultaneously distances them from the analogy of enslaved blackness while (futilely) attempting to redeem Asianness from its complicity with forced labor. Yet, the presence of Canaan/Learned Jack in the mirror suggests that Chang and Eng are indeed somehow analogous to Blackness. They are, to return to Sexton, “masters,” just by being nonblack, but also nevertheless nonwhite; by being both nonblack and nonwhite, they are also

caught between the two binaries of valuation that those negatory categories signify (white/nonwhite, black/nonblack).

The presence of the mirror in this scene evokes the familiar Lacanian “mirror stage,” which refers to the experience during which a young child recognizes herself for the first time in the mirror image; doing so produces an identification. As Lacan writes in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function”: “It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image” (4/94). In identifying with the image, she understands herself as self *and* other, that she exists in the social world, and is an *other* relative to her others. The mirror stage, however, does not come seamlessly; Lacan states: “This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an ‘orthopedic’ form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure” (Écrits 6/97). Lacan thus seems to indicate that the mirror stage entails a dialectical fracturing caused by the disjuncture between the image in one’s mind and the image seen in the mirror. The rise of this fractured subject marks the end of the mirror stage, and the dialectic of this fracture “will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations” (7/98). As a consequence, the process of the mirror stage is both crucial to the subject’s understanding of herself as a being in a social world, and also, as a consequence of the fracture, inculcates in the subject a desire for the other’s desire, understanding herself to not just be subject but also object within the scopic regime.

But as the twins see Learned Jack in the mirror, particularly at the point in which they have attained a degree of symbolic whiteness through the act of owning slaves themselves, the play suggests a troubling but productive ambiguity, particularly in the context of contemporary Asian American relations at the time of its writing. There is indeed a Lacanian disjuncture between the image of the conjoined twins who, through unique and fortuitous historical circumstances, have become Southern gentlemen, and the figure of Learned Jack/Canaan. They have achieved “freedom” through the uniquely American paradox of owning slaves, of subjugating Blackness, and yet they still see the image of Blackness in the mirror. The play suggests, then, that the Bunker twins – and perhaps Asian America at large – are existentially more proximal to Blackness than to whiteness even as they perform the most vicious antiblackness possible. And it is this complicity in slavery, paired with their own identification/disidentification with Blackness that is most perverse—in the classic Hegelian sense, by achieving freedom through enslaving, they are also bound up in the object of that slavery, that they are enslaving themselves.

Tellingly, the brothers express a sense of reluctance, a cognitive dissonance. Gotanda’s project is not, as stated earlier, to be faithful to the literal history of Chang and Eng, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that this attitude is likely an historical inaccuracy. According to Irving and Amy Wallace’s *The Two*, their problematic but staggeringly well-researched biography on Chang and Eng written in 1978, Chang and Eng together owned a total of 28 slaves by 1860, and “were rumored to be hard on their slaves, sometimes whipping them” (189). Wallace and Wallace then continue to cite rather brutal historical anecdotes about the twins’ relationship with their slaves, such as exhibiting “a malignant air” when they “saw the negro standing in the front door” rather than entering from the rear and insisting that he “knew his

place” (189) The same person, J.E. Johnson, recalls how, when one of Chang’s slaves escaped and was shot dead by a white citizen, Chang and Eng refused the killer’s compensation for lost property “and expressed their satisfaction that the negro was out of the way” (190). Wallace and Wallace also state that Chang and Eng would fondly tell a story in which they won “a negro” in a game of cards and sold him back at a major profit to the gamblers.

The asymmetry between Chang and Eng the sympathetic characters who befriend Learned Jack, and Chang and Eng the brutal overseers who are relieved at the murder of their escaped slave, epitomizes the moral masochism of the Afro-Asian super-ego, and Gotanda’s desire for coalition and solidarity in spite of a material moment in which our protagonists furthered and capitalized from antiblack racism. Of course, this asymmetry also stresses the necessity to read Gotanda’s play as a literary rather than historical project, pointing to the underlying political project of *I Dream of Chang and Eng*. The relentless presence of Learned Jack, who haunts the play as blackness haunts the Asian American political and literary imagination, insists that Asian America sides with its fellow oppressed, even if it has also benefited from strategic privileges from its oppressors. Learned Jack shames Asian America to ask, as Eng muses upon his decision to start a plantation, “What would Learned Jack think?”

“Orientals Can’t Play No Jazz”: Yearning for Solidarity in *After the War*

Gotanda’s *After the War*, commissioned by and staged at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco in 2007 and revised and restaged at UC Berkeley in 2014 as *After the War Blues*,⁶ is a sweeping drama surrounding life in a Japanese American-owned boarding house in the San Francisco Fillmore district around 1946. Gotanda tellingly dedicates the play to August Wilson and John Okada, and audiences familiar with the works of Wilson and Okada can immediately pinpoint the influences of both writers. *After the War* echoes the narrative and character structure of Wilson’s boardinghouse play *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, and also spends ample time wrestling with the postwar angst of a No No Boy (male Japanese Americans who refused conscription and a loyalty oath while in camp, and thus relocated to other, harsher camps), most famously treated by John Okada’s novel of the same name. Gotanda’s explicit reference to both writers, performing masterful homage through the aesthetic style of the writing, itself performs an Afro/Asian solidarity.

However, *After the War* concerns itself with a key moment of agonizing Black/Asian conflict centered on San Francisco’s Fillmore district. Postwar Fillmore reflects a time in which Japanese Americans return to a former Japanesetown that had been resettled by Blacks during their internment. Not only does *After the War* express the challenges faced by two differently oppressed groups competing over limited space and resources, but also represents a clash of narratives of racialization. The narrative of Japanese American internment comes face-to-face with the narrative of Black subjugation and slavery, and as the characters painfully discover, solidarity never comes easily.

With a large ensemble cast with fairly evenly developed characters, the largely naturalistic *After the War* can be read from a wide range of angles, but again I focus on the role

⁶ For the purposes of this discussion, my analysis will be focusing on the 2007 script of the play produced at ACT. Interestingly, some of the scenes discussed in this chapter were cut in the 2014 version of the script in the interest of streamlining character interactions, but I have decided to focus on the 2007 version primarily because of its more overt treatment of Afro-Asian thematics and, secondarily, its greater tendency towards stylistic homage to August Wilson in the form of monologue poetic flourishes.

of Black characters, in particular Earl Worthing, a mid-40s dockworker behind on his rent and one of the most central characters to the narrative, and his sister-in-law Leona Hitchings, an educated woman in her mid-40s who is much more distrustful of Japanese Americans than her brother-in-law. Unlike the quasi-magical Learned Jack, who serves as more of a mystical literary device than fleshed-out character, treated with comparative thinness as an allegorical symbol, Earl and Leona are “whole” characters with humanizing flaws, and thus not as easily identifiable as racial superegos. Rather than embodying the Afro-Asian superego, they invoke it and conjure it. Yet, Earl and Leona serve a similar function in respect to Asian American agony, raising once again the question of Asian American positionality vis-a-vis blackness, ending with a tragically pessimistic conclusion that coalition may be structurally impossible, or at least extremely difficult.

The play begins displaying strong friendship between Earl and the play’s central character, Chet Monkawa, a former No-No Boy who owns the boarding house and was once an aspiring jazz musician. In a sense, Chet is ostensibly an “ideal critical subject,” having actively resisted the internment rather than rehearsing the model minorityism and respectability of the Japanese American Citizens League; he even borders on embodying the Afro-Asian super-ego itself. The solidarity between the Chet and Earl is both personal and political. In Act 1 Scene 7, Chet and Earl exchange a one-on-one conversation, in which Earl begins complimenting Chet on how effectively he can perform blackness: “We walk in [to the jazz club], you Japanese. I turn around, suddenly you a colored man” (18). As the discussion veers into Chet’s incarceration at Tule Lake for his political protest, Earl insists that Chet never deserved to be especially imprisoned, nor Japanese Americans as a whole interned, regardless of the circumstances:

EARL: Don’t matter, don’t matter. All you folks shoulda never been took to Camps and you shoulda never been put into that Tule Lake place. I don’t even need to know why and I understand. Man don’t need to have a reason, he change the rules to suit hisself then say it’s for everybody’s good, like hell. ‘Specially when it come to war time. Civil War, my great grandpa fought, hell who wants to be a slave? ‘Sides we gonna get 40 acres and a mule. See my 40 acres? See my mule? First World War. ‘Course they want the Colored man, who’s gonna do all the dirty work. Okay, we go, America gonna finally give us our due. We fight, we do the dirty work and we die. What we got to show for it? Our very own graveyard on the other side of the fence where the weeds growin’. This War? Where my pretty backyard with the swimmin’ pool? Where the hell my martini? Ship yards close down ‘cause we won the war but guess who the first one lose his job? Over one year now Earl T. Worthing ain’t found steady work. All us Colored folks losin’ jobs, no wonder the music gettin’ meaner. (19)

In this moment at the beginning of the play, Earl can easily indicate the common villain in the US state for both the Japanese American and African American communities, with the former unnecessarily incarcerated, and the latter repeatedly disenfranchised. Earl is also attentive to the specificity of the No-No Boy narrative, pointing out the futility of wartime service in achieving redress.⁷ The friendship of the two men displays the possibility for political empathy, although

⁷ e.g. Japanese American 442nd regiment / 100th Battalion and the African American 332nd Fighter Group and 477th Bombardment Group in the Second World War, the African American 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions in the First World War, to name but a handful examples. Much of this military participation can

this also hinges upon Chet's channeling of Black masculinity, symbolized by his musical prowess (jazz in the 2007 *After the War*, blues in the 2014 *After the War Blues*). Chet's acceptance by Earl, in performatively masculine terms, fulfills the yearning for Black acceptance found in the writings of Frank Chin, and also represents a form of success in relation to the Afro-Asian super-ego that Chang and Eng spectacularly failed.

However, the ease of solidarity becomes complicated by the entrance of Earl's sister-in-law, Leona. Unlike Earl at the beginning of the play, Leona is more Black-centric in her interests, distrusting the Japanese American characters at the Monkawa boarding house. In Act 1, Scene 10, when Earl urges Leona to be empathetic to the Japanese given their prior eviction from the Fillmore, Leona retorts: "And then they come back, after they lose the war and what happens? After *they* lose the war and we won, all us Colored folks get thrown out and all these Japs get to move in. That's just like it always is but that doesn't mean it's right" (27). Earl rightfully reminds her of the distinction between Japanese and Japanese Americans, which Leona refuses, given what she considers to be their identical relationship to Black people. When Earl pleads that "They just got back from being locked up," Leona provocatively replies: "It doesn't matter things like this, everybody got some pain they have to jive with. Lord knows, no one's got more pain than Colored folk. That includes your Jap—'oriental' friends. So they been locked up for 3, 4 years? So what? That ain't pain. I got a life time of pain. 3, 4 years – that's a walk in the woods compared to our pain. Japs don't know nothing about pain" (27). Leona's commentary, although certainly tainted by overt anti-Asian bigotry such as the usage of "Jap" (perhaps to make her easier to dismiss), does painfully vocalize a valid point while uncomfortably playing "Oppression Olympics", that Japanese American internment perhaps cannot compare to the historical trauma inherited by slavery, a slavery in which Chang and Eng Bunker were historically complicit. In some ways, Leona's attitude is prescient, considering how model minorityism as a widespread discourse consolidated within post-internment, pro-Japanese American discourse, as Scott Kurashige has argued in *The Shifting Grounds of Race*: "Although the 'model minority' controversy first arose amid the social upheaval of the 1960s, the roots of this ideological construction lay in the generation prior" (186), particularly due to the success of "a confluence of actors [who] became invested in portraying Nisei as model American citizens during World War II" (187). Consequently, "in a perverse way, the internment and Japanese Americans' response to it paved the way for greater acceptance by whites" (Pulido 43).

In Act 2, Scene 18, Leona persists in her assertion of the totalizing nature of Black racialization in a later conversation with Lillian, the former fiancé of Chet's brother and Chet's primary love interest in the play: "You think it just happens to be that way. For Coloreds it can't be like that because when bad stuff happens, you don't just see what's happening to you right then, you see back to your mother, grandmother, great grandmother. You got a memory of things doesn't even belong to you but connected to you. And you know it didn't just happen. What happened before and now is all connected" (51). When Leona accuses Lillian of not having any idea of what Colored people have been through, Lillian can merely (if assertively) reply that Leona doesn't have any idea of what Japanese Americans have been through, although she cannot counter Leona's point of deeply embedded intergenerational racialized trauma. Leona's commentary, despite her anti-Asian bigotry, nevertheless is effective at establishing Blackness as exceptional among racializations, and that despite the vicious trauma of the internment, Japanese

be attributed to strategic movements within their respective communities in an effort to win US mainstream acceptance.

Americans have still been positioned in privilege relative to Blacks, and thus Leona understandably expresses no compulsion for solidarity.

The climax of the play conveys the tragic disintegration of Earl and Chet's friendship in a catalyzing moment of violence. One of the central character conflicts of *After the War* entails Earl and Chet's complex rivalry for the affections of Mary-Louise, the white Okie taxi hall dancer and sex worker who had once had a relationship with Chet and currently beds Earl (whom she refers to behind his back as a "nigger"), eventually pregnant with his child. Mary-Louise was once Chet's partner, although Chet eventually comes to favor Lillian by the end of the play, but Earl's detection of their intimacy throws Earl into a rage. However, the climactic confrontation between Earl, Chet, Mary-Louise, and Mary-Louise's brother Benji shatters the possibility of solidarity established at the onset of the play. Earl begins to violently shake Mary-Louise in a jealous rage, which prompts Benji to train a shotgun at Earl. Chet succeeds at pulling the gun away from Benji, but then, crucially, points the gun at Earl, whom he perceives to be the biggest threat in the moment. Incredulous, Earl implicates him, and ultimately agrees with Leona:

EARL: 3 years they lock you up. And now you standin' there defendin' that White boy over me.

CHET: It's got nothing to do with the boy's race --

EARL: It's all got to do with race. Everything's 'bout race. What they done to you they been doin' to us for a long time, can't you see that? We on the same side of the fence.

(beat) But maybe you know that. Maybe that's what this all about.

CHET: What are you saying Earl?

EARL: I ask myself what you doin' on that side of the door holdin' a gun in my face and now I think I know, Leona right all along.

CHET: Earl, what's wrong with you? Don't measure me like White folks.

EARL: You got the gun, you the landlord, well?

CHET: If it's not Colored it's gotta be White? Is that it?

EARL: 'Cause that's all there is as far as I know.

CHET: Look at me. Look at me, Earl. I'm standing right here. Can't you see me? Look. Look.

(beat)

EARL: I'm a Colored man, Chester. That's all I know.

When Chet points the gun at Earl, Earl suddenly realizes that in this moment, Chet's nonblackness outweighs his nonwhiteness, that Chet has instinctively and symbolically decided to side with whiteness, and that from the perspective of Blackness, the Black/White binary is what remains primarily relevant. "Leona," in other words, was "right all along." This is, of course, doubly heightened by the fact that Chet unquestionably holds greater institutional power in this moment, also being Earl's landlord and, spurred on by competition over Mary-Louise, in pursuit of overdue rent. Structurally, as landlord, despite his radicality as a jazz artist and No-No Boy, despite his own history of exclusion, Chet is fated to turn the gun on the Black man. The circumstances of the narrative thus distill the relationship between Chet and Earl to its barest materiality of landlord and tenant. Suddenly, this economic hierarchy becomes a racial one, between Chet, who is propertied and assuming the position typically afforded to whiteness, and Earl, slave descendant, racialized-*as*-property. And although the narrative places most of the

“fault” of the conflict on Earl’s actions rather than Chet’s, there is nevertheless an overpowering sense of betrayal when Chet aims the gun.

With Earl and Chet’s friendship irrevocably dead, *After the War* makes us wonder whether Earl’s earlier skepticism of whether “an Oriental can play jazz” was correct, after all. That is to say, Chet is able to *perform* a culture of blackness without inhabiting its political position; to “play jazz,” then, is to do both. Chet Monkawa’s approximation of blackness reveals itself for having been taboo, incestuously imitating the style of Black masculine cool while ultimately finding himself on the side of capital and white property relations, despite all the best intentions. It was the privilege of nonblackness that finds Monkawa trapped in the position of the oppressor.

After the War thus asks the question of whether Asian American advancement and inclusion depends precisely upon antiblackness, and whether an ethico-political choice is in fact possible for the Asian American subject in this regard—it seems to share the pessimism of Sexton and Wilderson, or Koshy. In a sense, *After the War* is ironically more fatalistic than *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, despite the latter being an historical play; Learned Jack appears explicitly to the brothers of *Chang and Eng* as if offering a choice between self-interested moves towards identification with whiteness, or solidarity with blackness. In contrast, *After the War* presents Leona—and eventually Earl—as paranoid interlocutors for an Afro-Asian superego, with Chet reasonable and well intentioned, with the moment of anti-blackness presenting an Aristotelian end to his tragedy (although it is the friendship, rather than Chet himself, who dies). While Chang and Eng choose to be oppressors, Chet lands upon the position due to his hamartia, which is nonblackness. Whereas *I Dream of Chang and Eng* implicitly seems to ask, “what if” the Bunkers hadn’t become complicit in a system of slavery, the fictional *After the War* demonstrates that Chet’s structural position as model minority overwhelms his agentic attempts at solidarity.

It is possible to read both of these plays as demonstrations of the Afro-pessimist position, that the Asian American is inevitably the “master” to the Black subject’s “slave.” *I Dream of Chang and Eng* fits this diagnosis in a literal sense. But *After the War* offers up a complex critique of model minorityism and antiblackness while at the same time refusing to offer an “ideal type”—in this case, an Afro-Asian superego *figure*—to emulate. The closest to this “ideal type,” if anything, is Chet himself, with his No-No Boy political consciousness and comfortable heteromascularity. Chet’s failure as a figure of solidarity demonstrates that, not unlike in Pak’s *Hulk* in the previous chapter, it is the circuitous flow of racial power that determines racial structural positions, more than any intent to oppress, as in the episteme of *ressentiment*.

Moreover, it is worth considering that while Chet can be read as aspiring to “whiteness as power,” Earl and Chet are, in effect, making competing claims to whiteness, albeit in different ways. In this sense, *After the War* works both with and against the exceptionalism of the Afro-pessimist paradigm. While Chet finds himself the beneficiary of whiteness as power through property, Earl seeks whiteness *sexually* through the imperfect (proletarian) vessel of Mary-Louise. The male competition over the white woman speaks to a kind of colonized desire, made explicit by Leona’s accusation to Earl that he desires the white “whore” over her, and does not look at Leona with the same desire. However, Earl’s claim to whiteness is not assimilationist per se; in a sense, Earl’s eroticism and possessiveness of Mary-Louise can be understood as heteromasculine *ressentiment*. In the context of his early soliloquy (“See my 40 acres? See my mule?”), Mary-Louise is objectified and idealized as recompense within Earl’s compensatory logic. In this context, Frantz Fanon’s oft-quoted treatise of the subject seems descriptive of Earl’s

eroticism of Mary-Louise, the “desire to be suddenly *white*.... But... who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man” (45). And while Earl’s perception of Chet’s affections for Mary-Louise catalyze the conflict between the two men, Chet ultimately chooses not to couple with Mary-Louise, but nevertheless retains the (white) power of property. While *After the War* acknowledges the gravitational pull of the Black racialization in setting the paradigm of race at large and the logics of antiblackness that animate the politics of inclusion, it is critical of all racialized subjects who attempt to pursue redress from whiteness *through* whiteness, including Black ones. Rather than an exceptionalist ontology of Black social death, *After the War* offers a model of variegated traumas and multiple, messy, conflicting attempts at racial rebuilding.

Nevertheless, in both *After the War* and *I Dream of Chang and Eng*, it is the Asian being morally whipped. These plays confront their audiences with shame, hinting at an idealized *ressentiment* but instead turning in on themselves. They commit to a moral masochism that necessitates self-interrogation, while simultaneously making its subjects intently and uncomfortably aware of their socialities. And although their shapes do not materialize within these performances, the plays necessitate imaginings for new political possibilities, either with the presence of a clear super-ego against antiblackness (as in *Chang and Eng*), or a diffuse one (as in *After the War*).

Afterword: Nurturing the Psychic Life of Coalition

Several years ago, I posed a question to Philip Gotanda, pondering on whether or not Asian Americans were, on a multitude of levels, actualizing their “model minority” status. It was an early version of the question that I have explored throughout this chapter, wondering what direction Asian American cultural politics should head in the face of increasing embourgeoisement and material gains.

It was then that he shot me a wryly ironic smile. “Well, isn’t that what we wanted all along?”

In reality, Gotanda’s work makes us question the ethico-political priorities of Asian American cultural politics altogether. Since 2014, Gotanda has worked on an initiative he has entitled “The American Adaptation Cycle,” in which he adapts his celebrated 1985 play *The Wash* to non-Japanese American cultural contexts. For the first leg of the project, Gotanda worked in close collaboration with longtime colleague, actor and director Steven Anthony Jones, to develop “The Jamaican Wash,” rewriting the play to fit Jamaican American diasporic mores and historical circumstances. According to Gotanda, this project aims to produce cross-cultural understandings through a solidarity of shared marginality, a collaboration of what Deleuze once called “minor literatures,” in order to not only produce solidarities, but to collectively unseat the universality of the white canon.

In any event, Gotanda’s engagement with Blackness as a mode of anti-racist ethics powerfully dramatizes the Asian Americanist anxiety of becoming model minority. At the time of this writing, an age in which Richard Aoki has been discovered to be a likely informant, when many Chinese Americans rallied to support Peter Liang after he killed unarmed Black man Akai Gurley,⁸ when public awareness of the extrajudicial killings of Black people has reached a

⁸ On November 20, 2014, Chinese American NYPD officer Peter Liang shot and killed unarmed African American Akai Gurley in Brooklyn, New York. Unlike a number of white police officers who similarly killed unarmed Black people in the same period, Liang faced indictment. In response, Chinese Americans

fevered pitch with the Black Lives Matter Movement, the question of Asian American positionality vis-a-vis Blackness becomes all too imperative. Not unlike the Hulk, subject to the tendrils of the Spikes in the previous Chapter, Gotanda offers a vision for that political possibility, coupled with a critical, masochistic pessimism that demands that Asian America interrogate its own core investments. Learned Jack, after all, watches from the mirror.

But there are, in fact, many such mirrors. In the next and final chapter, moral masochism, *ressentiment*, and becoming-machine all converge in a mirror world of sorts, the virtual world.

rallied in massive numbers to protest what they perceived as “unfair treatment” of a Chinese American police officer, demanding charges be dropped. On April 19, 2016, Liang was sentenced to five years of probation and 800 hours of community service and never served a day in jail.

Chapter 5
Gasp in the Shell
Erotohistoriographic Masochism in Eidos Montreal's *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*¹

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored the relationship of masochism and techno-orientalism to one another and to Asian American masculine subject formation across media: the historiographic example of Vincent Chin, the masochism of techno-oriental affect in experimental Asian American literatures, Greg Pak's re-configuration of Marvel's Hulk as a figure of masochistic omnipotence in response to technological rampancy, and the moral masochistic configuration of Blackness as super-ego. By way of conclusion, I move on to an object within what is perhaps the most masochistic and "technological" of popular media today: video gaming.

Announced in 2007 and released in 2011 as the prequel to the 2000 classic *Deus Ex*, Eidos Montreal's video game *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* was roundly heralded as a monumental achievement of gameplay and digital aesthetics. With an average score of 90/100 among critics according to game review aggregator website metacritic.com, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is by nearly all measures a triumph in video game design, aesthetics, and narrative. As Arthur Gies of IGN writes, "It's a visionary, considered piece of work.... Human Revolution is a smart, rewarding piece of transhumanist noir that does justice not just to *Deus Ex*, but to the fiction that inspired it." A first-person action/role-playing game, the cyberpunk science fiction game places the player in the perspective of its protagonist, Adam Jensen, explicitly described as a thirty-four year old Caucasian male who has fully augmented cybernetic limbs and organs. As security chief of the human augmentation firm Sarif Industries, Jensen unravels a massive conspiracy pertaining to the controversy of human (or, more specifically, transhumanist) augmentation itself, all unfolding in the *Blade Runner*-inflected imagery of an imagined 2027 AD.

Problematically, like its 1980s filmic and literary cyberpunk predecessors, DX:HR is also guilty of vicious techno-orientalist representations, positioning Asian-raced peoples as the paradigmatic racial others of a white transhumanist future invoking fears of dystopian transhumanism through a violent interplay of Asian bodies and cybernetics. This is particularly relevant, not only given the rise of the so-called gamification of society² at large, but also the high rate of video game play among Asian/Americans. According to the Nielsen Company's 2012 "State of the Asian American Consumer," Asian Americans "spend more time on video games than other groups" (10), particularly youth. The Northwestern University Center on Media and Human Development's June 2011 report "Children, Media, and Race" has demonstrated that Asian American youth aged 8-18 have the highest rate of video game and computer game play compared to youth in other racial demographics, spending 73% more time on video games and 83% more time on computer games per day on average compared to white children.³ However,

¹ A previous version of this chapter has been published in *AmerAsia Journal* as "Do Asians Dream of Electric Shrieks?: Techno-Orientalism and Erotohistoriographic Masochism in Eidos Montreal's *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*." *Amerasia Journal* 40-2. 2014, pp. 67-86. The content has been heavily modified to reflect its placement in the dissertation.

² See Deterding, Sabastian, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, Lennart Nacke. "From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining 'Gamification.'" In A. Lugmayr, H. Franssila, C. Safran, & I. Hammouda (Eds.), *MindTrek* 2011 (pp. 9-15).

³ Calculations in essay based on data on Tables 22 and 27 on pages 17 and 19, respectively.

as Dean Chan writes, “Asian American gamers are, paradoxically, both hypervisible and out of sight.” Moreover, as I have written elsewhere, “North American video games have had a long contentious history with regard to Asian racialization. From the grotesquely racist *Shadow Warrior*, the techno-orientalist cyberpunk *Deus Ex* series, and the essentialist and stereotypical portrayals in Sid Meier’s *Civilization* series and *Alpha Centauri*, to the comparatively benevolent but romanticizing *Jade Empire*, and the redemptive but masculinist *Sleeping Dogs* (to name but a handful of easy examples), Asian racialization has had a persistent presence in the North American video game imagination, to varying degrees of epistemic violence or political potential.” (“Ordering a New World” 195). Considering the presence of video gaming among Asian Americans, coupled with Asian Americans’ purported ubiquity and invisibility in the world of gaming, the anti-Asian representations within DX:HR are particularly vexing.

Yet, for the Asian American gamer to not just play, but take pleasure, in assuming the roles and scripts of DX:HR requires closer examination. Such a problematic has been already interrogated at length within Asian American theater critique, framing the central polemic of this essay at large. Concerns of theater are relevant to video game studies—perhaps even doubly so—given that video games represent a form of intensified, privatized performance for its users; I am thus indebted to Clara Fernández-Vara’s framework of analyzing video games as a genre of performance, especially given how video games, like other modes of performance, demonstrate “a special ordering of *time*, a special value attached to *objects*, *non-productivity* in terms of goods, *rules*, and performance spaces” (2). Consequently, Josephine Lee’s assertion on Asian American theater remains germane to Asian American video game studies: “That Asian Americans enact Orientalized stereotypes is often interpreted as a form of misguided internalization of cultural oppression, as ideological brainwashing rather than a conscious decision or choice. But this only partially accounts for the complexity of responses when Asian Americans articulate an *ambivalence about the desire felt for the body-as-stereotype*” (91). Provocatively, there are peculiar pleasures, or perhaps, to borrow a term from Celine Parreñas Shimizu, a “productive perversity,” in inhabiting or embracing the representational figure that epitomizes the subject’s racialized status. Both Lee and Anne Anlin Cheng, in analyzing David Henry Hwang’s now-canonical *M. Butterfly*,⁴ variously suggest that stereotypes and the fantasies that deploy them may in fact be uncomfortably necessary catalysts for pleasure itself. Strikingly, in examining character Song Liling—the anatomically male Chinese spy who performs idealized Orientalized femininity to seduce and manipulate male French diplomat Rene Gallimard—Cheng links stereotype, pleasure, and the fluidity of roles of power within the erotic encounter:

One might say Song has... not only learned how to be with a white man, but also how to *be* the white man. This suggests that, within stereotype’s necessary and repeat performance, the *other* identificatory position available for the one stereotyped is not another stereotype... but the role of the master. The difficult lesson of *M. Butterfly* is therefore not that fantasy exists, as the playwright himself asserts in his afterword, but the more politically distressing idea that fantasy may be the very way in which we come to know and love someone—to come to know and love ourselves (127, emphasis in original).

⁴ Hwang’s 1988 play, the first play written by an Asian American to win a Tony Award, subverts Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* narrative, describing the tale of how Chinese spy Song Liling, an anatomically male person, performs ideal orientalized femininity as a woman for male French diplomat Rene Gallimard to seduce him and procure state secrets.

In examining this watershed work of Asian American theater, Lee and Cheng each foreground theoretical concerns of perverse pleasures, identifications, and fantasies in Asian/America. Crucially, such concerns become even more imperative within the medium of the video game. The video game is a cultural production whose mode of identification exceeds the Aristotelian empathy with the protagonist of drama; it is a mode in which the player *becomes* the avatar or gaze onscreen itself. Insofar as they act upon the gameworld, the gamer is neither strictly a performer, character, or audience member. In performance terms, the gamer blurs the boundaries between performance and *mise-en-scène*, for, in Fernández-Vara's words, "the player parallels both the audience of the theatre play, and the interactor of software. The player is an active performer because she is also an interactor; but she is also the audience of the performance, since she is the one who makes sense of the system and interacts accordingly" (6). Indeed, as Sherry Turkle argues, the video game provides a relationship of fusion, that whereas in "pinball you act on the ball.... [i]n *Pac-Man* you are the mouth" (70). *M. Butterfly*'s Song is something of a gamer herself, playing the rules established by an orientalist field of intelligibility to become the Madame Butterfly figure for Gallimard, taking pleasure in its simultaneous reification and subversion. But if *M. Butterfly* were a game, an audience would not just *watch* Song and Gallimard; it could *become* them. Thus, the stereotype in the video game possesses an amplified valence for the racialized player-subject, either in coercing the player to inhabit the role of the stereotype, or of "being the white man" against which the stereotype is juxtaposed.

As a game, a medium governed predominantly by active and direct interactivity,⁵ *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* precisely satisfies this desire, providing an opportunity for the Asian American gamer to experience not only their own body-as-stereotype, but their own body-as-other. I argue that this is precisely how DX:HR presents potentially generative potential for the Asian subject who plays it and engages its deeply problematic gameworld. In a sense, the video game allows its player to explore the architecture of the structure of feeling,⁶ in this case, one that houses techno-oriental becoming-machine itself. I thus suggest that playing and performing within the techno-orientalist gameworld of DX:HR that the Asian/American subject may masochistically exercise a mode of what Elizabeth Freeman terms "erotohistoriography," a deployment of violent erotics to contend with one's own subject formation. Through a reading of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, this chapter gestures to an Asian American cultural politics that locates itself in slippages, role reversals, and unintuitive affects, understanding the game as a realm of particularly open signification, analyzing gaming primarily as a *practice*. That is to say, this analysis of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* represents a reading of a reading. Consequently, this chapter aims to bring technocultural studies, queer theory, and Asian American studies into conversation around this politically "improper" object. Like Song in *M Butterfly*, the Asian/American player of DX:HR can learn to "be" the transhumanist white man in order to play within the structure of fantasy, opening discomfiting corridors of racial possibility. As I illustrate in the pages that follow, DX:HR is a private theater for the racially depressed, presenting a virtual world of self-annihilation for the Asian/American gamer that pries open wounds of racialization for investigation and reflection.

⁵ As argued in Galloway, Alexander, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

⁶ A nod here to, of course: Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 132-133.

Yellow Skin, White Flesh: Transhumanism and Phenomenology in DX:HR

As David Palumbo-Liu has written, “[t]he nature of Asian American social subjectivity now vacillates between whiteness and color. Its visibility is of a particular texture and density; its function is always to trace a racial minority’s possibilities for assimilation.... Asia/America resides *in transit*, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of *both* a ‘minority’ identity and a ‘majority’ identity” (5). However, the formal and aesthetic structures of the video game DX:HR enable such an “in-transit” social subjectivity to be *felt* through the artifice of the gameworld, by inviting the Asian/American player into *flesh*, and particularly in white flesh, which is central to theorizing Asian American engagement with the video game. Through the invocation and invitation of flesh, DX:HR thus suggests that what Colleen Lye has termed “racial form”—in which “the problem of race might... be reformulated as a question of the relationship between language... and other material processes—between race understood as representation and race as an agency of literary and other social formations” (“Racial Form” 99)—has a phenomenological dimension as well as a literary one.

A cyberpunk first-person action role playing game, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is a game about flesh, that performs flesh, that is an extension of flesh. This may seem counter-intuitive, since engagement with gaming and with digital media tends to imply a liberatory *disembodiment*. This very sentiment is the crux of John Perry Barlow’s famous 1996 assertion in his “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace”: “Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live.” Rather, by asserting the embodied dimension of video gaming, I align myself with feminist technocultural scholars such as Allucquère Rosanne Stone, N. Katherine Hayles, and Lisa Nakamura, all of whom note the continued (if somewhat different, often heightened) relationship of the body to the technological apparatus. Stone, for example, asserts that “the physical/virtual distinction is *not* a mind/body distinction. The concept of mind is not part of virtual systems theory, and the virtual component of the socially apprehensible citizen is not a disembodied thinking thing, but rather a different way of conceptualizing a *relationship* to the human body” (40). Within DX:HR, this relationship manifests through the phenomenological concept of *flesh*. The formulation of phenomenological flesh was first articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but refined by Gayle Salamon, who deploys the concept to provide a conception of transgender subject formation. Salamon’s deployment is useful here: she writes that flesh is not synonymous with bodily matter, as “neither matter nor mind, but partakes of both these things and yet cannot be described as a mixture of them” (65). Rather, writes Salamon, “flesh” is a felt phenomenological extension that actually anticipates the body itself; “*Flesh is that which, by virtue of psychic investment and worldly engagement, we form our bodies into*, rather than the stuff that forms them” (64). Flesh, then, *precedes* the body. But while Salamon applies the concept of flesh to the development of transgender subjects, I apply it to the first-person video game, considering flesh here as an extension of feeling a body, of mapping out the micro-space in which a body can “exist.” Importantly, Salamon’s phenomenological articulation of flesh offers a theoretical foundation to analyze the felt embodiment of the Asian American gamer in the white digital hegemony of DX:HR, naming the liminal interstices between subject and cultural object and opening this “flesh” to inquiry. Within the video game, Lye’s racial form lives not only in its visual representations, but in its flesh.

Recalling Richard Dyer’s statement that “All concepts of race are always concepts of the body” (20), I propose that racial subjectification exists in phenomenological “flesh,” as well; this

is, after all, an extension of the argument of my second chapter, that race exists in the shaping of perception and interface itself. Racial embodiment entails what Frantz Fanon has called an “epidermal racial schema” which encapsulates “A slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world” (91). For Fanon, to be racialized is to have a body, to be overdetermined by it over a gradual temporality, and the fleshy practice of DX:HR heightens this awareness altogether. Although Fanon’s description of the epidermal racial schema—a crucial racial intervention into phenomenological thought more generally—is rooted in the context of postcolonial Francophone Blackness, his formulation still retains import for Asian American racialization, especially given Karen Shimakawa’s argument that one strong basis of the legalistic abjection of Asians in the United States has historically been located on the body. To be racialized as Asian in the United States—and correspondingly, to undergo Asian/American subjectification in dialogue with that racialization—is at least partly to be cognizant of one’s own body, at least discursively and visually, as “Asian,” relative of course to “others.” Here, DX:HR follows the 1980s cyberpunk convention of establishing Asianness as the paradigmatic Other of cybernetic technofuture; DX:HR offers an expanse of Asian bodies to slay. For the Asian/American subject extending their flesh into the gameworld, this produces a paradoxical state; one that I argue bears masochistic potential.

Although I would argue that the medium of the first-person video game is “fleshy” on the whole (and indeed, in a game such as this, there is also the haptic sensation of the controller vibrating when receiving damage, etc.), DX:HR diegetically emphasizes this fleshiness through its particular articulation of transhumanism, which in this game is coded as an ideal white liberalism against techno-orientalized deviance. In the online publicity leading up to the release of DX:HR in August 2011,⁷ Eidos Montreal placed strong emphasis on three interrelated elements: its choice-driven agentic gameplay, its “cyberrenaissance” aesthetics (including, notably, extensive interactions with racialized Asian peoples), and its explicit engagement with transhumanist philosophy, all of which ultimately inform each other in DX:HR. The game immerses its player into a phenomenological experience of white liberal transhumanism, both diegetically and non-diegetically,⁸ placing the player into (at least, for the player of color, and the Asian American player in particular) the uncomfortable role of an augmented whiteness.

In an interview with GameSpot,⁹ DX:HR Art Director Jonathan Jacques-Belletete emphasizes the game’s direct engagement with transhumanist thought, including the work of

⁷ Online viral publicity was quite ambitious, including a Flash website for Sarif Industries (sarifindustries.com), a pro-augmentation Sarif advertisement (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWmeBeRb1RY&list=UUNE4zSurREHUhdB_2SISjOg&index=19&feature=plpp_video), and an anti-augmentation agitprop video by the fictional activist group “Purity First,” which evokes imagery of the 1999 Seattle WTO protests (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAio1dpebJA&list=UUNE4zSurREHUhdB_2SISjOg&index=15&feature=plpp_video)

⁸ The diegetic/non-diegetic distinction has appeared in literary and film studies, but in video game theory it has been most explicitly articulated by Alexander Galloway in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, in which he defines the diegetic as elements that exist as part of the gamic narrative (e.g. nonplayer characters to interact with, items to acquire, the room through which one is walking, ambient noise that is part of the environment), and the non-diegetic as those elements that are tacitly understood to not be a representation of what is “actually happening” in the game (e.g. the Main Menu or Game Over screens, soundtrack music that is not explicitly played from a source in game’s setting).

⁹ GameSpot’s Deus Ex Human Revolution Art Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8o1izAq7ig

Joel Garreau, who in turn describes transhumanism as an intellectual and social movement dedicated to “the enhancement of human intellectual, physical and emotional capabilities, the elimination of disease and unnecessary suffering, and the dramatic extension of life span” (xiii). Put simply, transhumanism can be understood fundamentally as the ideology of the “technologically-positive,” utilizing new technologies to “enhance” the “human.” In this sense, as Nick Bostrom states, transhumanism is at the center of human intellectual curiosity since its inception, though Bostrom traces contemporary transhumanist thought to the works of the Enlightenment, with an “emphasis on individual liberties, and... its humanistic concern for the welfare of all humans” (4).

Accordingly, transhumanist thought trends towards individualist advancement over ideological intervention. Garreau, writing in the early 2000s, points to a series of contemporary US American cultural tendencies as leading to transhumanist thought: “The inflection point at which we have arrived is one in which we are increasingly seizing the keys to all creation.... It’s about what parents will do when offered ways to increase their child’s SAT score by 200 points.... What fat people will do when offered a gadget that will monitor and alter their metabolisms. What the aging will do when offered memory enhancers” (11). Here, Garreau concerns himself not with educational equity, nor with societal perceptions of fatness; transhumanist human augmentation provides individuals with the capacity to succeed within a system taken as a given. Furthermore, it is implied that these augmentations, these prostheses, are external products, purchasable externalities to allow those with the means to succeed and leapfrog over those who presumably do not. Indeed, Cary Wolfe aptly explores that since transhumanism is essentially a conservative extension of white Enlightenment humanism, its discourses consequently deify the atomized Kantian individual, the white masculine rational ideal of the social contractarian imaginary. Despite transhumanists’ attempts to distance themselves from the “specter of eugenics,”¹⁰ transhumanism nevertheless shares a discursive resonance with eugenic notions of “human” “perfection” — “human” insofar as the modern concept of the “human” has been raced at least since the Enlightenment,¹¹ and “perfection” dependent upon full able-bodiedness and able-mindedness. Bodily ideality and whiteness consequently haunt the transhumanist thought upon which DX:HR draws.

From a disabilities studies lens, Adam Jensen is not just a transhumanist messiah (the Biblical reference in “Adam” is apparently intentional), but a white supercrip,¹² a flagrant

¹⁰ See Nick Bostrom’s “History of Transhumanist Thought” and Allen Buchanan et al’s *From Chance to Choice*

¹¹ Charles Mills, in *The Racial Contract*, argues that race is the central political system that has defined and organized “Western” civilization and notions of the “human” since the Enlightenment, dividing humanity between the white and the nonwhite, with “black” representing the epitome of the bestial, the barely-human. Mills points to Emmanuel Kant, considered widely to be “the most important moral theorist of the modern period” who “is *also* the father of the modern concept of race” (70), and that this “famous theorist of personhood is also the theorist of subpersonhood” (70), who derived much of his evidence from early eugenic studies that placed whites at the top of the racial hierarchy.

¹² As Richard Harris writes, the supercrip “is seen in characters like the superhuman and selfless paraplegic who wheels hundreds of miles to raise money for cancer research or the blind girl who solves the baffling crime by remembering a crucial sound or smell that sighted people had missed. Sometimes the two even coexist in the same person, as in *The Miracle Worker’s* Helen Keller, at first bitter and inept, almost animalistic, until she is “tamed” by the saintly teacher Annie Sullivan, after which she goes on to be almost superhuman. A covert message of both of these portrayals is that *individual* adjustment is the key to disabled people’s lives; if they only have the right attitude, they will be fine” (85).

personification of what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder describe as “narrative prosthesis,” the utilization of disability “as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (224). Jensen gains his augmentations in the introductory tutorial segment of the game that ends with his suffering mortal wounds at the hands of a black-ops augmented mercenary group called the Tyrants; Sarif engineers then proceed to augment his body to save his life. He gains cybernetic augmentations without consent to “correct” a disability imposed upon him against his will. The cybernetic supercrip dimension of Jensen provides the narrative prosthesis that inundates the game with its dimension of flesh, both explicitly and implicitly.

In its fleshiness, *DX:HR* is both representative and exceptional of the first-person action game. It is representative in that its general gameplay mechanics of movement, camera-control, and leveling up are emblematic of the genre. However, it is arguably exceptional in its explicit diegetic mapping of cybernetic augmentations onto the main character’s body that directly correspond to not just to statistical improvements in performance, but in “felt” phenomenological differences in gameplay altogether. In *DX:HR*, flesh manifests not just through the lived experience of being Adam Jensen, but also through the systematic form through which Jensen is augmented, allowing the player to form Jensen’s body into the flesh of the player. In the game, as the player controls Adam Jensen and progresses, they gradually acquire “Praxis Points,” which in turn can be spent in further augmenting parts of Jensen’s body. The player can exercise agency in choosing which body parts to augment, such as head, torso, arm, skin, legs, eyes, etc.—each augmentation having a different effect in the gameplay experience. Upgrades are thus literally mapped onto the digital anatomy of the avatar and then experienced in the digital body. To enhance stealth, the player can choose to augment Jensen’s skin so that he can turn invisible for a few seconds at a time, or perhaps his legs so that he emits less sound.

As Jensen incrementally gains transhumanist augmentations to his body throughout the game—which can alternatively make Jensen faster, more perceptive, stronger, et cetera—the alterations to the sense of being Jensen are not just seen or heard, but proprioceptively *felt*, affecting the player’s very capacities to act within the gameworld, especially from the immersive first-person viewpoint of the game. It is an interface, a cybernetic proprioception. Moreover, the leveling up of Adam Jensen procedurally literalizes the ideological white Enlightenment transhumanist ideal of atomized self-improvement by mapping it onto his body, and invisibilizing it through its first-person interface. It produces whiteness as experience through action, and the Asian American player, potential model minority, is welcome (if not explicitly) to step inside, to wear the glove of a role to blur the boundary between self and other as they control white transhuman Adam Jensen through techno-orientalist transhuman Hengsha. In this first-person view, Jensen’s race is particularly unmarked like whiteness itself, exhibiting its emblematic “invisibility... as a racial position” (Dyer 3) yet contrasting with the many racial others present in the game, since whiteness is “precisely the absence of culture... the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn’t and on whom one can hold back” (Roediger 13). After all, as Lisa Nakamura aptly argues in *Digitizing Race*, the default “subject of interactivity” of digital media is hegemonically understood as white and male (15). *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* thus procedurally literalizes the ideological white Enlightenment transhumanist ideal of atomized self-improvement by mapping it onto the body, and invisibilizing it through its first-person interface. Except in some dialogue and cinematic sequences, and when Jensen ducks for cover, the game primarily transpires in first-person view, effectively immersing the player into Jensen’s subjectivity as they make these various gameplay

choices throughout the game (see Figures 3 and 4). In this first-person presentation, in which the screen is almost always displaying what the character/avatar sees (even the Heads-Up Display – a first-person gamic convention usually understood to be nondiegetic – is understood to be a diegetic reflection of Jensen’s augmented vision, since the HUD does not appear pre-augmentation), the player does not only empathize with Jensen, but *becomes* Jensen in the gameworld. As Alexander Galloway asserts, the first-person subjective view in video games establishes “an intuitive sense of affective motion” to “facilitate an active subject position that enables and facilitates the gamic apparatus” (Gaming 69). If the player has adequate competence over the controls, looking, movement, and firing weapons become seamless, a virtual extension of embodiment in a three-dimensional landscape.

However, DX:HR’s various gameplay modalities offer more than combat: one can choose to confront mission objectives with gun combat, sneakiness, conversational persuasiveness, computational competence, or some combination of the above. Choices—both the strategic “reactive” choices of in-time combat and the tactical choices of character augmentation—provide a particular agentic pleasure in the video game. Even the narrative conclusion of DX:HR depends on the player’s actions; the player can choose one of four outcomes for the transhumanist future depending on the opinion they have formed regarding human augmentation through playing the game. It is largely through this agency that DX:HR possesses what Sherry Turkle has termed “holding power,” deeply entrenching the consciousness of the player into the presence of the gameworld. The *becoming-avatar* in the first-person video game grants something like (but not quite) embodiment, echoing Nigel Thrift’s theorization of contemporary automobiles as “extensions of [their drivers’] bodies” (47), especially through technologies of transubstantiation such as ergonomics and driving software that extend the bodily schema over the device itself.

The agency and immersion of the game all point to a heightened sense of flesh and of investment, in which the player plays a part in the authorship of the game’s narrative; through actions in a rule-bounded gameworld, the player is neither spectator nor author but a participant somewhere in between. The gamer of color is thus placed in a circumstance in which the distinction between subject and object is blurred, especially while assuming the role of the white transhumanist cyborg. Furthermore, as a role-playing game, in which the player does not simply play for a few minutes competitively for a round or two, but rather progresses for a total of over twenty hours in one continuous storyline, DX:HR is a game in which the player invests a significant amount of what Edward Castronova terms “avatarial capital,” a compelling virtual accumulation of “experience points and attributes” (qtd. in Nakamura “Don’t Hate the Player” 140) that is the product of the player’s narrative labor. This is particularly the case in a high-agency game like DX:HR, in which the player feels that they crafted the narrative and the character build according to personal gameplay preferences. To accumulate avatarial capital, the player constructs a selfhood through flesh, located on the assemblage that is Adam Jensen’s white cyborg pastiche of a body. DX:HR is emblematic of Turkle’s declaration that “games hold out a... promise,” that is, “the promise of perfection” (86). DX:HR, a representation of transhumanism on a transhumanist medium, does not just employ narrative prosthetics, but is a “cognitive prosthesis” (204) itself, opening a space for the felt sense of the digital body.

But above all, through the becoming-avatar and the extension of phenomenological flesh, the medium itself presents a kind of masochistic becoming-machine; granted, in a different sense than we have seen in the first few chapters of this text. Nevertheless, we see a union of form and content in DX:HR; becoming-machine and techno-orientalism are hand-in-hand.

Echoes of Ebens: Detroit, Erotohistoriography, and Techno-Orientalism

DX:HR shamelessly deploys techno-orientalism to render its aesthetic legible as cyberpunk, projecting anxieties that have haunted the genre since its inception in the Japanophobic 1980s. DX:HR Art Director Jonathan Jacques-Belletete refers to the aesthetic of the game as “cyberrenaissance,” deeply informed by both the Italian Renaissance¹³ and the cyberpunk imagery in films such as *Blade Runner* and novels such as William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, both of which are undisputedly the most influential paragons of the cyberpunk genre that birthed in 1980s science fiction. However, as Lisa Nakamura writes: “[Cyberpunk]’s emphasis on machine-enabled forms of consciousness seems to glorify, at times, the notion of the posthuman, which is also coded at times as the postracial. Despite this coding, however, race is all over cyberpunk’s future terrains” (*Cybertypes* 61). *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is replete with an abundance of techno-orientalist imagery (specifically, sinophobic techno-orientalism), which was quite intentional. DX:HR’s Art Director Jonathan Jacques-Belletete (who also served as the face and body model for Jensen’s appearance) indicates that the inclusion of Asian settings is almost a requirement for (the nostalgic) cyberpunk. Such displays become particularly prevalent once Adam Jensen arrives in Hengsha. The Shanghai island in 2027 (which, as of this writing, is primarily a small farming community) has been converted into a literally two layered mega-metropolis dominated by the Chinese augmentation firm Tai Yong Medical, which operates the upper layer of habitation and monopolizes the city’s sunlight. The lower level consists of Hengsha’s criminal elements, red-light districts, and freakishly augmented Triad agents called “Harvesters” who scavenge for prosthetic body parts to attach to their own bodies. In Hengsha, Jensen explores Hung Hua brothel, a cybernetic bordello with sexualized Asian women with straight bob haircuts, a throbbing techno beat interspersed with feminine gasps playing as a persistent soundtrack in the background. There, the player-as-Jensen can choose to play the White Savior role and assassinate (or frame for an arrest) a Chinese man who coerces the sex workers into augmenting themselves, in exchange for a reward in the form of money and potentially a Praxis point. Interestingly, even within a game replete with choice-driven gameplay, the game does not offer the choice to partake of services from the Hung Hua sex workers—Jensen remains loyal to his kidnapped white girlfriend (and chief Sarif scientist) Megan Reed—and thus retains his position of white male liberal-democratic moral superiority in contrast to the amoral, patriarchal, and sexually deviant Orient. Such relativistic othering of the orientalized morally justifies a particularly telling dialogue option of Jensen’s when he speaks to a bouncer in the neighboring nightclub The Hive (also obviously evocative of stereotypical Asian conformity and “swarmlike” character), in which he remarks that “all of you look alike.”

Adam Jensen, Biblically named in DX:HR as a figure of once-pure origin, literalizes and embodies not the techno-orientalist dystopia of transhumanist civilization’s Asian discontents, but the transhumanist ideal that takes white male individualism to its most glorious conclusion, a

¹³ In the same GameSpot interview referenced earlier in this essay, Jacques-Belletete points to Renaissance studies of human anatomy (such as DaVinci’s) as an origin point for transhumanist thought. The imagined 2027 of DX:HR, according to Jacques-Belletete, is also a kind of “renaissance” period for human augmentation technology before the impending social collapse that occurs in the game’s climax—the dystopian “cyberpunk” era thus looms on the horizon. Consequently, Jacques-Belletete decided to employ a consistent and dominating black-and-gold color scheme throughout the game—gold representing a Renaissance “golden age,” and black representing dystopian cyberpunk.

beacon of where transhumanism *could* lead instead of the dirty techno-oriental nightmare presented in Hengsha. Jensen is, in fact, a cybernetic transhumanist *homo oeconomicus*, described by Foucault as “an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (226). Such is the procedural rhetoric¹⁴ that undergirds the leveling-up process of Jensen as a character.

Consequently, acting through the first-person identification with Jensen presents a dissonant (if perhaps mundane and not wholly unexpected) experience for the gamer of color, who is placed in a circumstance in which the distinction between subject and object is blurred altogether, especially while assuming the role of the white cyborg. Such slippage recalls Kobena Mercer’s oft-cited essay “Just Looking for Trouble,” in which he describes his uncomfortable pleasure with Robert Mapplethorpe’s objectifying photographs of black men: “Once I acknowledge my own location in the image reservoir as a gay subject—a desiring subject not only in terms of sharing a desire to look, but in terms of an identical object-choice already there in my own fantasies and wishes—then the articulation of meanings about eroticism.... I am forced to confront the rather unwelcome fact that as a spectator I actually occupy the very position in the fantasy of mastery previously ascribed to the centered position of the white male subject!” (104) Mercer suspects that he too, as a queer black man, desires mastery of the nude black bodies in Mapplethorpe’s infamous photographs, identifying himself both with the desiring subject and the desired object at once, not unlike the Asian/American gamer playing DX:HR. Yet, in both Mapplethorpe’s photos and in DX:HR, the racialized object of representation (in Mapplethorpe’s case, the gay black man; in DX:HR’s, the techno-orientalized Asian) is not the likely audience for the work. Consequently, Mercer finds his engagement with Mapplethorpe’s work simultaneously offensive and generative, discomfotingly finding himself sharing the same “fantasy of mastery” as the white male subject.

But within the action of the gameworld, interactivity lends such mastery a performative dimension, and perhaps, a doubly erotic one. In gaining such a profound felt sense of existing in the gameworld, the gamer develops a relationship with the game not unlike that of an erotic encounter, rife with tactility, fantasy, pleasure, and perhaps emotional attachment. After all, as Sherry Turkle demonstrates, the video game’s holding power possesses “roots [that] are aggressive, passionate, and eroticized” (66), invoking altered states that “combine a feeling of omnipotence and possession—they are a place for manipulation and surrender” (83). Through the immersion of the gameworld, the player’s fusion with the avatar or first-person gaze blurs the distinction between identification and desire; in Thomas Foster’s words, “desire *for* machines often becomes difficult to distinguish from the desire to *be* a machine, and vice versa” (82).¹⁵ Thus, as a space that one inhabits and acts upon, techno-orientalized Hengsha literalizes Sara Ahmed’s description of the status of the Orient as a reachable object: “Orientalism... would involve not just making imaginary distinctions between the West and the Orient, but would also shape how bodies cohere, by facing the same direction. Objects become objects only as an effect of the repetition of this tending ‘toward’ them, which produces the subject as that which the world is ‘around.’ The orient is then ‘orientated;’ *it is reachable as an object given how the*

¹⁴ In reference to Ian Bogost’s *Persuasive Games* (2010).

¹⁵ F It is worth noting here Foster’s articulation here does not refer to video games, but techno-fetishism, and the representational figure of the desiring machine. Nevertheless, I argue that his description here still applies, particularly given the video game machine’s necessity for a human operator in order for its narrative to actualize.

world takes shape 'around' certain bodies."¹⁶ DX:HR's interactive techno-orientalism makes the Orient an object reachable by the player-as-transhumanist-Jensen while simultaneously establishing the Orient's irreconcilable otherness by exhibiting its improper "orientation," especially given its transgression of sexual normativity. DX:HR's techno-orientalism imbues Hengsha with a sleazy, dirty affect against which Jensen's transcendent whiteness is counterposed. Thus, for the player with a body racialized as Asian, the game silently necessitates an asymmetric identification with not only Jensen, or even the white male gaze, but with the imperial white male sense of engaging with the world in a process of perpetual othering and of mastery. It is a fantasy of conquest of a *reachable* techno-orient, a sensory space whose bodies are not unlike that of the player themselves.

As the Asian/American player engages with the epistemologically violent, stereotypically techno-orientalist setting of Hengsha, DX:HR illuminates the possible slippage of roles between the Asian stereotyped and the white master enabled by the structure of fantasy for the Asian player themselves, which is, in this case, techno-orientalist. The player, to reference Anne Cheng at the beginning of this chapter, has "not only learned how to be with a white man, but also how to *be* the white man" within the ludic magic circle of the techno-orientalist fantasy gameworld. To become Jensen is to master Jensen; to master Jensen is to master techno-orientalist Hengsha, which in turn is to master, in Josephine Lee's words, "the body-as-stereotype." However, such mastery is simultaneously a submission, as the player is, despite the significant agency afforded by DX:HR's game mechanics, still bounded by a racist techno-orientalist narrative if one wishes to succeed. The player is as much "bottom" as "top" to the game itself, and pleasure can arise from this ambiguous doubling of position. Yet, rather than simplistically pathologizing "internalized racism," I cite Mercer again to caution against a totalizingly negative reading in that such critiques moralize "images of a reductive dichotomy between good and bad, 'positive' and 'negative', and thus fails to recognize the ambivalence of the text" (104). Furthermore, despite the problematics of techno-orientalism for the Asian/American subject, it is a racial form that is not altogether eschewed by Asian America; to recall again Rachel C. Lee and Sau-Ling Wong, "the Asian (American) cyborg is not solely the construct of the West, but also a self-invention that can take on model minority dimensions" (xiv). The Asian/American relationship to techno-orientalism, like Mercer's relationship to the Mapplethorpe photographs, or Song's relationship to white masculinity, is complex and masochistic, heightened even more so in the video game medium as a consequence of its flesh.

Such masochistic pleasure invokes the work of Elizabeth Freeman, who theorizes what she terms "eroto-historiography: a politics of unpredictable, deeply embodied pleasures that counters the logic of development" ("Time Binds" 59). Erotohistoriography also "posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times" ("Time Binds" 59) deriving pleasure from the inappropriate. In her project, Freeman examines particular instances of "politically incorrect" queer sexual pleasure as performing a form of subjective excavation, locating rich potential in a "'bottom' historiography" that would usually be intuitively dismissed as internalized oppression ("Time Binds" 65). In discussing S/M, for example, Freeman states that "S/M relentlessly physicalizes the encounter with history and thereby contributes to a reparative criticism that takes up materials of a traumatic past and remixes them in the interests of new possibilities for being and knowing" (*Time Binds* 144). Freeman's formulation of S/M is instrumental in conceptualizing how both graphically and

¹⁶ Ahmed, Sara, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 120. Emphasis mine.

epistemologically violent video games such as DX:HR can potentially reorganize “the relationships among emotion, sensation, and historical understanding” through the usage of “icons and equipment from traumatic pasts” (*Time Binds* 168), excavating knowledges through the epidermal-racial schema of the flesh. I would assert that DX:HR offers the same potential for the Asian/American subject, a sadomasochistic encounter in which Asian racialization materializes into an object of media.

That said, if we consider the Asian American playing of DX:HR to be an erotohistoriographic gaming practice, then what historiography is it performing? It is a historiography of the very species of techno-orientalism I have elaborated in the beginning of Chapter 1, a racialization of mechanization ultimately rooted in the Detroit auto industry. Although much of the second half of DX:HR’s narrative transpires in techno-orientalized Hengsha, the majority of the first half of the game occurs in Detroit, Michigan. As it happens, Jacques-Belletete mentions that Detroit was chosen as the opening setting precisely due to its history with the automotive industry:

For Detroit, the idea was to show the reinvention of the city through Sarif Industry’s heavy investment in the field of biotech research and manufacturing. If the city’s glorious past was about the automotive industry, it would now be revived through the cybernetic industry. We even decided to reinforce this concept by having old car factories turned into biomechanical assembly lines, which in turn creates a strong visual message for the location. (Agnello)

There is thus an intentional through line from the Detroit auto industry to that of human augmentation within the mythos of DX:HR. The machinic appearance of human augmentation of DX:HR furthermore lends human augmentation an industrial aesthetic compatible with a twentieth-century conception of Detroit, and, similarly, Fordist mechanization. However, in contrast with the multi-tiered vertical Hengsha, which speaks to a kind of dystopian extravagance in spite of its perverse underclass, Detroit’s landscape more uniformly reflects the depressive bleakness of urban decay. With the exception of the Sarif Industries headquarters, DX:HR’s Detroit is overwhelmingly a place of deteriorating alleyways, gangs, and poverty, depicted often quite problematically. Within mainstream gaming journalism, DX:HR received negative publicity about its extremely stereotypical and anti-black portrayal of a homeless Black woman named Letitia (who serves as an informant for Jensen), a minstrel-esque representation whom Evan Narcisse calls “a really bad part of a really good game” that “look[s] and sound[s] like a homage to Amos ‘n’ Andy.”¹⁷ In any event, it is through the stereotypical caricature of Letitia that Jensen and the player receive an assessment of the socioeconomic conditions of city; if the player has Jensen ask her about the city’s mood, Letitia responds: “Oh, things ain’t looking good, Cap’n. People losing their jobs, their homes, locking everything they’s own into those, uh, garage-door storage units ‘round town, hoping nobody breaks in an’ steals stuff. Mr. Sarif gonna save us, he better do it, soon.... Just feels like this whole city’s waiting to explode.”

¹⁷ Interestingly, in this same article, Eidos Montreal released a statement in response: “Deus Ex: Human Revolution is a fictional story which reflects the diversity of the world’s future population by featuring characters of various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. While these characters are meant to portray people living in the year 2027, it has never been our intention to represent any particular ethnic group in a negative light.”

Through the absurdity of a 2027 Black person speaking a caricatured pre-1980s AAVE, *Deus Ex* displays a continuation of the contemporary Detroit that conforms to its blighted post-industrial stereotype. As Letitia implies, Sarif Industries is purported to be the corporate savior of the community through its investment, although its effectiveness in doing so is predictably disappointing. Still, *DX:HR*'s Detroit, possessing a largely unemployed and ultimately post-industrial workforce, resonates deeply with Vincent Chin and Ronald Ebens' Detroit of 1982. The parallels are rife, down to the presence of roboticism to the preoccupation with outside Asian competition. As a consequence, despite the game's transhumanist futurism, *DX:HR* ultimately draws upon a historical nostalgia, accessing a structure of feeling indexing the aesthetic and logic of 1980s cyberpunk techno-orientalism, including the very setting of the Vincent Chin murder. But Adam Jensen is provided an opportunity that Ronald Ebens was never afforded: a chance to travel to Asia and slay the very Asian competition that has conspired to disenfranchise him.

Enter the Dragon Lady: Masochism and the Annihilation of Self and/as Other

No character embodies the techno-orientalist yellow peril quite as emblematically as Zhao Yun Ru, the CEO of Chinese cybernetics company Tai Yong Medical, rival of the Jensen's American company Sarif Industries. Of the multiple antagonists of *DX:HR*, Zhao is the ultimate villain behind the conspiracy to control the world through augmentation implants. Mysterious, empowered, duplicitous, and cunning, Zhao is, quite blatantly, a Dragon Lady—she is even literally referred to as “the Dragon Lady” in text-based diegetic documents found throughout the Tai Yong facility. And yet, I argue that the final confrontation with Zhao is the moment that most illuminates *DX:HR*'s game-specific, masochistic, erotohistoriographic potential for the Asian/American subject.

Jensen first personally encounters Zhao when he breaks into Tai Yong Medical in search for clues to find his (white) girlfriend Megan; Zhao plays the China Doll role, pleading to Jensen that she is a smaller pawn in a larger game, extending a hand to touch his face to distract him with her exotic-erotic Oriental feminine wiles, before she turns around and locks him in her office as she calls up her guards, whom Jensen must either defeat or sneak past.

Zhao's treachery escalates throughout the game's narrative. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the game, the entire augmented population on Earth—Jensen included—is hit simultaneously with a brief, violent seizure, which causes both the game's controller and the display to shake. News reports identify the mass seizure as an augmentation software bug, but, fortunately, Tai Yong Medical advertises having created a software repair patch. As Jensen, the player can choose to visit a clinic and have the patch applied, which ceases any future seizures, or the player can choose to distrust Tai Yong's unclean Chinese science and proceed through the game without the patch. The former choice results in Zhao's ability to literally neutralize Jensen's augmented upgrades during his battle with a powerful commando. To augmented civilians less powerful than Jensen, the Tai Yong patch even enables Zhao to remotely control their actions like a puppeteer. Thus, Zhao's Tai Yong upgrade is an infection of Oriental software that poisons, or perhaps queers—evocative of viral toxic Chinese lead as described by Mel Chen, who writes that “lead itself has become recently racialized as Chinese” (“Toxic Animacies” 269)—also possessing the capacity to render subjects—and most threateningly, white subjects—non-normative. In this case, the toxic Oriental infection renders some mediocre (as in Jensen), and others mindless conformist automotons, hordes made-Chinese to serve the

treacherous Dragon Lady queen. While human augmentation serves as a biopolitical “corrective” to disabled bodies (which are then, subsequently, othered once more through augmentation’s hypervisibility), augmentation then becomes additionally racialized: some upgrades are “trustworthy” while others are “foreign” tools that lie in wait, like the Manchurian Candidate, to execute their collectivist Oriental agenda. Jensen’s augmentations represent the “safe” routes for evolution, while the optional Tai Yong upgrades present the peril of a techno-oriental dystopia. The player will feel the oncoming weakness should they choose to take the East into their body.

But it is in the final encounter with Zhao that the game is at its most sadomasochistic with the Asian/American player. As the final villain to slay in DX:HR, Zhao connects herself to a massive network of quantum computers called the Hyron Project, invented by her co-conspirator turned-traitor Hugh Darrow (who, as the “father of augmentation,” was the inventor of most of the technologies—Zhao, the Oriental, replicates, appropriates, and steals from this white man’s genius), that would enable her to regain complete control of the augmented human population. She connects the Hyron’s fiber optics to her own nervous system, which suspends her from the ground, giving her an almost arachnid appearance as her Oriental body is fused with the massive technological apparatus, though she is protected, safely secure behind bulletproof glass.

The conventional strategy to defeat Zhao in this confrontation is to attack the Hyron machine, which in turn has four other “drone” women linked in as slaves to the central processing unit. In a frenetic battle, the player-as-Jensen can dodge the Hyron’s weaponry and slay the hapless, blinded drone women who have given their souls to the machine, which will result in Zhao’s protective glass screen collapsing, leaving her open to attack. However, there is an alternate method: if Jensen was fortunate enough to pick up the experimental laser rifle earlier in the game, he can literally shoot through the glass to annihilate Zhao. This particular method is striking on several levels; there is an unsettling sense of violent masculine penetration, for one. Furthermore, glass is an invisible protection, an uncanny fetish-element of the digital age that transforms the three dimensional into the two dimensional, that transmutes tactile objects into objects of visual display. But for the Asian/American player in particular, I moreover suggest that the glass is not entirely transparent; the glass that shields Zhao is a Lacanian mirror in which the Asian/American player confronts the image of both self and other, or perhaps, self as other. Zhao is suspended in the machine, not unlike how the Asian/American player is also suspended in the playing of the game, submitting to the machine’s techno-orientalist aesthetic. Through the glass, the Asian/American player faces the image of herself and must annihilate herself in order to progress.

In any event, no matter how Zhao is slain, her body is literally incinerated in a brief cinematic sequence that plays when her health falls to zero; as she wails an otherworldly shriek of anguish, her human body is charred to a crisp and collapses to the floor. Jensen renders her overcooked meat, confronted with the sad reality of her organicity. Zhao, techno-oriental techno-fetishist, paradoxically cannot transcend her humanity because she is, as nonwhite, as Oriental, not human enough. The player, in turn, whose flesh has extended into the combat of the game, experiences a kind of orgasmic relief at the defeat of Zhao; her burning, contorted, but almost postcoital corpse is the climactic reward after hours of developing augmentations and maximizing Jensen’s strength.

For the Asian/American gamer, the player whose racial-epidermal schema aligns with Zhao’s, it is a moment of simulated self-annihilation. In “being” the white man, the Asian/American player is positioned as simultaneously “top” and “bottom” of the erotic gaming

encounter, a strange mixture of excitement and shame as the player is paradoxically coerced into a position of dominance in which one simultaneously incinerates self and other, both embodied by Zhao. In other words, the player's self has expanded beyond the body of Jensen—like Song Liling as described by Anne Cheng, the player embodies the white male subject and the Asian female object at once. Provocatively, the naked exercise of power coupled with pleasure in this game, as in S/M, displays the means by which domination and submission as positional categories themselves blur altogether. To dominate Jensen is to submit to his transhumanist whiteness. To dominate *as* Jensen is to submit to techno-orientalism. But perhaps, to submit to techno-orientalism is to deploy, in Freeman's words, "the uses of physical sensation to break apart the present into fragments of times that may not be one's 'own,' or *to feel one's present world as both conditioned and contingent*" (*Time Binds* 141, emphasis mine). Thus, such an erotohistoriographic engagement in the game implies a productive inappropriateness, a means by which flesh reveals itself as imbricated within the ubiquity of power, to feel the "present world as both conditioned and contingent," allowing for slippage between the white male master and the dominated techno-orientalized.

To take pleasure in the slaying of Zhao is not necessarily to take pleasure in killing an Asian woman, nor even in occupying the space of heteropatriarchal whiteness; such pleasure is perhaps instead a necessarily masochistic invitation into the wound of racialization, whose traumatic nature becomes reconfigured in the moment of pleasure. I suggest that DX:HR offers for the Asian/American player (who again, to stress the specificity of *action* in games, is not merely a *reader*) a potential articulated by Darieck Scott regarding Samuel Delany's racially masochistic erotica: "the traumatic past is exacerbated as it is also soothed, the wounds both bandaged and bled; and it is in that body-psyche nexus wherein what we call the sexual operates that this contradiction is held and that both psychic pain and the effects, if not the content, of language undergoes a transformation" (236). But unlike both Scott's description here and Freeman's theorization of the erotohistoriographic, the interactive techno-orientalism of DX:HR explicitly highlights not only past racializations but a transhumanist future, locating racial futurity in a complexly masochistic configuration upon racialized flesh.

The Asian/American immolation of Zhao, the annihilation of the techno-orientalized self and/as other, must be recognized not as mere internalized racism or abjection of the orientalized self, but a creative mode of reflection. But this erotohistoriographic masochism of the flesh enables a claim to both a collective memory and a negotiation of a contentious future. As Rey Chow explains, "[T]his extra dimension of the historicity of having-been-rendered-object needs to be recognized as a dimension of intellectual and artistic creativity, one that bears a sticky, messy historical imprint—namely, a claim to a (collective) memory of being aggressed against and the masochistic pleasures and pains that typically accompany such a claim" (*Entanglements* 181).

It is also, finally, a self-punishment, an annihilation of the model minority. The player here becomes-machine to kill a racial cyborg, having undergone a process not unlike Zhao herself. Not only does DX:HR present an eroto-historiography of exclusion; it incorporates (assimilates?) its player into the gameworld in order to slay the Asian who, while on the one hand unmistakably foreign yellow peril, has also tried to play the white man's game but was driven mad from hubris. The moral masochism of Greg Pak's *Hulk* and Philip Gotanda's Afro-Asian super-ego also converge at this point: it is, at once, shame and pleasure, in both the player and Zhao, of both complicity with becoming-machine, and the annihilation of its results. This could very well be the condition of the model minoritized Asian American itself.

Needless to say, the encounter with such epistemic violence is fraught and perilous. But invitations of video games like *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* provide challenging yet generative quasi-erotic avenues for the othered subject to reflect upon the interpellative historical violence to which they have been subjected. Ironically, through this digital landscape of games, Asian American cultural theory can deploy new methods of epistemological and affective inquiry in ways that are often shockingly inappropriate, but also represent a complex source of ecstasy and self-formation in this digitized present.

Afterword: Masochistic Futurities

In the echoes of the becoming-machine in 1980s Detroit, in the touchscreens and televisions of the Asian American literary imagination, in the muscled *ressentiment* of the Green Goliath, in the mournful yet impossible jazz notes of Chet Monkawa, in the digitized dystopia of the video game interface, racial masochism's life persists in what it means to perform, and to approximate "being," this uncanny thing called "Asian American." What I hope to have offered here is not a definitive or static model of an identity, but rather an impressionist portrait of a social position, wherein the convergence of historical, aesthetic, and ethical forms have coagulated into something that exceeds the sum of the parts of panethnicity. To reference the immortal title of Carlos Bulosan's magnum opus, Asian America is in the affect; it is in the liminal zones of human and machine, interior and exterior, model minority and perpetual foreigner, pain and pleasure.

This final chapter gestures to a futurity within a painful encounter with trauma, and I propose that through masochism, there may be a futurity beyond what *ressentiment* and melancholia have allowed. Of course, it is possible that this may not be the case; in the end, masochism remains more descriptive than prescriptive, and even as it contains its various telic ideals, the various masochisms may, in fact, thwart each other. The masochism of becoming-machine and the moral masochism against it may coexist only in a deathly embrace. Yet, this antinomy may be precisely what is needed in order to achieve an Asian American cultural politics that is more reflective of those interpellated under its sign, yet also transformative in its relationship to power and self-formation.

Despite my consistent skepticism of the moral-masochistic "ideal critical subject" throughout this text, I paradoxically believe that an Asian Americanist radicality is needed more urgently than ever. As I write this, Donald Trump is in the waxing weeks of his U.S. Presidency, and the waves of nativism, exclusion, and overt white supremacy have re-entrenched themselves in the national mainstream. At first glance, my critique of *ressentiment* and melancholia may seem to discredit the movements against his administration, but in reality, it was *white ressentiment*, not unlike that which killed Vincent Chin (and in fact, concentrated in similar geographic areas), that propelled Trump into office. Recalling the Lordeian truism that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," moral economies of woundedness have grave limitations in their transformative potential simply by relying on the individuation and essentialism that animates racial capitalism (as I argued in Chapter 3).

The Asian American model minority itself can be conceived as one such "master's tool," an embodiment of respectability politics itself, and operationalized as a technology via techno-orientalism. Racial masochism contends with its underlying logics even as it sometimes embraces it, or sometimes *precisely* by doing so. Not unlike Donna Haraway's cyborg in the 1980s, the monstrosity formed by militarism and capitalism that can in turn lead to its undoing,

the self-objectifying, self-punishing, masochistic Asian American may offer a modest first glimpse into an Asian American subjectivity not of resistance, but of corrosion. The robot may leak battery acid, after all.

It's up to us to test just how miraculous of a synthetic we really are.

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