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The Sexual Ecologies of Asian America

DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

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DEDICATION

for

Dawn Bohulano Mabalon

and

Asa Akira

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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FIELD OF STUDY

Queer Asian American Media and Performance

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Sexual Ecologies of Asian America

By

Raymond Andrew San Diego

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Theory

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Professor Christine Bacareza Balance, Chair

This dissertation explores how transmedial performances of racialized sexualities disrupt disciplinary regimes of visuality, inviting a deeper consideration of embodiment. Blending methods of performance ethnography with practices of close reading, I track the multi-sensorial engagements and entanglements of in/human subjects and objects in spaces organized by or around cinema, musical performance, public health, museum exhibitions, and adult film to understand how these sites represent race and sexuality and express it as well. I argue that sex/objects co-perform *alongside* "properly human" bodies and co-create an intersensory and relational Asian/American sexual ecology. My research mobilizes ecology as a theoretical and methodological framework to capture the dynamic interrelationship between subjects and objects, places and bodies, and energies and rhythms emerging from and circulating through technologically mediated performances of racialized sexualities. Taking up the question of racialized sexualities ecologically, I argue, detaches sex from the over determining disciplinary boundaries of "the human," and opens up multidimensional,

multisensory, and multiscalar approaches to *whom* and *what* is accounted for in the assemblage of "Asian/American sexualities."

Chapter two, "Pharmacologizing Wellness: HIV, PrEP, and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," examines how public health organizations appropriate the aesthetic practices of pornography organizations vis-à-vis public service announcements produced by the Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center (APIWC) in San Francisco. The third chapter, "Bound, Drowned, and Drilled: Staging Sexual Sensation at *kink.com*" explores the role of staging sensorium across two different transmedial sites of BDSM performance of pornography production: the live studio tours offered by kink.com of the historically preserved Armory building housing the sets and the 2013 documentary about the company, *Kink* Focusing on the stages of performance, as a choreographed transmedia practice. Chapter four, "Gay Geek Socialities and 8-Bit Aesthetics: H.P. Mendoza Queers the Asian Art Museum" traverses the museum space as a form of queer nightlife producing, exhibiting, and experiencing racialized sexualities. The epilogue, "Prosthetic Intimacies: Sexing Queer via Rico Reyes' *AC/DC*," takes a scene of erotic encounter between a man and household appliances, allowing us to think otherwise about the onto-epistemological boundaries of what is "sex."

Introduction: Touchy Subjects

Asa Akira is an award-winning Japanese American porn star. As one of the top performers in the industry, the male sex toy company Fleshlight selected her to be a "Fleshlight Girl," a career distinction Akira equates with an athlete getting a shoe contract. Becoming a Fleshlight Girl involved having her vulva molded and mass produced with her signature internal texture, "The Dragon." Her silicone parts were such a commercial and critical hit, in 2012 online retailer TLA RAW awarded her "Best Video On Demand Title of the Year" for *Asa Akira is Insatiable 2* and "Best Sex Toy" for the Asa Akira Fleshlight, items likely sold and used together. Asa Akira is an award-winning porn star and toy model known for her wit and humor on multiple social media platforms. Her tweets and captions are so well Grove Press offered her a book contract. In 2014 she released *Insatiable Porn: A Love Story*, thereby extending her carnal presence through various genres of writing ranging from poetry, autobiography, essay, erotica, comedy, sagely advice, and life writing. During a more diaristic part of the book, Akira writes, " June 22: I got home to find my Fleshlight disassembled and drying out on Toni's bathroom sink. Half of me is flattered; the other half is scared it feels better than me"[1]. Asa Akira is an award-winning porn star, toy model, best selling author, podcast host, and director, who on June 22 experienced jealousy because her husband, porn star Toni Ribas, found sexual pleasure not with one of his many co-stars, but from a silicone replication of her vagina.

In just a few lines, Asa Akira's existential crisis presents an onto-epistemological opening I yearn to follow. Swerving away from the grasp of discourses tethering her embodiment as a hypersexual Asian American woman to whether or not she *is* a "bad" subject or improper

[1] Asa Akira, *Insatiable,* 180.

[2] Right Wing Blog *The College Fix* expressed antagonism against sex objects (e.g., toys) as an

object, Akira's distress emerges from the shifts in her relationships *with* her husband *and* her synthetic genitals. The hierarchies between active subjects and passive objects are moot within this context as each *body*—the term I will be using throughout this dissertation about both subjects and objects, the inhuman and the human, and the organic and the synthetic— within Akira's record is accountable for making the others *feel* something. Akira's response is not one of anger, nor does she attempt to reassert herself as *the* subject[2]. Instead, she takes note of her surprise reaction and leaves it at that. As a porn star, she has built a career performing *as* a sex object—and *with* them— to satisfy her insatiable desires, leaving her open to the possibilities of more profound pleasures but also more vulnerable to twangs of jealousy.

My dissertation explores three central questions. First, what is the emergence of Asian American Sexuality as a field of study? More precisely, purport to constitute the "proper" objects and methods for the study of Asian American sexualities? In line with queer and feminist studies scholars in Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, and Performance Studies, I understand "Asian American Sexualities" as produced through discursive and performative effects. Attempting to answer this question through the lens of knowledge production as performative, I am interested in tracking the deployments of "queer" and "sexuality" within the field of Asian American Studies to see when and how these terms are made distinct and interchangeable, with queer eventually eclipsing and jettisoning sexuality from Asian American

[2] Right Wing Blog *The College Fix* expressed antagonism against sex objects (e.g., toys) as an academic area of inquiry, mocking Ethnic Studies and Sexuality Studies Professor Amy Sueyoshi for reaching about racial discourse in dildo design and marketing at San Francisco State University. https://www.thecollegefix.com/post/24654/; On the other end of the political spectrum, multiple think pieces about Orientalism, Asian American women, and desire make anger and disgust explicit against sex objects. For example, "I'm Sick of Being Seen as a Sex Toy Because I'm Part Asian," https://www.xojane.com/issues/stop-hypersexualizing-asian-women

Studies. Second, after understanding how queer sexualities are produced discursively as il/legible, how do the mutually imbricated processes of racialization and sexualization produce, shape, and call for different ways of understanding the modes of relation between living and non-living bodies? Traversing the theoretical contributions to understanding racialized sexualities from of queer of color critique, the possibilities and potentialities of queer worldmaking in Performance Studies, and the attention to multiscalar interactions transpiring among differential instantiations of the in/human from queer, feminist, and critical race scholars of affect theory and new materialisms, all converge and alert to different practices of sensing and making sense of connection, relevance, bond, interaction, and contact. Finally, I ask what can racialized sex/objects do politically, aesthetically, socially, and epistemologically? This dissertation mainly takes place within the fields of Asian American Studies and Queer Studies, and each subsequent chapter travels through a permutation of Public Health, Media Studies, Museum Studies, and Performance Studies to explore how racialized sex/objects function as nodes or points of connectivity amongst these fields[3]. How can someone like Asa Akira invite us to consider alternative expressions of sexuality, or in other words, think sexuality ecologically?

[3] In line with queer (women) of color scholars, I use variations of the term "racialized sexualities" to make explicit that the problems, processes, and potentialities of racialization and sexualization are not discrete or additive onto-epistemologies, but co-constitutive. In "The Relevance of Race for the Study of Sexuality," Roderick Ferguson highlights how intersectional approaches—following legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw—capture the incommensurate and dynamic imbrications of race and sexuality as opening up conversations about immigration, diaspora, capitalism, knowledge production, and aesthetics in ways that are flattened out by "the presumed universality, benevolence, and innocence of categories like 'woman,' 'gender,' and 'sexuality.'" In this essay, Ferguson refers to "sexuality as a racial formation," alluding to Omi and Winant's theorization of race as a social construct. Because of the humanist leanings embedded within these frameworks, I affix "objects" at the end to allow for a more vibrant and extensive scope for thinking about racialized sexualities.

Articulating *The Sexual Ecologies of Asian America* demands I first unsettle sedimented notions of "Asian American sexualities" constricting and narrowing the cognitive scope of this formation. Because of academic and social justice disciplinarity, "Asian American sexualities" must be de-sexed, abstracted, and desensitized in order to be intelligible and viable in intellectual and activist circles. Exceptions are made, however, for feeling pain and expressing similar negative responses. For example, Richard Fung's "Looking for my Penis," applies Edward Said's theorization of Orientalism to 1980s gay pornographic film *Below the Belt,* where white porn actors anally penetrate Asian/American porn star Sum Yung Mahn. Combining formalist film analysis techniques and postcolonial literary theory, Fung interprets these scenes as depicting racial and sexual "bottoming." This framework results in what I call affective regulation, a practice of obscuring, denigrating, and excising physical and emotional forms of sexual sensations. Thinking ecologically shifts patterns of sensing and relating by removing hierarchal distinctions between subjects-objects, humans-inhuman, and living-nonliving bodies. Thinking ecologically forces us to consider what we maintain and find permissible, but also what we regulate by disciplining and requiring respectable comportment—explicit engagements with embodied sexuality. Ultimately, this dissertation project seeks to redefine and expand the possibilities and potentialities of "sexuality" along with a broader spectrum of sensations, affinities, and frequencies.

Mapping Sexuality and Queerness

In this section, I track the emergence of how sexuality and queerness are deployed within the field of Asian American Studies to understand the domain and range of what has been assumed to be the "proper" or "correct" approach. While it may be argued sexuality is

understudied, I do not believe a project based upon an additive approach would be sufficient, as it could lead to another layer of sedimentation based upon the archive I select. Instead, I want to describe how three anthologies on Asian American sexualities have functioned to privilege particular ways of knowing. I acknowledge the primary intervention these texts accomplished for the study of racialized sexualities; however, they may have also fulfilled a preventative role for future lines of inquiry.

To paraphrase anthropologist Gayle Rubin, "the time has come for Asian Americans to think about sex.[4]" Written in 1982, Rubin's article was an invitation to study sexuality as a distinct category of analysis and introduced radical sexual politics as a liberatory project. One highlight is the illustration titled 'The Charmed Circle vs. The Outer Limits,' a concentric circle diagram differentiating what sexual acts are respectable, privileged, and believed to be "the norm," and which sexual acts are pathologized, unnatural, and damned.[5] Rubin's proto-heteronormativity model is useful for understanding how sexual acts (explicitly understood as distinct from an identity) produce hierarchies of power and judgment. The smaller, center circle is "Charmed" and includes married, heterosexual, procreative, free, sex taking place within the home and without pornography, sex toys, or leather harnesses. The "Outer Limits" includes promiscuous, homosexual sex (alone or in groups), which is for money, takes place in the park, and includes the use of pornography and manufactured objects.[6] Aware of the politics against the "Outer Limits," "Thinking Sex" encourages researchers to take the marginalized sexual practices seriously as and for social justice aims. I do not mean to suggest Asian Americans and

[4] Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (2011), pp. 137.
[5] Ibid. p. 152
[6] I would amend the "Outer Limits" to also include race and disability.

Asian American Studies are not "thinking about sex," sexuality, queerness, desire, or pleasure. Making the broad claim "Asian American Studies does not think about sex!" triggers kneejerk reactions for the single footnote in an article or day of the week on the syllabus, as if the assumed response demanded an evidentiary or quantitative example. What is of interest to me is how and when does "sexuality" emerge as a topic, analytic, or object, and what are the ways in which sexuality is generally framed negatively, as the unfortunate consequence of global inequality, white supremacy, and heterosexism limit our sensibilities? Discussions of Asian/American sexuality typically emerge within the discourses of law and rights, media, health, or militarization. These studies are critical to understanding how various institutions work to subjugate Asian American bodies and impede life chances based upon the uneven distribution of resources, but also points to how the repetition of these discourses naturalizes the trauma and oppression with racialized sexualities. I want to acknowledge the emotional labor for the self and others when facing any form of trauma as an academic (or otherwise) endeavor. There does seem to be, however, an intellectual cache attached to painful subjects—often appended by the word “critical”— that does not seem to adhere as easily to porn stars or gay geeks. Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick reflects upon how paranoia and cynicism became yoked to “critical” intellectual rigor in “Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You.” Academia privileges projects of “tracing-and-exposure,” wherein a researcher seeks to find, un/discover, reveal, unmask, bring to light, or prove the “hidden truth” of systemic oppression. Sedgwick, who is also self-reflexive about her earlier works participating in this habit, makes room for us to consider, “What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge

of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?"[7] Acts of knowledge production are not neutral, universal, or complete endeavors and Sedgwick's questions invite us to remember how researchers are implicated within their work, and also, enabled and constrained by the knowledges produced by others. Acknowledging the affinities amongst researchers, audiences, and texts urges for accountability. Pointing out the flaws in a text or performance is a habitual reaction relied upon to express critique, but much more creative and intellectual labor is required to figure out what is working.

I now turn to a discussion of three anthologies within the field of Asian American Studies that attempted to galvanize a more sustained inquiry of sexuality as an object of study: *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience, Q&A: Queer in Asian America,* and *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*. Although sporadic, these texts are the only the three anthologies about Asian American sexuality and queerness and therefore wield a great deal of influence in directing the conversation[8]My attention is towards the editor's introductions, rather than each essay, as these opening remarks identify what each volume does for the field and the reader.

Published in 1996, *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience* is the first book to analyze the intersections of racism, sexism, and homophobia from the perspectives of those identifying as Asian American Studies activists, artists, and scholars. A majority of the essays included within the volume are reprints of "Dimensions of

[7] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling*: *Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 124.

[8] It should be noted, these are "academic" anthologies, meaning university presses publish them and the majority of authors are working in academia.

Desire," a 1994 special issue of *Amerasia Journal.* In the introduction, "Home Bodies and the Body Politic," Russell Leong begins with the litany, "*Home bodies, homelands, homosexuals...*" and follows with the questions "*Where is home?... Whose body?*"[9] An alliterative play with words articulates the knotted affective relationship between the desire for a sense of national/domestic/domicile belonging with a yearning for more nuanced ways of understanding oneself. From here, the conversations centering identity and community in discussions of Asian American sexuality go against the whiteness of Lesbian and Gay Studies by acknowledging how "same-sex" or "homosexual" desires are indeed part of the Asian American experience. Leong's preface works to identify the specific tensions and problems of Asian American gays and lesbians through the polysemic rendering of "home." The search for "home" becomes aspirational when trying to figure out where you belong when you are a racial minority in the country you live in, while also a sexual minority when you are with your family.

Leong then gives an overview of the essays within the volume by categorizing them into five subsections: 1) "Homebodies" (covering the topics of identity and family); 2) "The Body Politic" (about intersectional activism within larger Gay and Lesbian movements as well as Asian American movements; 3) "Figuring Desire" (which aims to situate Asian Americans as the subjects—not the objects—of desire; 4) "Bloodlines" (HIV/AIDS); and 5) "A Tongue in Your Ear" (poetry, visual art, and creative writing). Taking a prismatic approach, these subsections diffract "Asian American Sexualities" into an array of relational practices and avenues for formulating racialized sexualities into aesthetic, cultural, and political arenas. As Asian American Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies are "fields," a careful diligence goes into organizing each subsection to

[9] Russell Leong. *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience.* Italics in the original.

align with a more established discipline: 1) "Homebodies" (Sociology and Anthropology); 2) "The Body Politic" (History); 3) "Figuring Desire" (Film and English); 4) "Bloodlines" (Public Health); and 5) "A Tongue in Your Ear" (Literature and Creative Writing). The act of justifying "Asian American sexualities" as an object of serious academic investigation then becomes tethered to the methods of investigation demanded by each discipline. Although the populations studied or practices taken up by the authors are interpreted to be minoritarian, or on the fringes of society, the method of engagement and presentation falls in line with more normative academic conventions. One of the major additions to the book from the journal comes from the anthology How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video: "Looking for My Penis," Richard Fung's seminal essay on the role of gay Asian American men in pornography.

"Looking for My Penis" is reprinted in 1998 for *Q&A: Queer in Asian America,* the second anthology on Asian American sexualities. Extending and further elaborating upon *Asian American Sexualities, Q&A* diverges by foregrounding queerness—as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender *as well as* a theoretical and methodological orientation—in response to the implicit heteronormativity of Asian American Studies and the rampant whiteness of Queer Studies. Within their introductory essay, editors David Eng and Alice Hom declare the twenty-six chapters in their volume are helping cultivate and grow "'queer Asian American Studies,'" which is not only a social movement but also a "growing intellectual field." [10] Drawing from multiple fields and disciplines and an array of intergenerational academics and activists, Eng and Hom are the first to classify this convergence of racialized sexualities as its

[10] Eng and Hom, page 2.

own field of study, and alongside Leong's offering, becomes a touchstone for crystallizing and making lucid a strand of research within Asian American Studies and Queer Studies.

Making “queer” central to their project gives Eng and Hom a clear sense of *Q&A’s* political-intellectual investments. Whereas *Asian American Sexualities* works to carve out the intellectual space to explore lesbian and gay experiences, *Q&A* foregrounds its antagonisms toward Lesbian and Gay/Queer Studies’ universalization of a singular white subject position at the expense of other forms of experience and oppression. Additionally, as the field's emergence stems from grassroots and social justice activism, Asian American Studies' tepid attempts at collectivity and inclusiveness for queerness is critiqued. Joining an ever-expanding chorus of queer (women) of color feminists, Eng and Hom interrogate the sedimentation of these fields' bracketing of epistemological complexity, asking, "As we ask of the coalitional ‘we' of queer Asian American studies, who are the ‘proper' subjects of feminism, and who are the ‘proper' subjects putatively represented by lesbian/gay studies?" (11). Challenging the naturalized correspondence between a theoretical approach and an ontological subject, Eng and Hom detail how queerness and Asian racialization have always been inextricable.

Similar to *Asian American Sexualities, Q&A* arranges the chapters into thematic categories, the first three falling into disciplinary patterns: 1) “Working Out” (political practices and the role of intersectionality; Social Sciences), 2) “Im/Proper Images” (visual cultures and representation; Film, Art); and 3) “Keeping Records” (historiography; History). Richard Fung’s “Looking for My Penis” makes its third appearance in the "Im/Proper Images" section. While Eng and Hom observe that attention to queer sexuality within Asian American Studies is "far from sustained; it is instead, sporadic and divided," the presence of Richard Fung's essay on gay

Asian men in pornography remains consistent. To be clear, this is not a facetious statement, but one intending to raise the question of how and why this article appears to be so widely circulated and reproduced? If these anthologies intend to be a platform for more inquiries into queer sexuality, what happened between the prevailing seven years? Alternatively, more precisely, what did *not* happen? As Richard Fung is a filmmaker in Canada and not a "traditionally" trained Ph.D. in the United States, the repetition of his pornographic scavenger hunt alludes towards the inability for academia to allow "queerness" to proliferate, or, to do so only within a very narrow bandwidth.

The last three sections are organized thematically and include topics touched upon in *Asian American Sexualities,* but did not cohere categorically. Their additions expand the reach of queer reading practices and the sites in which queerness circulates. Rounding out *Q&A* are: 4) "Closets/Margins" ("coming out" processes); 5) "Paternity" (a section aiming to work against discourses conflating Asian American men as "asexual" or "homosexual"); and 6) "Out Here and Over There" (diasporic queer sexualities in an era of globalization). "Closets/Margins" discusses a multiplicity of incidences one may choose to publically identify themselves as a sexual minority or as gender non-conforming in different geographic locations and age groups, disrupting the dominant narrative of urban centers as the main sites of queerness. In tracing the emergence of "queer Asian American Studies," Eng and Hom locate its antecedents within two clusters of events. The first is the work of grassroots organizing from a myriad of metropolitan collectives, while the second is the critical mass of Asian American lesbian writers and artists such as Willyce Kim, Kitty Tsui, and Merle Woo, among others (3). Although Queer of color scholars often produce theoretical genealogies acknowledging women of color feminisms

as productive and generative nodes, the section "Paternity," is dedicated to stereotype criticisms of cisgender Asian American men against hegemonic white masculinities, but how Asian American lesbians struggle with and against racialized sexism is not afforded the same space. The final section, "Out Here and Over There," is noted to be inspired by and in conversation with the conclusion of the same name in David Eng's first book *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America.* In contrast to *Asian American Sexualities* where "home" is a major organizing theme, *Q&A* takes queerness transnationally.

Between these two anthologies on Asian American sexualities and queerness reside many discussions around, inspired by, in the moments before or after, or critical of sexuality, but there are few scholarly explorations of sexual acts, save for Richard Fung's gay porn expose and an anecdote by Daniel Tsang about how thawed carrots do not make good substitutes for dildos. Physical intimacy is at the core of many poems and short stories but is trafficked in through "creative" pieces by authors not reliant upon the academy. The export of queer theory "out there" into other realms is responsible for legitimizing the field by revealing how queer theory is anything but identitarian and works in a myriad of ways. An unintended consequence of the turn to "queer" any-and-everything is a distancing from sexual practices of embodiment, an exchange for disciplinary legibility and modes of scholastic rigor favoring abstraction (intellectual pursuits) over physiology (especially from the "lower" parts of the body).

The decade following the publication of *Asian American Sexualities* and *Q&A* saw a proliferation of articles and monographs about Asian American sexualities inspired by these anthologies, creating careers, winning book awards, and establishing "experts" about queer Asian Americans across the disciplines, thereby validating an onto-epistemological

intensification of “queer” knowledge production as having less and less to do with “sex.” *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities,* edited by Gina Masequesmay and Sean Metzger, debuted in 2009 and aimed to really ground their fourteen curated texts in the problems, practices, and potentials of embodied racialized sexualities across a cadre of artists, academics, and activists[11]. In their introduction, Masequesmay and Metzger trace early and mid-twentieth racial and sexological studies' propensity towards essentializing claims used to make and provide evidence about bodies constructed as "deviant" or "abnormal" resulting in eugenic practices, anti-miscegenation statutes, immigration laws, and diagnoses about intellectual and moral capacities. As a result of anti-essentialist discourses, "like the evolution of studies on race and gender that have moved from viewing them as natural occurring phenomena, current studies have denaturalized sex and sexuality and shifted the focus to the social" (12). Deconstructing terms thought of as "natural," such as "sex," has led to a greater inclusion into what a body is and what it can do, particularly within the trans* community. A sense of condescension is attached, however, to their usage of "evolution," used here to communicate not only a temporal distanciation from primitive lines of thought but also parsing through the messiness of material bodies is *unevolved* in comparison to the discursive production of bodies. Disconnecting the discursive from the material implies a unidirectional flow of power, denying how the discursive produces the material and what “matters.”

[11] The title itself includes a solidus, or “/,” demonstrating the transnational realities of the Asian/American experience. Many working on racialized representations also use the solidus, as regardless of citizenship status, a person can be racialized as Asian and/or Asian American based upon phenotype. See David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 1.

Unlike *Asian American Sexualities* and *Q&A*, *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities* does not divide the essays into separate categories, as "contributors to this anthology were asked to focus on embodiment or corporeality, because individual and collective Asian/American bodies may support, complicate, and/or defy attempts to make them legible" (15). Refusing to classify essays allows for each piece to be met with a sense of openness and engagement instead of relying upon the inattentive shorthand of a delimiting subheading to assist you in gauging the text's (or objects' discussed within) relevancy to a discipline, field, trend, or moment, what it is "about."[12] When it comes to explicit engagements with sexuality, there is one essay on pornography. It is not "Looking for My Penis," but it does have Richard Fung on a roundtable discussing his infamous article! Across the three anthologies, he is the only constant.

From these three anthologies emerges a trend of Asian American sexualities as intelligible through a pattern of white negation and Asian American recovery. In other words, the practice of paranoid reading is the dominant mode of engagement. Additionally, theorization stemming from explicit Asian American sexualities is absent except for Richard Fung. While it is strange, yet lovely, to think the field of Asian American Studies holds so dearly this essay—with its vivid descriptions of anal sex, erections, and ejaculations—it also makes Asian gay pornographic anachronistic; the same problems we had with whiteness and hegemonic masculinity in the 1980s continue to this day. On a more cynical note, the essay's reoccurrence, particularly amongst compilations where sexuality tends to be more modest, stabilizes more explicit expressions of sexuality not as knowledge productions, but as knowledge *produced.* Said differently, Fung's essay reached the field's erotic limit, and it would

[12] For more on "aboutness," see Kandice Chuh's "It's Not About Anything," in *Being With: A Special Issue on the work of José Esteban Muñoz. Social Text* 32:4 (2014), pp. 125-134

be unnecessary for anyone to revisit. Embodied sexualities, especially in contradistinction to more abstract sexualities, are positioned as obvious and less complicated (unevolved), thereby not worthy of cognitive labor.

On Respectability Politics and Numbness

I track the emergence of Asian American sexualities as an academic site of inquiry above in order to describe in this section how queer and feminist Asian American Studies scholars found ways to engage with sexually explicit materials, such as pornography. To move towards thinking sex ecologically, however, I challenge the reliance upon visuality as the dominant mode of sensorial engagement for interacting with sexually explicit phenomena. In this section, I will also argue how a regime of “appropriate” sensorial comportment in sexuality research

Inviting us to study pornography reparatively is Nguyen Tan Hoang, who takes up gay Asian American male visual cultures in his monograph *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Male Masculinity and Sexual Representation.* Observing how Asian American sexuality in the academy "remains euphemistic in everyday spaces," Nguyen laments the dearth of research about sexuality in its "vernacular meaning," particularly when it comes to queer performances of gender and sexuality (3). Nguyen attributes "deep anxieties" within Asian American Studies for embracing different forms of masculinity as it calls into question cultural nationalists' tactics against white racism as if there is a zero-sum game. Part of the trepidation for thinking sex vernacularly, according to Nguyen, is the concern for how white Americans will view Asian Americans. Awareness of how sexuality is imbricated within processes of racialization and vice-versa had led to a vigilant awareness of how Asian Americans are represented in the media. Rather than aim to diversify the interpretations of these representations, activist and

academics instead self-monitor their comportment—in everyday life, in their research— to avoid reifying asexual or hypersexual stereotypes.

For Asian Americans, academic discourse on cinematic representation fought against Orientalist framings of women as being hypersexual dragon ladies or men as asexual nerds, a reaction against the "dehumanization" occurring by becoming a sex object (for women and gay men), or, by becoming a sexless object, and so, never the subject of sex (for hetero men). The lack of representations beyond these stereotypes severely framed the general knowledge of and about gender and sexuality in Asian/America quantitatively as either "too much" or "too little." The 1990s saw the logic of lack extended into straight and gay pornographies, implicating racism as the cause. Noting the perpetual positioning of Asian/American men as receptive anal sex partners, Richard Fung's article "Looking for my Penis" argues against the rampant manifestations of orientalism in gay porn videos. Similarly, Darrell Hamamoto's manifesto, "The Joy Fuck Club: Prolegomenon to an Asian American Porno Practice" bemoans the lack of heterosexual Asian American men having sex with Asian American women in the mainstream pornography market. The solution proposed to rectify this imbalance involves an appeal for more racially conscious pornographic representations to be produced, an intervention requiring belief that a "right" or "proper" depiction would have the capacity to reveal a "true" Asian American sexuality elided within the majoritarian sphere.

In the 2000s, a paradigm shift occurred questioning whether the original claims offered by Fung and Hamamoto were problematic in their assumptions. Is there quantitatively a lack of positive representations of Asian/American sexuality, or is it the analyses available that impede more radical interpretations? Celine Parreñas Shimizu, celebrating the "politically productive

perversity" of Asian/American women in her book *The Hypersexuality of Race,* argues against a facile either/or distinction, and calls for a critical engagement with pornographic images in the hopes that "*we may put these powerful images into the service of articulating how Asian/American women, as subjects and objects, are enabled as well as limited by sexual and scopic regimes"* (23). Although objectification- due to its seemingly inhumane attributes- is often viewed as "bad," Shimizu defers this moralistic interpretation and dwells within the range of expressions offered by porn.

Politically productive perversity requires we not jettison provocative depictions of racialized sexualities, but seek to understand how Asian Americans (and Asian American Studies) are "limited by sexual and scopic regimes?" Controlling depictions stemming from Orientalism and other epistemological violences skewing the intelligibility of Asian Americans is well-worn territory. However, in a field positing itself as a champion of desubjugated knowledges, why are so few unwilling to, explicitly or implicitly discouraged from, or even aware of the possibilities of pain and pleasure in the studying of material expressions and circuits of sexuality queerly? I believe Nguyen's summation of fragile Asian American masculinity and Shimizu's frustration with the "bondage of representation," a quandary resulting in no winners, index the impasse caused by the acquiescence to respectability politics, or what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham characterizes as "the politics of respectability." In *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920,* Higginbotham highlights how church-going African American women—in response to white supremacy—internalized and reworked mainstream concepts "such as equality, self-respect, professionalism, and American identity" as a means of fostering political agency for racial and

gender empowerment (186). Alongside protesting and other sanctioned forms of dissent, close attention was paid to hygiene, comportment, styles of dress, ways of speaking, sexual purity, performances of piety, and when and where African American women were seen as part of an overall campaign of "manners and morals" as a means to disproving essentialist claims about the non-white capacity for civility and virtuousness (188). This twinned strategy for social reform also required an in-group disciplining of other African Americans whose voices and clothes were too loud, and were shamed, ostracized, or held liable for their lack of respectability which the Baptist women believed made them look bad and proved white people's racist and sexist caricatures right. As a form of survival, these women left unquestioned what counts as "morals and manners" and the uneven distribution of awards based upon one's adherence to them. Refusing to comply meant enduring social sanctions or banishment, as they were willing to sacrifice heterogeneity in favor of the chance to have a seat at the table.

Respectability politics, it would follow, function as a strategy of affective regulation by marginalized populations lacking in forms of social, cultural, and economic capital. Conversely, respectability politics signal us to what forms of social, cultural, and economic capital are devalued and warrant affective regulation. Using a Spinozist definition of affect "the power (or potential) to affect or be affected," which Brian Massumi argues "offers a way of weaving together concepts of movement, tendency, and intensity," what would regulation look like for Asian American sexualities?[13] What gestures, curiosities, tics, utterances, feeling patterns, physiological responses, reactions, actions, thoughts, sensations, and habits get flagged as "too

[13] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, page 15

much" or "too little" or "unevolved" and somehow necessitate intervention? Within film studies and the problem of representation, the documentary *Master's of the Pillow* chronicles Darrell Hamamoto's quest to restore Asian American male masculinity from the ravages of effeminacy by producing the first all Asian American identified *heterosexual* porn film *Skin on Skin,* a move that relies upon evacuating queerness from the Asian American male body an embodied bolster white hegemonic heterosexism. The emphasis on penis-vagina sex suggests the work of Asian American queer porn stars is not as "empowering." In sociologist Yen Le Espiritu's *Home Bound*, interviews with Filipino American immigrants and their families about issues surrounding gender and sexuality reveal conservative values, particularly with their daughters, are not only seen as a defense against racism within the United States but are also used as a vehicle for maintaining their culture." A second-generation daughter states, "We don't sleep around like white girls do," noting how forms of prudence—or respectability—grant a sense of superiority to their peers even as they co-sign to heteropatriarchal expectations[14]. For heterosexual Asian Americans, there is a demand for cisgender men to perform their masculinity "correctly" by intensifying their sexuality, and cisgender women are expected to temper hypersexual stereotypes, both of which demonstrate how the centering of heteronormative whiteness leads to reactive politics.

This brief, and in no way comprehensive, examination of when and how Asian American sexualities and queerness have been studied shows many fits and starts over the past twenty-five years. Reflecting upon the conditional admittance of Asian American Studies in higher education, Eng & Hom write, "The 1980s introduced newcomers trained in specific disciplines

[14] Yen Le Espiritu. *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries.* Berkeley: UC Press, 2003.

into the field of Asian American Studies and witnessed the increasing ‘professionalization' of Asian American Studies within the academy" (8). Eng & Hom are quick to defend the academic incorporation of Asian American Studies from militant activists critical of institutionalization, as it provided the opportunity to break away from the heterosexist cultural nationalism camps that were either openly hostile towards or irresponsibly indifferent to feminist and queer demands for intersectionality. However, in stepping away from one form of affective regulation—of "toxic masculinity"—did the field walk into another, one of literary, cinematic, historical, sociological, anthropological, and artistic "disciplines" and their attendant expectations of "professionalization?"

Laura Kang incisively criticizes the disciplinary “alibi” in *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women,* noting, "their very epistemological commitment to a particular object of study or domain of inquiry acquits them from full, total coverage of every possible kind of personhood" (3). Following Kang's assessment, disciplinarity operates as a mode of affective/sensory regulation, reducing the bodily capacity to take in, observe, and be attuned only to what the discipline licenses. Narrowing the scope of what and how an object is thought of as worthy or valuable for rigorous study confirms commitment to the discipline. Processes of "professionalization," a term associated with respectability politics, is one of desensitization, of self-regulating the unruly racialized, gendered, queered, disabled, and classed ways of being and thinking; yet another pathway for enfolding oneself into whiteness. Becoming "professional" is the reward by the disciplines for stifling creativity and curiosity; it is the recognition of showing Asian American Studies qualifications, compatibility, and co-signing of a discipline's reductive and solvent epistemology.

While I am in agreement with Nguyen's evaluation of the field as being rife with fragile East Asian masculinity, both his and Shimizu's deployment of visual culture as the primary object of study alerts us to another constraint into how sexually explicit cultures are studied, one not limited to the field of Asian American Studies and speaks to the broader politics of knowledge production surrounding sexually explicit representations, expressions, and practices. Their work on Asian American sexual representation in film and video, particularly within the genre of moving image pornography, opened the scholarly doors Richard Fung kicked his foot through decades earlier. Nevertheless, I cannot help but question how people became more inured to porn, to the point where Richard Fung's "Looking for My Penis" becomes the go-to essay? What makes *representations* of racialized sexuality more palatable than *experiences* and *expressions?*

To de-sensationalize the object of pornography, and make it “acceptable” to the university, the researcher must present as disinterested, lest they be branded a pervert. Affective regulation, in this instance, transpires through engaging disciplinary methods like close reading[15]. Seeing and hearing, as senses of distance, are privileged in film studies, as if other sensory information cannot also be capable of interpretation or abstraction. Questioning what the status and function of close reading as *the* sanctioned method is, and more importantly, what that *does* to gay pornography, John Champagne argues for scholars to "stop reading films," and instead to explore the social function of pornography, its screening sites,

[15] A lovely example of what engaging with sexual explicit digital cultures differently looks like can be read in Juana Maria Rodriguez’s chapter “Welcome to the Global Stage: Confessions of a Latina Cyber Slut” in *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces.* New York: New York University Press, 2003, pp. 114-151.

and aspects of production and reception[16]. Warning researchers of the heteronormative academy's superficial nods at including difference, Champagne cautions, "the eager importation of 'queer' artifacts into the purview of an academic discipline may be a means whereby the academy actually 'straightens' 'queer' cultural practices" (77). Under the auspices of institutional respectability and disciplinary legibility, "the heteronormative academy relies on the practice of close analysis to contain the threat and promise—for both men and women, straight and gay— of gay pornography," an observation also pertaining to race, disability, and other forms of minoritarian embodiment (Champagne 77). Privileging close analysis/reading transforms the queer researcher following their curiosities into a translator forced to corral the more "out there" aspects of their work into something more "justifiable" via formal reading analyses. As we saw with the anthologies earlier, acts of containment materialized through efforts to categorize and name affectively regulate knowledge production by foreclosing what is sayable and thinkable. What would they look like if they embraced "trenchant interdisciplinarity," whereby the discrete fields and disciplines "mutually unsettle each other's founding presumptions and favored methods."[17] In what ways can leaning into the sensations of uncertainty and discomfort be productive? How can restoring previously unavailable thinking and feeling patterns facilitate alternative techniques of interpretation *and* also make conceivable different types of "stuff" –sites, texts, objects—previously held out of bounds?

Thinking Methods Ecologically

[16] John Champagne. "'Stop Reading Films!': Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography." *Cinema Journal* 36:4 (1997), pp. 76-97

[17] For more on "trenchant interdisciplinarity" see Kang, *Compositional Subjects.*

I want to think reparatively and productively about how sexuality affectively and performatively functions as a node and pathway in Asian America. *The Sexual Ecologies of Asian/America* explores how transmedial performances of racialized sexualities disrupt disciplinary regimes of visuality and respectability, inviting a more in-depth consideration of embodiment. Doing so allows us to link together the multiple forces of varying degrees of intensity that the will to containment rendered "extra," and therefore unnecessary. As numerous discussions on racialized sexuality have had (regardless of intention) *the effect of* sensorial monitoring and affective regulation, this project fosters a sense of "*response-ability*, the capacities to remain responsive to changing situations."[18] To do so, I mobilize "ecology" as a theoretical and methodological framework to capture the dynamic interrelationship between subjects and objects, places and bodies, and energies and rhythms emerging from and circulating through technologically mediated performances of Asian American sexualities.

The dissertation requires a wide range of interdisciplinary methods dependent upon the mode of expression taken in each chapter. Government documents such as historical preservation records and community based public health grants are analyzed as performance scripts. I employ ethnography for film studio tours or museum exhibits. Aesthetic analyses occur within each chapter but vary from a documentary film, public service announcements, visual museum exhibits, and performance art. There is no fidelity to a method, discipline, or theoretical approach threading together the chapters. What does reoccur across the different sites is the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate objects sharing the opportunity for analyses of Asian American relations with non-human objects co-performing on different scales. A

[18] Nick Montgomery and carla bergman. *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times.* Chico: AK Press, 2017, p. 32.

description of methods and their contribution to understanding sexual ecologies appears early in each chapter.

Sex/Objects, Sensation, and Prosthetic Intimacies

Ecologies are not restricted to a particular site or environment and do not privilege a single material or form. Taking up the question of racialized sexualities (ecologically), I argue, detaches sex from the overdetermining disciplinary boundaries of "the human." Within each chapter, the frameworks of *sex/objects, sensation, and prosthetic intimacies* are explicated to open up multidimensional, multisensory, and multiscalar approaches to *whom* and *what* counts and is accounted for in the assemblage of "Asian/American sexualities."

As Asian/American political contestations over sexuality are battled on the level of representation, often in response to the dehumanization of Asian/Americans, the blaring spectacle of pornography—its lascivious, unapologetic display of bodies in relation to orgasms— washes out the relationship between and among the materialities of sex/objects. "Porn" is more than the bodies on screen. It is an ecology, with production companies and crews, health and labor organizations, fan bases and critics. Porn travels at conventions, conferences, strip clubs, award shows, and bookstores. Porn is a subject of controversy in museums, art galleries, courts, and universities. "Sex/objects" is employed here to keep the tension between Asian/Americans having sex *with* objects, but also Asian/Americans *as* sex objects. Both usages incite ire from the intelligentsia of Asian/American, whether it be the usage of toys undermining a level of desirability or reifying stereotypes of awkward and inept Asian/American men unable to procure a "real sex partner," or, the diminishing of subjective capacity of Asian/American women and gay men as mere objects in the service of hegemonic,

more “human” body. In doing so, however, the notion of a liberal human subject, who is self-sufficient and self-determining, gets reified. Returning to the earlier discussion on the politics of respectability, sensory minimization, and disciplinary legibility, sex/objects—with their squishiness, vibrating, viscous fluids, contractions, temperatures, and pressures—fly in the face of all that is proper.

I return to the productive jettisoning of respectability politics in the analysis of racialized sexualities to emphasize the potentialities of interdisciplinarity and sensation. To paraphrase Eve Sedgwick's analysis of Melanie Klein's depressive position, how can we think about Asian American sexuality for the prospect of "seeking pleasure," and not automatically or solely concerning "forestalling pain?" (137). In parallel with Sedgwick, Dean Spade proposes, "The systems that we live under really want us to be numb…they work best if we have limited empathy. Being able to dehumanize others is essential for surviving. Everyone has to do some dehumanization to survive living in hierarchies."[19] Capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, heteronormativity, sexism, ableism, transphobia, and xenophobia all thrive when we numb ourselves as a response to the overwhelming oppressions we live with on a daily basis *and* as a strategy from perceiving how these oppressions impact others. For example, capitalism praises those who overwork or "tough it out" by numbing themselves—a form of affective regulation. The "it" to be "toughed" or "walked" may include how racism reduces the life chances of black and brown bodies in the form of police murder, how ableism minimizes "invisible" disabilities stemming from mental health issues, or how sexism implicitly gains co-signers when people "don't make a big deal" about the sexist rape culture fomenting across

[19] Dean Spade. “How Social Movements Feel.” 2018 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick Memorial Lecture at Boston University, April 6. Accessed on YouTube May 10, 2018.

college campuses. When you are numb and deal with things calmly and quietly, it is called "being professional." Opening the floodgates to allow in pain and pleasure is a risk worth taking if it helps to broaden out a sense of the possibilities and potentialities in our multiple worlds, and in this dissertation, sex/objects take those risks in the form of "prosthetic intimacy."

At first glance, "prosthetic" and "intimacy" appear to be strange bedfellows, with the clinical, perhaps even cyborgian imagery invoked by the prosthetic cooling off all that is conjured by the familiarity, warmth, or even the humanity intimacy vows to offer. However, they have been kept apart not because of differences in outcome, but by the linguistic borders of what they are. For Brian Massumi, prosthetics function as extensions, not merely *of* a body but *between* bodies, observing "the thing, the object, can be considered *prostheses* of the body—provided that it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing" (95). The theory of affect employed by Massumi emphasizes mobility and connection. This relationship to the world facilitates perpetual reciprocity where the beginning and the end are indeterminate, forcing a reorientation of relationality wherein objects extend bodies in the same way that bodies extend objects. Lauren Berlant writes in *Intimacy: A Special Issue,* that "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation" (2)[20]. She identifies intimacy, like affect, as not existing innately within bodies but as a result of the encounters themselves, with the generative capacity to transform and transport. It is within and through these two ideas that makes possible a promiscuous mode of intelligibility and affinity with all the senses engaged and interacting with all forms of sex/objects.

Dissertation Overview

[20] Berlant, Lauren Gail, ed. *Intimacy*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.

This dissertation looks at how sex/objects co-perform and co-create an intersensory, always relational, Asian/American sexual ecology. Following Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization on the role of criticism, *The Sexual Ecologies of Asian America* is not an act of "justification but a different way of feeling: another sensibility."[21] This project holds space open for queers of color who exceed the boundaries of compartmentalized knowledge and are often the "remainders" in the "race, class, gender, and sexuality" litany often touted in hollow proclamations of intersectionality.[22] I track the multi-sensorial engagements and entanglements of in/human subjects and objects in spaces organized by or around cinema, musical performance, public health, museum exhibitions, and adult film. In doing so, I attend to how these sites theorize racialized sexuality within and through the concepts of sex/objects, sensation, and prosthetic intimacies as components of a sexual ecology.

My dissertation begins with a more familiar site of imbricated race and sexuality: public health. Chapter one, "Pharmacologizing Wellness: HIV, PrEP, and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," examines how public health organizations appropriate the aesthetic practices of pornography organizations vis-à-vis public service announcements produced by the Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center (APIWC) in San Francisco. In 2011, APIWC launched "[un]SPOKEN," a digital media campaign wherein gay, mostly Chinese American men using dating apps for sex are exposed to HIV and prescribed antiretroviral medications as a form of prevention**.** The videos produced by APIWC use erotic scenarios to introduce synthetic pharmaceuticals to their bodies as a micro-level prosthesis to their immune systems. This

[21] Gilles Deleuze. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 94.
[22] Here I am thinking about "remainders" in the mathematical sense. After the equation is computed, what is "left over" is the remainder. Queer people of color are often the remainders or the "et cetera."

chapter zeroes in on the political economies of a sexual ecology, analyzing as performative texts the public health policies and grants from the Centers for Disease Control whose directives—shifting from prevention to management—impacts how community-based organizations and non-profits must apply for and implement funding.

The second chapter, "Bound, Drowned, and Drilled: Staging Sexual Sensation at *kink.com*" examines the role of staging sensorium across two different transmedial sites of BDSM performance of pornography production: the live studio tours offered by kink.com of the historically preserved Armory building housing the sets and the 2013 documentary about the company, *Kink* (dir. Christina Voros). The film and the tour discuss the contributions of Van Darkholme, a gay, Vietnamese/American porn director, actor, and set designer who aims to maximize sound, touch, and vision for the performers in the scene as well as those watching. Focusing on the stages of performance in the porn industry itself—be it documentary or walking tour—this chapter demands we look at the aesthetic performances of sexual labor constituting BDSM performance as a choreographed transmedia practice.

Chapter three, "Gay Geek Socialities and 8-Bit Aesthetics: H.P. Mendoza Queers the Asian Art Museum" traverses the movie theatre and museum as spaces for producing, exhibiting, and experiencing racialized sexualities. H.P. Mendoza is a gay, Filipino American artist who wrote the 2006 film *Colma!: The Musical*. Ten years later, the San Francisco Asian Art Museum collaborated with Mendoza to launch "TAKEOVER," a one-night "pop-up" block party that included a smartphone based museum scavenger hunt, live performances of numbers from his films, and the exhibit "Anaglyph: The 3D art of H.P. Mendoza." This chapter presents a unique opportunity to explore the immersive and participatory aspects of the gay geek nightlife

using participant observation, a methodology I employ to interface with Mendoza's reconceptualization of museum decorum and experience.

The epilogue, "Prosthetic Intimacies: Sexing Queer via Rico Reyes' *AC/DC*," is a meditation on Filipino/American performance artist Rico Reyes'mid-1990s video where he engages in sexual relations with kitchen appliances. I come into contact with this piece as a transition to how sex *works*. Within technoscientific iterations of affect, "bodies" break free from skin envelopes to include the non-living, the inorganic, and the immaterial and are recognized for their abilities to not only be acted upon but also act. As Filipina/os labor globally in multiple spheres and are often rendered as objects—or as mere instruments in the household— what we are witnessing in *AC/DC* is not a catalogue of domestic onanism, but an affective modality of sexual relations between and among seemingly discrete migratory bodies coming together through and being made legible by prosthetic intimacies, a queer affinity not only describing the events transpiring in the video but also as a prognosis for what is to come and what can be.

Chapter 2: "Empowering People With Drugs": Gay Asian American Men and the Pharmaceutical Turn

"Hey, how's it going? What are you up to tonight?" a young, gay Asian American man asks from his smartphone. The conversation continues as the screen shrinks to the upper left-hand corner, revealing the same character repeating his inquisitive greeting on Grindr, the gay social networking smartphone app. As Grindr cruising moves to the upper right corner of the screen, the search for a mate takes place via the virtual community board Craigslist. Scrolling the M4M (man looking for another man) personals, subject lines such as "seeking slim tops," "looking to get head," and "Asian BTM for hot TOP," advertise specific body types, sex acts, and racialized anal sex positions. The final panel features the voracious seeker shirtless in front of the mirror taking a "selfie," a self-portrait using a mobile phone to trade the photo on a social networking site. Opening what will be the first in a series of four films, *Tony's Story* sets the scene and the screens of digital sexual networking marking the contemporary moment of gay culture[23].

Asian Americans engage in activist-aesthetic practices as a means for sparking social change because of art's capacity to quickly produce stronger affective and sensorial responses in the most people. Art, be it film, photography, painting, fashion, or performance, is a vital tool for raising consciousness about HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, and treatment for Asian Americans who can often connect better to more localized and personalized experiences. Although handing out flyers or deploying the phone tree is critical for reaching niche populations, today, however, new and social media platforms such as YouTube are viewed as

[23] See Sharif Mowlabocus, *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

an immediate and economical manner for agitating the masses. However, what happens when the medium and the message are co-opted by those you are attempting to challenge? This chapter looks at the HIV prevention videos created by Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center in San Francisco, as an example of what happens to art heavily influenced by the bureaucracy of public health agendas and funding. Specifically, [un]Spoken, a series of films about Asian American gay men and HIV. Utilizing theories of biopolitics and performance to focus on what these videos *do,* rather than what they *say,* allows for a focus on these films that is not preoccupied with how "authentic," "positive or negative," or "masculine or asexual" the characters and scenarios are for representations of Asian Americans in the media[24]. These videos are not representations but performances indexing a shift from the prevention to the management of HIV/AIDS discourse in public health settings, using the Asian American gay male body as a vehicle to commission a pharmaceutical way of life[25].

The [un]SPOKEN videos expand the conceptualization of sexual ecology by exploring the enmeshment policy and government impositions with aesthetic practices. Often, performances and media emerging from community-based organizations are romanticized as acts of activism, or worse, are interpreted to be local, and thereby "authentic," representations of resistance

[24] José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 8:2 (1996): 8-15. Also engaging with theories of performance and new media is Christine Bacareza Balance, "How it Feels to be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube Performance," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40:1 & 2 (2012): 138-152.

[25] The distinction between representation and performance is an important one for this project's filiation of Deleuzian-inflected theories of affect and queer of color performance theory, as both affect and performance, in contrast to representation, are about movement or "doing." Generally speaking, theories of representation are filtered through the lenses of psychoanalysis or linguistics, thereby leading to diagnostic analyses of meaning making and the unconscious, or, following Muñoz, what these films "say." To engage with the [un]SPOKEN shorts as performances recognizes the gestural work the films are doing.

against hegemonic ideologies. Part of the work of this chapter—and the dissertation overall—is to mobilize ecology to consider multiple linkages producing, embodying, and circulating sex/objects; these linkages do not always easily converge. Remaining open to the multiple and competing affective, political, economic, and cultural investments into these erotic public service announcements results in a multi-directional analysis of the films themselves that does not quarantine their context. This chapter tracks the multiperspectival development of [un]SPOKEN shorts by first discussing Asian American grassroots activism about HIV/AIDS, then the recent economic shifts altering funding protocols, followed by a detailed analysis of two of the films to see how multiscalar bodies, and not just human ones, coalesce.

In 2011, San Francisco based non-profit organization Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center (API Wellness Center) launched the [un]SPOKEN short film series: a five year HIV prevention social media campaign on safer sex and substance abuse among young Asian American "men who have sex with men."[26] The films function as public service announcements for their prioritization of health and well being weaving in melodramatic narratives with scenes of simulated sex employing a low-tech pornographic-aesthetic. Referring to the supposedly traditional beliefs Asian American and Pacific Islander cultures share regarding sexual behaviors and attitudes, the title, [un]SPOKEN, intends to encapsulate Asian American discourse on sexuality[27]. The homepage to the series describes the [un]SPOKEN Shorts as films intended "to empower the A&PI men's community by encouraging open

[26] "Men who have sex with men," or MSM, is a public health category used instead of gay for its "neutrality." This essay uses gay to be more in line with the social networking apps and porn sites references. Moreover, while the characters in the videos do not identify themselves sexually, I will not use queer as their more conservative politics and maintenance of gender norms align more with gay.

[27] http://www.apiwellness.org/unspokenshorts.html

dialogue and information sharing about issues of safer sex, substance abuse, and HIV prevention—topics that are traditionally unspoken in our community."[28] Ignorance is not the issue since it is not as though these men are unaware of safer sex practices and other forms of "risk reduction," but a debilitating culture of silence that prevents them from speaking about sex—as if "speaking" led to transformational resistance and was not a pathway into government surveillance and subjection. This reductive and ahistorical Orientalization of a heterogeneous population suggests ancestral notions of propriety and deference are causing queer Asian and Pacific Islander men to contract HIV or develop drug and alcohol addictions. The [un]Spoken Shorts strive to educate Asian and Pacific Islander men to adopt United States based gay cultural attitudes towards communication and sexuality resulting in proactive behaviors intending to reduce their exposure to HIV. The [un]Spoken Shorts mobilize HIV within new media to produce and transmit knowledge about gay Asian American subjects as embodiments of sexual risks, but concomitantly, capable of (re)incorporation via the social and immunological prosthesis offered by antiretroviral medications. That is, the films enact a two-fold performance: first, to pathologize modes of gay Asian American sexuality by presenting electronically mediated sexual encounters, and the parties involved, as sketchy and subject to removal. Second, to convince this newly castigated population their banishment is only temporary if they affectively regulate and modify their bodies pharmaceutically.

General public health discourse on HIV finds the unwrapped penis as the most significant risk in need of discipline—especially during anal sex where the probability of HIV transmission is highest. In some gay communities, "barebacking" is used to describe anal sex

[28] http://www.apiwellness.org/unspokenshorts.html

without a condom. Occasionally shortened to "bare" and otherwise referred to as "raw" sex, barebacking indexes the absence of a condom assumed to be already present during intercourse. The physiological consequences of HIV are represented with social and personal problems in the [un]SPOKEN shorts. In *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking,* Tim Dean argues, "The social death caused by HIV's intense stigma…antedates organic death."[29] These films warn of the impending social dislocation and isolation accompanying HIV, crafting links between sexual orientation, sexual practice, and medical illness. Condoms are standard safer sex paraphernalia, and APIWC gestures towards silence as a cultural value to explain why Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are not using them. Being racialized as Asian/American within a biopolitical matrix is another risk factor for this population, whom the [un]SPOKEN shorts portray as more vulnerable to HIV due to their lack of "voice."

To rehabilitate and protect *oneself*, however, and be viewed as a responsible *individual,* antiretroviral medications extending the body's capacity to fight off HIV—such as Truvada—should be compliantly consumed as either pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Attempting to empower gay Asian Americans and Pacific Islander men in culturally competent ways through social media networks, the [un]SPOKEN shorts are a population-level management program mobilizing ideas about what "healthy" bodies are and what they do. The notion of "sex/objects" is transformed here to make room for medications which will internally alter and extend one's immune system, providing a form of pleasure through a pharmaceutical regime. Made possible by government funding for the

[29] Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 94.

implementation of guidelines approved by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the [un]SPOKEN shorts raise questions about the political purpose of art created in asymmetrical collaboration with such a disciplinary power. Therefore, I consider the films as participating in distraction activism—forms of cultural production enabled by an aesthetics of domination substituting structural transformation for short-term spectacle. The possibility of change is offered only at the individual level via affective regulation under the guise of self-empowerment. The short films are not used to incite long-term change such as demanding the government for a vaccine, educating *everyone* on how to prevent the spread and contraction of HIV, or commenting on the inequities faced in healthcare. Instead, the [un]SPOKEN Shorts are a performance of governmentality, or the institutionalization of biopower.

Aesthetics of Biopower

I nominate biopolitics as an analytic to apprehend the complex circulations of power falling outside of and beyond the facile binary maintained by oppositional politics. Michel Foucault first theorizes biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, recognizing how sovereign power lies in the ability to "*take* life or *let* live"[30]. This tension between life and death becomes the preoccupation of state power, as Foucault argues in *Society Must Be Defended,* "power has no control over death, but it can control mortality"[31]. Biopower is concerned with how life is to be determined, managed, and sustained in a manner best serving the state's interests. Birth rates, public health, housing, education, migration, and other issues dealing with the population at large became the focus of state power. These various institutions, in

[30] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1990): 140.
[31] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003): 248

concert with their attendant processes of subjectification, demonstrate Foucault's argument that "power is not something that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it…Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power"[32]. Biopolitics creates the illusion of self-determination, working best when individuals feel a sense of control over their lives positively and productively. Focusing on sexuality to exhume the government's quotidian manifestations of biopower, Foucault discovered that "the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed"[33]. At the institutional level, ideologies about "proper" sexualities developed and trickled down to influence and inform interpersonal and individual attitudes and behaviors. Intent on preserving and perpetuating the life and lifespan of the population, biopolitics appears seemingly benevolent. Yet, the demarcation of who is a part of the population as mentioned above becomes highly contested. For this context, the young sexual body figures as a harbinger of illness, and following the logic of biopolitics becomes "the undisciplined body that is immediately sanctioned by all the individual diseases that the sexual debauchee brings down upon himself"[34]. Undisciplined sexuality becomes associated with sickness and poor morals, which is simultaneously advanced and contained through the entity of the [un]Spoken Shorts.

Rachel Lee astutely outlines the possibilities and potentialities of biopower in Asian Americanist approaches to cultural production. She invites us to think of "the grid of biopower"

[32] *Ibid.* 29
[33] Foucault, *History,* 139.
[34] Foucault, *Society,* 252.

as "a combined attentiveness to both poetic detail on the scale of individual bodies and psyches, and an extrapolation of these individuals to the context of a dichotomous (eugenic/dysgenic) population divide"[35]. Lee provides a critical methodology for analyzing the art of biopolitics as well as the biopolitics of art, suggesting a toggling between the particularities of bodies (at the cellular level as well when rendered in/human) with the broader exercises of power seeking to extend the lives of some at the cost of others. The genre of pornography integrated with the content of safer sex information works well as a site to examine how information about bodies circulates between policy and poetics. In the 1980s, early aesthetic instantiations of biopower were found in commercial and independent pornographic films depicting barrier methods of safer sex (condoms, gloves, dental dams), such as The Gay Men's Health Crisis Safer Sex Shorts[36]. One of their shorts, *Steam Clean*, directed by filmmaker and theorist Richard Fung, features a Chinese man and a South Asian man who meet at a bathhouse and tacitly communicate their desire to practice safer sex by using condoms. At a time when HIV/AIDS information and education was difficult to access and disperse—the Regan Administration was notoriously indifferent and only promoted abstinence—these tapes used a favorite genre and media format to deliver material[37].

API Wellness Center's genesis began from grassroots social movements in 1987 determined to provide direct services and political advocacy for LGBT Asian American and Pacific Islanders excluded from the gay, white, cisgender discourses on HIV/AIDS[38]. API

[35] Rachel C. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America,* p. 46
[36] Cindy Patton, "Safe Sex and the Pornographic Vernacular," Bad Object Choices, eds., *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991)
[37] Michael Bronski. *A Queer History of the United States,* p.230-231
[38] http://www.apiwellness.org/history.html

Wellness Center strives to help those with HIV, and other health issues, who are disenfranchised by majoritarian establishments due to their language ability, citizenship status, financial capacity, and access to "culturally competent" education (API Wellness). Through support groups, outreach events, and educational materials with slogans such as “Love Yourself: Use a Condom,” these activists worked passionately to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. In the early 1990s, the organization expanded as the government provided funding for more research studies and outreach programs. Now, API Wellness and similar non-profits, operate under much different economic and political circumstances than their antecedents. In *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law,* legal scholar Dean Spade challenges the goals of political representation and inclusion common in LGB organizations, observing that "This new sector differs significantly from the more grassroots and mass-based social movements of the earlier era. Its reform projects reflect the neoliberal shift toward the politics of inclusion and incorporation rather than redistribution and deep transformation"[39]. Spade critiques the neoliberal institutionalization of "social justice" work, which uses tactics of the masses but operates like a business serving the elite. Similarly, the grassroots movement for Asian American and Pacific Islanders fighting for recognition and support in the battle against HIV/AIDS increased financial stability and political legibility, but has since become a professionalized, credentialized, and corporatized project more interested in winning grant money than ameliorating the problems of the populations they had initially sought to serve.

Money Matters

[39] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011): 59.

On August 3, 2010, the Centers for Disease Control issued a press release announcing the awarding of $42 million across 133 community-based organizations working in HIV prevention, with a majority of the organizations serving people of color and/or men who have sex with men. According to the CDC, each awardee possesses "the cultural knowledge and local perspective to reach people who might not otherwise access HIV testing or other prevention services," emphasizing the role of community based organizations as translators to groups whose current knowledges and perspectives inhibit their interpellation into public health recommended ideas and practices about safer sex and intravenous drug use. This carefully defined investment into HIV prevention imagines a distance between the white, heterosexual constituents already capable of comprehending institutionally determined health norms and LGBT people of color in need of assistance from the non-profit entity.

The API Wellness Center is one of four agencies in this cycle explicitly serving Asian American and Pacific Islander populations granted money to implement community-based HIV prevention strategies such as "Community Peers Reaching Out and Modeling Intervention Strategies" (Community PROMISE), a CDC approved behavioral intervention project providing the theoretical framework and practical guidelines for the [un]SPOKEN shorts. In “Community PROMISE,” needs are assessed and outcomes are measured by progression along five stages of change to attitudes and behaviors of sexually active people and intravenous drug users: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation or planning, action, and maintenance[40]. Each stage reflects what, if any, actions are being taken to carry and use condoms or bleach (to clean needles) to prevent the transmission of HIV. Unlike other HIV prevention programs wherein the

[40]http://www.effectiveinterventions.org/en/HighImpactPrevention/Interventions/PROMISE/ImplementationMaterials.aspx

goal is to *teach* people about sexual health information, Community PROMISE relies upon "role model stories"—first-person accounts from local individuals struggling, succeeding, and progressing through the stages-of-change—to *influence* the target population to practice less risky behaviors. To create the role model stories, the non-profit selects folks well enmeshed in their local scenes (e.g., people who frequent gay bars and nightclubs), interviews them about the obstacles faced thwarting safer sex practices, and how explores how to overcome those barriers. The raw data collected becomes narrativized into a role model story circulated in "small media" format (print publications such as cards or comic books) in conjunction with HIV prevention/reduction materials by a network of peers. Sex workers, needle exchange programs, bar owners, adult video store operators, and the role models themselves become hubs to facilitate the spreadability of these HIV prevention bundles, potentially reaching those who may not yet be comfortable visiting a brick and mortar agency or explicitly identify with the population served.

Diverging from the “small media” approach of ink and paper, APIWC adopted a digital media storytelling approach with the [un]SPOKEN shorts—and was the only organization using Community PROMISE to do so. While the protocol for constructing the stories remain the same, an alternative network is used for distribution. Social media websites like YouTube and Facebook house the videos and can be accessed at any time by anyone with a computer, smartphone, or tablet, thereby expanding the scope of the audience. Unfortunately, the audience for the shorts will only receive part of the intervention as smartphones, computers, or other viewing devices cannot distribute bleach or condoms. Another drawback for the viral video format arises with Community PROMISE hinging on localization—or niche references— as

as a means to physically connect with the target population, but also to affectively relate via geographical markers ("I know that bar!") or local cultural practices (styles of dress, slang, etc.). Those watching the videos that are not in San Francisco, or another urban city with a large Asian American population, may lose some of the personal connection Community PROMISE emphasizes. The creative decision to produce the role model stories through new media points to the critical role of electronically mediated networks in structuring gay Asian American male life. In an era of globalization and biotechnology, sociologists Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas propose the idea of biological citizenship to recalibrate the ways in which people relate to one another beyond the borders of the nation-state[41]. Biological citizenship enables alternative collectivities, wherein "new forms of 'biosociality' and new ethical technologies are assembled around the proliferating categories of corporeal vulnerability, somatic suffering, and genetic risk and susceptibility."[42] Affinities through and despite sickness allow bodies across borders and other spatial limitations to network together for broader political and medical advocacy supplementing general day-to-day support. For APIWC, a biosocial constituency materialized around HIV and gay Asian American men.

The celebratory imperative typically associated with such acts must be further interrogated as there is a much more insidious agenda at play. In *Life as Surplus*, Melinda Cooper premises "the emergence of the biotech industry is inseparable from the rise of

[41] Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenship," Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008): 440.
[42] *Ibid.*, 442.

neoliberalism as the dominant political philosophy of our time."[43] By situating developments in biotechnology concentrically with economic deregulation, Cooper astutely observes over a forty year period starting in the 1970s how life and capital became intimately invested in a telos of efficiency. The epoch also marked the emergence of HIV throughout the world and the rise of community-based organizations dedicated to its containment like APIWC. The goal is no longer to eradicate HIV, as it is now a productive occasion capitalized on by biotech industry with medications and through biopolitical governance via public health protocols. Dissent, protest, and other forms of activists' expression are part and parcel of the broader scope of any democratic state. Rather than view collective organizing as a threat, the government seized this opportunity to encourage self-regulation through the hospitals, public health officials, and non-profits it funds. With the peril of HIV comes the promise of "safer" sex practices ensuring the performance of a "proper" citizen that is not a menace to society.

Although claiming to empower API men who have sex with men, the viral videos, like many other community-based programs, fall back on normativizing models as dictated by those at the state level[44]. A goal of API Wellness Center's internet-based series of short films, [un]Spoken, "is to provide tools and create discussion for young folks about safer sex by getting a glimpse of the lives of young men who have overcome real life sexual challenges"[45]. As with the typical public service announcements about safer sex, these films aspire to integrate "real life" situations young men encounter when having anonymous or casual sex with multiple

[43] Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008): 19.
[44] Christine Bacareza Balance, "On Drugs: The Production of Queer Filipino America Through Intimate Acts of Belonging," *Journal of Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 16:2 (2007): 269-281.
[45] http://www.apiwellness.org/unspokenshorts.html

partners. They diverge, however, by adding scenes of simulated sex.. Visually echoing the "sex is risky" sentiments of health education standards, the pedagogical purpose of these films is to promote psychological and physical security via a CDC approved intervention. Demonstrating social as well as economic proficiency, the [un]Spoken shorts are all available on Facebook, YouTube, and a few are also available on pornographic websites such as GayTube. All three sites easily facilitate intertextual activity through commenting on the videos/responding to other's responses, posting the videos onto one's profile page, or sharing the videos with others by providing links on their profile pages. API Wellness Center recognizes the potential benefit of using virtual webs of connectivity to attain the largest audience possible, per the grant's directions.

It was Always Inside of You

The [un]SPOKEN shorts premiered in the summer of 2011 with a trio of videos depicting young Asian American men learning the importance of condoms in their sexual dalliances: *Different Cocks, Different Smocks; Rubber Anxieties;* and *It was Always Inside of You*. In each film the characters, settings, and points of contestation over condom usage vary. In *Different Cocks, Different Smocks* the condoms are too small. For the protagonist of *Rubber Anxieties,* condoms aggravate his preexisting sexual performance issues brought about by GRE test preparation. What remains consistent in each film are the lessons acquired on how to communicate with a partner about using condoms. Of the three films comprising the first season, only *It was Always Inside of You* features a character with a confirmed diagnosis of HIV. In what follows, I offer a comparative reading of *It was Always Inside of You* alongside with the [un]SPOKEN shorts' second season *Tony's Story* in order to highlight how the representation of

HIV shifts remarkably over a short period from preventative risk reduction education to a biomedical model.

It was Always Inside of You is a tale about Johnson, an insecure Filipino American man, who meets Eli, a Latino top, through the phone app Grindr[46]. In a scene capturing the moment of penetration, Johnson asks to get a condom, but Eli dismisses the request saying "Don't worry about it. You're clean right?" Aware that "clean" is code for STI/HIV status and not hygiene, Johnson's exhale of "yeah" prompts Eli to reply "me too cutie." This brief assessment of health transitions into time-lapsed sexual intercourse. Eli's refusal to wear a condom is not an expression of hedonism or irresponsibility, as the inquiry into "cleanliness" is part of the act of serosorting, wherein gay men "pursue unprotected sex only with those who share one's HIV status."[47] By accepting the veracity of one another's "cleanliness," both partners allay their worries about the transmission of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

Later, Eli returns to Johnson's apartment to confess his recent diagnosis of HIV. Johnson remains speechless as Eli apologizes for not using a condom. To conclude his act of contrition, Eli gives Johnson a business card for the API Wellness Center to get tested. Six months later, Johnson walks into a café. He is there to meet up with Eli, who shares how he is generally doing well but the HIV medications are making him tired. He apologizes to Johnson again lamenting, "I'm sorry we barebacked. It wasn't cool. At all." Johnson informs Eli that he repeatedly tested for HIV over the past six months—the "window period" when HIV might

[46] Grindr is a social media app using the phone's GPS to locate near-by gay men for chatting, networking, or sex. Other apps include Jack'd and Scruff (catering to the bear and leather community). A heterosexual version, Tinder, became famous in 2013. In 2014, Cuddlr—for those seeking platonic touch—debuted.

[47] Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 12.

develop antibodies—and is HIV negative. Johnson pronounces his condom negotiation abilities are developing, and he even learned to demand safer sex. A curious Eli asks "How?" Johnson pauses, slams his hand on the table and says he told the next guy: "He ain't touching my boo-gina if he ain't using no condom!" A reverse shot shows Eli laughing, who replies, "I guess it was always inside of you." Johnson ignores Eli's comments about the harsh side effects of his pharmaceutical regiment and responds, "I'm glad you are doing OK." The screen fades to black, and a title card asks the viewer "How do you talk about condoms with your hookups?"

The first series ended each episode with "happy endings." Over the next year, the API Wellness Center produced another series of videos. According to Clay Ngo, director of the [un]Spoken Shorts, an evaluation of the films by senior staff demanded a clearer engagement with the five stages of change model outlined in the Community Promise Grant[48]. Obtaining federal monies fundamentally alters the visions and missions of API Wellness Center (and similar organizations with the 501 (C) (3) status) since the "success" of this transactional relationship depends on how well an agency matches the grant's qualifications, expectations, and deliverables. How problems get defined, who is worth investing in, and what the appropriate measures for addressing issues are no longer locally determined but must conform to the standard indicated by the state. The content, delivery, and measurement of the agencies' programming are defined and determined by the sources of funding who paradoxically require a high population in need of services while also expecting high levels of effectiveness. Unlike the stand-alone episodes of season one, season two is a multi-episode arc featuring one character's experience through the stages of change model.

[48] Phone Conversation with the author on June 4, 2013.

Tony's Story

Divided into four parts, *Tony's Story* follows a young Asian American man living in San Francisco whose penchant for random sex with multiple partners lands him in a precarious situation. I continue with my opening vignette of *Tony's Story #1*, where the titular character is an active participant in the world of electronically mediated erotic interactions. After searching the digital sexscape for potential sex partners, he heads to his parents' house for a dinner of Chinese cuisine and interrogation of his life. A horizontal split screen divides Tony's current position in a domestic, familial space contrasting his social life rife with drag queens, alcohol consumption, and flirtatious men. Through his parent's flat, Standard English accented line of questioning, we learn that Tony is in college, employed and is not out to his parents who inquire as to why he does not have a girlfriend. Tony demurely replies he is too busy, while the other half of the screen proves he prefers the company of men. Unable to manage the duplicitous circumstances of his life, Tony goes to his car and begins drinking from a flask stored in the glove compartment.

The next day, a text message alert from Kuya (the Tagalog word for older brother) asking if they are meeting for drinks awakes Tony, who is in bed with a random, shirtless man. A jump cut brings Tony to a bar where Kuya questions if Tony wore the same outfit the night before, prompting a flashback to the previous night with Tony drinking at a nightclub and going on Grindr as his voiceover states he met up with a man he "plays with." Kuya exasperatedly reminds Tony of his bad habit of getting drunk and having sex with random men since they were in college and hoped that Tony remembered to use a condom. Even though they are at a bar, Kuya tells Tony he should not drink so much since it inhibits the ability to think clearly.

When Kuya goes to the bathroom, Tony pulls out his phone and goes back on Grindr. While scrolling through the images of nearby men, Tony's internal monologue concludes with him reflecting on how maybe he should watch how much he drinks. This vignette establishes Tony as an undisciplined and indulgent individual with a high probability for contracting HIV. On its own, *Tony's Story #1* offers little explicitly with regards to safer sex practices and the audience is to believe that Tony's debauchery stems from his heteronormative parents. His support system is portrayed as less than the CDC ideal, as Kuya does not suggest that Tony stop drinking, only that he be more observant of the quantity imbibed.

Tony's Story #2: Hooked on Hooking Up begins with a friend in the kitchen asking Tony how Jason is. Tony mumbles he does not know, and once again the screen divides into quadrants showing Tony leaving a voicemail, texting, going on Facebook, and cruising for men on Adam4Adam. A flashback of Tony's relationship with his ex-boyfriend Jason as they play tag in the park and go antiquing is juxtaposed and ultimately transitions to the present moment with a transactional sexual encounter between Tony and an anonymous white man. Verbal communication between the two does not take place until after they finish having sex. While lying on opposite sides of the bed, Tony asks his partner if he gets "tested." Tacitly knowing Tony is asking about his HIV status, the man replies, "Aren't you positive too?" Tony is flabbergasted by the man's nonplussed disclosure after barebacking. Upon hearing he just exposed Tony to HIV, the man places accountability onto Tony by stating, "You didn't ask."

The crux of *Tony's Story #2: Hooked on Hooking Up,* and the other videos in the [un]SPOKEN series, is how the inability to communicate, or even look into your partner's HIV status, is the cause of HIV infections. While walking home, Tony's voiceover rehearses a

battery of questions he should have asked to find out the number of sex partners, the locations they met, and their HIV status to determine whether or not sex should follow. Loaded with conservative moral judgments, the line of questioning Tony aims to pursue maps sexually transmitted infections onto those who have multiple sex partners they find from modes of social media or other non-normative spaces. However, what number of sex partners or possible locations would have made Tony change his mind? Also, should HIV status matter? The [un]SPOKEN videos never discuss how physical intimacy occurs between sex partners with mixed serostatuses and assumes prohibiting contact between bodies with HIV is the healthy, social justice driven choice. The video reinforces sexual respectability politics about quantity and frequency of sexual partners to imply only promiscuous people contract HIV. Although only once did he engage in binge drinking, and only two sex partners appeared on screen, it is implied his multiple interfaces with online websites and mobile phone applications led to other sexual encounters.

Back in his apartment, Tony closes his blinds, symbolically preparing himself for his eventual pariah status. He returns to his computer, not in search of another sex partner, but to seek out medical advice. Following a quick Google search, *Hooked on Hooking Up* ends when Tony discovers post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), a set of medications taken shortly after exposure to reduce the chances of contracting HIV. Instead of focusing on condom usage, or even drinking alcohol as mentioned in the previous film, Tony's intentions adopt a biomedical approach and prioritize acquiring pharmaceuticals.

Tony's Story #3: Exposed, revolves around Tony's pathway towards a new lifestyle while taking PEP. He joins his friends for a party, but due to his medication cannot drink. A

flashback takes us back to a distraught Tony pacing outside the offices of the Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center to take an HIV test. Tony sits across from a faceless counselor, who informs Tony his test came back with a negative result but cautions HIV antibodies may not be detectable the first three months after exposure. Exercising his voice, Tony inquires about other options. Instead of using their time to educate Tony about risk reduction practices during his next sexual encounter, the API Wellness counselor offers PEP, "an aggressive regimen of HIV/AIDS medications that a doctor can prescribe to someone who has been exposed to the virus or thinks they may have been. You have to start within the first 72 hours after contact. It can be expensive because PEP isn't always covered by insurance." The low tech barrier method of condoms appears archaic compared to biomedical technology and the implicit message of "just take your pills, and you will feel better." Calling for a self-monitoring paranoia (if you *think* you have been exposed to HIV, which, because of the window period, you can never be sure) while offering up a costly gamble (the cost of PEP ranges from $600-$1,000) situates the gay body as a site of contamination that, for the right price, can be contained.

For Tony, money is not a barrier to receiving the medical treatment. In the following scene, PEP is prescribed, and a doctor is reviewing the side effects of PEP (nausea, exhaustion, etc.). Absent from the doctor's monologue is the safer sex materials Tony will need in the future such as condoms, lubricants, dental dams or gloves. These inexpensive prophylactics do not become part of Tony's behavior modification plan, which is becoming a moot point because he is part of a class with access to medical care. The film misses the opportunity to address the inequities caused by the lack of health insurance and the effects on life chances for different populations. What would have Tony's options been if he did not have health insurance or the

financial capital necessary to fill the prescription? PEP serves as a second line of defense against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections after condoms, but is reimagined in this film as the vanguard for the fortunate few, not those who are in the most vulnerable positions in society such as sex workers, trans people, or homeless youth who would benefit from such resources but are unable or are uncomfortable with navigating the medical system. Tony is silent with sexual partners, but his agential voice gains prominence when he communicates his request for PEP to authoritative health workers.

Tony's Story #4: Connections concludes with Tony happy to be HIV negative after having completed the month-long regimen of PEP. He is the successful, obedient subject of biopower, unlike the 1 in 5 people on PEP unable to finish the series of medications due to the side effects such as headaches, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and fatigue[49]. He laments on how the acquisition of a smartphone should have increased his sense of belonging, but implies "other connections" were unable to fulfill his needs: "the grinds, pokes, smiles, and woofs." Cataloging various gestures available on gay social networks such as Grindr, Adam4Adam, and Scruff (a smartphone app targeting the Bear community) designed to flirt virtually, in comparison to face-to-face interactions; Tony demarcates the boundaries of a world offering a "healthy lifestyle" and a world leading to abjection. Abandoning Kuya's initial uneasiness with drinking, Tony's reflection identifies technology, not alcohol, as the enabler of high-risk sexual behavior.

Tony laments the "disconnections" suffered from gay social networks provoking feelings of rejection, isolation, and undesirability. A random encounter with another man turns sour

[49] http://www.avert.org/post-exposure-prophylaxis-pep.htm

when Tony does not want to have sex and is kicked out. When a date with another man at a boba café bodes well for intercourse, Tony asks for his "status." Intuitively knowing he is referring to HIV, the date replies, "Yes I get tested," an answer Tony parrots back. However, what if the date expressed he was HIV positive? Or Tony revealed he was on PEP? Would proclaiming an HIV positive status automatically preclude sexual activity? The films keep these questions beyond the bounds of what is acceptable to think because quarantine serves as a prevention strategy rendering contact with seroconverters as not an option.

PEP proved useful as a prophylactic against the merger of HIV with Tony, who still uses the various apps and websites to meet men. Running off into the sunset, Tony exults, "I'm becoming more connected to who I am and who I want to be." However, to assume whom he wants to be is of his own volition is tricky in the biopolitical moment. Beatriz Preciado coins the term "pharamacopornographic" to describe the interplay of biopolitics and sexual aesthetics in everyday life as, "the processes of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity."[50] One only needs a cursory look at their spam email folder to see the barrage of erectile dysfunction pills and pornographic websites inviting free trials. But for subjects like Tony, Preciado observes, “In the pharmacopornographic era, the body swallows power…biopower dwells at home, sleeps with us, inhabits within”[51]. The act of swallowing absorbs any distinctions between internal or external distinctions of biopower. The worlds of sex and HIV medications are enmeshed, as certain "hook-up" apps have advertisements or notifications about HIV medications. Men advertise their prescriptions

[50] Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013): 33-34
[51] Preciado, 207.

in their profiles. PEP, a medication taken if one *thinks* they came into contact with HIV, Tony's ingestible awareness of his participation in this economy. Even before PEP, however, alcohol, weight gain/loss supplements, steroids, sleeping pills, hormones, or other party drugs would perform the same function.

Over the course of four short films, we see the basis for his security did not emerge from an increased competency with interpersonal communication but came into being through scientific advances. A quick shot of a chat function on Adam4Adam during the closing montage highlights Tony proclaiming "I only play safe" to an interested party. Represented as a double-edged sword throughout his journey, be it for sexual pleasure or health information, new media is the only platform Tony is proactive. PEP proved useful as a prophylactic against the merger of HIV with Tony. The medication also benefitted him through the unexpected side effect of re-embodying Tony from gay cybercultures.

Prescriptive Politics

The operationalization of HIV in these films, along with their proposed interventions, is based on fear, paranoia, and anxiety. During their study on sexually transmitted infection prevention campaigns, Gagnon, Jacob, and Holmes found public health officials "reinforce the discursive representation of STIs (and those who contract them) as physically repulsive and socially undesirable. By intensifying the fear of bodily disorder and social repercussions, the prevention campaign suggests that wearing a condom during sexual intercourse is a practice of self-contained and self-control"[52]. However, a negative status is perceived contingently, as all

[52] Marilou Gagnon, Jean-Daniel Jacob, and Dave Holmes, "Governing through (in)security: a critical analysis of a fear-based public health campaign," *Critical Public Health* 20:2 (2010): 245-256.

gay men are assumed to be potential carriers. Of course, it is admirable to practice safer sex, but Tony's delay in getting tested provides a dramatic sense of indeterminacy justifying pharmaceutical treatments such as PEP. Given how popular media representations of gay men are pronounced with bacchanalian promiscuity and thereby conflate queer sexualities with disease, it does not surprise that the figure of the gay-body-as-sick punished for sexual deviancy is internalized and seen as inevitable. "Pos-phobia," a fear of those with HIV, animates this bio-cultural project. Moreover, the [un]SPOKEN short construct a particular message for those who bareback: if you fuck unprotected, you are an ugly, undesirable, social outcast.

A common theme throughout the [un]Spoken series are the deployments of sexuality and technology to produce more self-regulating bio-citizens. Both of the films contain narratives of gay Asian American men who become directly exposed to HIV by having unprotected sex with non-Asian men. Between season one, with *It was Always Inside of You,* and season two, with *Tony's Story,* a significant alteration to how anxieties over HIV are managed transpires. *It was Always Inside of You* showed Eli linking Johnson to the API Wellness Center for testing, a hub of biosociality around HIV. In *Tony's Story,* the protagonist is seen researching HIV prevention options on the Internet and acquiring them. Not only are HIV positive men taking anti-retroviral medications in both films, but *Tony's Story* advocates for the other partner to begin taking post-exposure prophylaxis, a month-long regime of medicine designed to prevent the contraction of HIV. Clay Ngo, director of the [un]SPOKEN Shorts, says the inspiration to include PEP in season two came from an interview with a role model whose story best demonstrated the preparation and action stages while delivering the most dramatic

story arc. T; his interview, along with many others, created the composite character Tony[53]. Coincidentally, when the [un]SPOKEN shorts were in production, APIWC saw a redistribution of funds throughout the organization. A financial report available on the agency website for the fiscal year 2009-2010 shows that 31% of expenses were in community development and external affairs, 30% in health education, 15% in HIV care, and 1% dedicated to the wellness clinic[54]. In the following fiscal year, expanded clinical services reallocated funds: 25% for community development and external affairs, 28% for health education, 12% for HIV care, and 11% for the wellness clinic[55]. While the clinic and the [un]SPOKEN shorts are unrelated projects in separate departments, one can observe an economic and cultural shift in API Wellness Center, from a holistic model addressing the multiple spheres of influence upon Asian American health to prioritizing the delivery of medical treatments such as PEP[56].

According to the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California, San Francisco, PEP comprises the same HIV medications prescribed to those living with HIV, providing pharmaceutical companies a new population they can market their medications to[57]. For Ngo, the political economy of HIV medications is incidental if there is a way of "empowering people with drugs," and the emphasis on PEP in *Tony's Story* is justifiable since "the reality is people don't like condoms, and to promote them… it is ignorant and dangerous to not think

[53] Phone Conversation with the author on June 4, 2013.
[54] http://www.apiwellness.org/extras/2011/fiscal_year_2010.pdf
[55] http://www.apiwellness.org/extras2/2012/fiscal_year_2011.pdf
[56] This does not have to be inferred but is now the reality. During the time of writing, APIWC dramatically restructured, eliminating most of the prevention programs and expanding clinical services to now include "family planning."
[57] http://caps.ucsf.edu/factsheets/post-exposure-prevention-pep/

about other ways of prevention."[58] Here we see how "neoliberal regimes of biocapital produce the body as never healthy enough, and thus always in a debilitated state in relation to what one's bodily capacity is imagined to be," producing the gay body as commodities for pharmaceutical corporations[59]. The gay body, as a site of toxic excess, is the prime laboratory for a medication regime benefitting the "bottom line" of non-profits, public health, and pharmaceutical market logic. The [un]Spoken videos mobilize gay Asian American men to adopt the "biomedical definition of life", placing greater emphasis on techniques of biopower such as access to medicine, HIV testing that catalogues and maps out "high risk" populations, and viral videos instilling complicity with the structures rendering specific populations vulnerable in the first place over broader social and political issues. P(r)EP is not a vaccine, but a daily pharmaceutical treatment[60]. Tethering together discourses of agency, rights, responsibility, choice, and health as *the issues* to take on, the [un]SPOKEN shorts are nothing more than distraction activism myopically typecasting what "gay issues" are.

The discourses of health, sexuality, race, and technology converge in the [un]SPOKEN shorts producing the queer body as dirty and undesirable. Therefore, these men must be regulated and disciplined; by being more respectable, they regain their humanity. Within the parameters of "prognosis time," this body *must always be* subjugated, speaking to the violence of incorporation and inclusion. Rather than contrasting and challenging these institutions, non-

[58] Phone conversation with the author on June 4, 2013
[59] Jasbir Puar, "Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility, and Capacity," *Journal of Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 19:2 (2009): 161-172.
[60] http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/prevention/reduce-your-risk/pre-exposure-prophylaxis/

profits like API Wellness Center parallel neoliberal disciplinary values[61]. For non-profits to stay in business, bodies need to remain in positions of vulnerability, risk, and (in)security. So-called "safe spaces" claiming to help those in need, most non-profits operate within a culture of paternalistic morality that positions their clients as blameworthy for their problems[62]. Those who engage with digital-social- sexual networks, as has been the case with any other "new" technology, are portrayed as promiscuous addicts increasing their likelihood to contract HIV through "other connections," which the [un]SPOKEN shorts discipline and regulate with the threat of HIV. The representation of a marginalized population in HIV prevention campaigns must be met with skepticism and considered beyond the intent and towards the broader context and impact.

The [un]Spoken Shorts force a reconsideration of Asian American activist-aesthetic practices. When the conceptual problems are a lack of representation, emasculation, and exclusion, videos like *Tony's Story* achieve their goals: Asian American men are not asexual, they have sex with many people, and they can advocate on behalf of themselves in the clinical setting. Taking up theories of biopolitics and performance as analytics to make sense of our encounters with these videos, however, demands us to pay attention to the conditions of possibility enabling their production as well as their ontological effects. In the videos reviewed, gay social life no longer imagines the elimination of HIV. Instead, the low tech social media aesthetic, used by gay youth to connect with others, becomes the pathway for high tech immunological prosthetics to extend the duration of a socially, and now biologically, toxic life. What is it,

[61] For more on neoliberalism and the non-profit industrial complex, see Soo Ah Kwan, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
[62] Spade, 175.

precisely, that these characters are moving towards? What worlds are they opening up, if any? In the next chapter, we explore a sexual ecology also operating within government policies and regulations with interventions seeking preserve rather than prescribe. If APIWC coerces compliance through a microscopic delivery system, BDSM pornography studio kink.com first demands the consent of its buildings and bottoms before beginning any action. The labor in creating the BDSM event—sometimes decades in the making—demonstrates how kink modifies affective regulation to facilitate pleasurable practices of sensation management.

Chapter 3: Bound, Drowned, and Drilled: Staging Sexual Sensation at kink.com

If you are ever walking through San Francisco's Mission District, you might notice things have changed since the dot-com boom of the late 1990s began. A neighborhood which has long been associated with working-class and immigrant Latina/o people, queers, and creative folks, "The Mission"—as it is commonly referred to by locals—is now ground zero for rapid gentrification due to the second wave tech boom and subsequent influx of coders, app designers, and various technological entrepreneurs. Vibrant bodegas, dive-bars, and community centers now compete for economic and cultural survival as vegan sushi bars, trendy mixologists, and outrageously expensive residential communities cater to the area's new upscale inhabitants. And yet, one building remains generally unchanged for over 100 years.

Located on the corner of 14th and Mission Streets is the Armory Building, a looming edifice "designed to convey the impression of a heavily armored and forbidding Moorish fortress, with four octagonal towers, rough clinker brick exterior walls and narrow rectangular lancet windows."[63] Built in 1914 after the1906 destroyed the original Armory Building—at 200,000-square-feet—the Armory is the largest building in the Mission District. The sprawling grounds of this four-story (plus basement) compound for the California National Guard functioned as both a military and recreational space and included a gymnasium, a natatorium, an industrial kitchen, a banquet room, a boiler room, living quarters, an indoor shooting range, a munitions room, and a drill court. Many of these spaces within the Armory still exist,

[63] http://www.armorystudios.com/history/

however, the military no longer owns the building. The only difference is now they are repurposed as interactive sets and stages to facilitate BDSM pornography production.

More than just a "set," or perhaps more broadly, "a setting," in which explicit sexual activity transpires between two or more "properly human" bodies, these sites and stages of sexual performance function ecologically alongside the human(s), mutually constituting one another's BDSM legibility. What do sets tell us? How do sets tell us? How did these sets come to be and what does the designation of being a "historical landmark" do? What is the performative or scriptive potentiality of a set? How do sets influence human bodies? Along those lines, what do sets and props do in the construction of racial and sexual knowledge and practice when depicted on screen and experienced materially? How does the tour participate in these acts of knowledge production as another iteration of "sex work?" Going "into the field" of pornographic production and reception is inspired by the ethnographic interventions of feminist porn scholars Mireille Miller-Young and Lynn Comella, who observe the labor conditions on porn sets (Miller-Young), sex-toy stores (Comella), and racialized fandoms at the Adult Video News (AVN) Convention[64][65]. Their textured accounts of bodies in motion animated by the pornographic allow us to experience more intensely the multiple actants interfacing sexual ecologies that are mystified by the visual field of representation.

This chapter examines the role of sensorium and performance across different transmedial sites of BDSM performance: the live studio tours offered by kink.com of the Armory building and the 2013 documentary *Kink* (dir. Christina Voros). More specifically, I am

[64] Mireille Miller-Young. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography.* Durham: Duke University Press.
[65] Lynn Comella. *Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure.* Durham: Duke University Press.

looking at the performative labor transpiring through the BDSM event, paying close attention to how sensoria are generated, managed, choreographed, and in turn, produce or intensify other affects. Additionally, thinking beside Laura Kang's recent work, I hope to begin pushing the boundaries beyond what typically counts and is accounted for within the typical sense of "Asian American," as this chapter disrupts the conventional one-to-one congruence of author-performer racialization dominating the fields of representation by adjusting our attention to embodiment, experience, and emplacement[66]. Because its status as a historically preserved building plays such a large role in the staging of kink.com's sets, I will first provide an account of the Armory, as its history gestures toward how it will later achieve such prominent status as a co-performer in the documentary and on the tour. By becoming more attuned to embodied and affective labors, we can begin to sense how race and sexuality are not only seen but heard and felt within the sexual ecology of kink.

Setting the Scene

Since 2007, the Armory has been home to kink.com, the largest producer of BDSM pornography on the Internet. The company was founded by Peter Acworth, a Ph.D. student in Finance at Columbia University, in 1997 after he read a tabloid from his native England about a firefighter generating substantial income from running his own pornographic website. Combining his business acumen with his interest in *kinbaku* (Japanese rope bondage), Acworth began shooting scenes in his dorm room that served as the inaugural set for "Hogtied." A year later, as a growing interest in BDSM (and his profits) flourished, Acworth left graduate school for San Francisco to meet more like-minded folks. Over the next ten years the company—then

[66] Laura Kang. "Introduction: Sex," in Alisa Lebow and Alexandra Juhasz (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film.*

known as Cybernet Entertainment—filled a kinky niche absent from the adult content on the World Wide Web. When the Armory building went on the market after being out of commission for thirty years, Acworth bought the building for 14.5 million dollars, noting that, "The basements, in particular, have a creepy, dungeon-like feel that is quite appropriate."[67] Beyond the aesthetic feeling evoked by the abandoned building as a direct benefit to his digital empire, Acworth also optimistically mused on the social opportunity of his purchase as "an improvement for a property where people made war, not love."[68]

Although this last remark is a cheeky, off-the-cuff comment inflected with the aura of British charm, Acworth's economic motives driving his pursuit of expansion run alongside the notion that social good is possible from the proliferation of BDSM. Upon arrival to the Armory, which now became a hub for production and distribution, kink.com quickly grew into a platform with thirty-six different hard-core BDSM websites offering weekly content such as *Electrosluts*: lesbian electro-play; *TS Seduction*: a trans woman dominates a "straight" man; *Fucking Machines* and *Butt Machine Boys*: a dildo is attached to a machine with mechanics similar to a jackhammer and then penetrates someone at different speeds; and *Bound in Public*: a submissive male repeatedly humiliated then gangbanged by five to seven men, each of which took advantage of the new set options made possible by the utilitarian structures built on each floor. Additionally, kink.com and its brick-and-mortar proxy the Armory have also positioned themselves as a local node for BDSM resources ranging from on-site and online workshops, health and legal advocacy, social and community-based organizations, and museums and archives throughout the United States. Journalist Jon Mooallem reiterates this ethos in the *New*

[67] http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/offbeat/2007-02-02-pornstudio_x.htm
[68] Ibid.

York Times, writing, “He realized early on that building a respectable company devoted to the fetish could help ‘demystify’ it… Acworth, in fact, seems to police his content simply by the values of the B.D.S.M. community, laboring to make its playful, consensual spirit transparent.” [69] His declaration of sex positivity, even as a white heterosexual man, should not be dismissed, but it should remain contextualized. Never forgetting that he is a businessman working within the field of media first, one interpretation of Acworth’s comments could attribute his interview to a series of talking points directly engaging with a respectability politics to mainstream and package sexual acts in a more sanitized manner to attract more consumers and increase his profit margin. Margot Weiss’s ethnographic study of a BDSM community in San Francisco, *Techniques of Pleasure*, argues BDSM is not inherently transgressive nor does it function as an “escape from reality.” Rather, it is a commodified practice informed by neoliberal consumer ideologies. Although, unlike the participants in Weiss's exploration into a BDSM community populated disproportionality with economically privileged white people for whom practices of BDSM inform their "private" social lives, thereby limiting access for those who do not have the means to participate within their kinky circles fully, kink.com does not downplay how it is first and foremost a site of sexual labor, more specifically, pornography.

Pornography is an aesthetic, social, economic, and political enterprise, practice, product, and relation subject to the multiple, overlapping, and competing conservative and progressive discourses of representation, health, law, political economy, and art. Academics, politicians, psychologists, artists, and journalists have researched each of these discourses, mostly by engaging with moving image pornography primarily as a visual text on which to launch

[69] http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29kink.t.html

investigations, pathologize and diagnose illness, argue for free speech, educate about safer sex, or as industry producing and containing an archive of racialized sexualities and labor. So far, I have provided a partial history into the emergence of kink.com from an extracurricular activity into a full-fledged transmedial pornotopia to trace its pathway towards establishment.

Differing radically from other porn companies specializing in BDSM, and even studios known for "mainstream" pornography, is kink's usage of continually standing sets. Major companies like Wicked, Vivid, Lucas Entertainment, and Hustler with the budgets and staff for more elaborate sets do construct them as needed, but these tend to be porno films with plots geared towards heterosexual couples or parody films of Hollywood blockbusters. The majority of pornography today is shot in hotels, apartments, houses, cars, vans, or whatever might be available on the day of the shoot. "Gonzo" pornography, a porn genre typically containing only sex acts and no exposition (there might be scenarios, but not a continuous plot), focuses more on a realist aesthetic as a factor of enjoyment allowing the empty bed, couch, or restroom to exist anywhere and everywhere. The content produced at kink.com merges aspects of both pornographic modes, filming mostly non-serialized material within and around elaborately designed and constructed permanent sets within (and occasionally around) the Armory building.

Regardless of the bodies on screen and the acts they perform, the built environments and sets of the BDSM pornography at kink.com are always an active player in each scene as sex/objects. Further demonstrating the relevance of these sets, kink.com also offers a way of engaging with pornography no other company in the world does, let alone even has the capacity for doing so: every single day, after filming wraps for the day and production assistants

sanitize the stages and props, kink.com offers ninety minute docent-led tours of the Armory building and kink.com's sets to the general public. The tours began in 2009 as part of the larger project of demystifying porn production operations, allowing visitors to see, hear, touch, smell, and experience overall the artistic, affective, and skilled labor going into the forty-five-minute final cuts of scenes posted online[70]. Occasionally, "models" (the term kink.com uses to describe porn performers), or a well-known BDSM practitioner in San Francisco will lead the tour. It should be noted there are no "hot" sets. Said differently, tour groups will not stumble upon any "live" shoots, as the stars of this tour are the wide variety of sets and the building itself.

Although they are two different modes of engagement with kink.com, both the tour and the documentary achieve similar goals. The documentary *Kink* also offers a behind-the-scenes peek into the daily operations of producing BDSM pornography at kink.com[71]. Following the conventions of an expositional documentary, interviews with directors, models, set designers, and other support staff intermingle with footage of staff meetings, castings, porn shoots, and information about the different sets. For those unable to attend the tour in San Francisco, the documentary provides the viewer a chance to explore the Armory building. Conversely, the documentary offers what the in-person tour does not, which is, the bodies and voices of the models absent from the set visits. Promiscuously traversing back and forth between these two iterations of knowledge production about kink.com allows for a more textured analysis into how racialized sexualities produce and are produced by and within the BDSM event.

[70] Conversely, as part of a transmedia practice, the tours are another way of generating income (from both the tour itself, as well as those who will visit the site after to view pornography).
[71] The documentary *Kink* will always be italicized in contrast to kink.com or kink as a company

The overlaps between documentary and ethnography methodologically invite an interdisciplinary encounter at the site of kink.com as both are concerned with quotidian and staged bodies in action, ritual, and performance. Vision, the gaze, and the imperative to look all organize both the ethnographer's and the director's approach towards knowing and encountering the subjects and objects of their projects of documenting, recording, and constructing knowledge about a particular culture have historically produced uneven levels of enjoyment and utility for those involved. In *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary,* Christian Hansen, Catherine Needham, and Bill Nichols situate pornography as a somewhat flirtatious genre of documentary, allowing for a comparison with ethnography and how discourses of power are organized similarly in these fields of representation, arguing that, "Pornography and ethnography dwell on the body as a socially significant site. They extract, respectively, pleasure and knowledge from that site, while at the same time demystifying and familiarizing it."[72] While I agree with their overall point, it is important to note what they are "demystifying and familiarizing" are the performances of these bodies as legible through the researcher's visuality, and thus, are only iterations of a partial "truth." Pornography and ethnography also share an appreciation of "pleasure and knowledge" for the physical sites and contexts in which erotically charged "bodies" interact, as hospital exam rooms, office workspaces, college classrooms, and even "in public" are places through which genres of pornography (and sites of ethnography) take place.

Versatile Methodologies

[72] Hansen, Christian, Catherine Needham, and Bill Nichols. "Pornography, Ethnography and the Discourses of Power," in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts of Documentary.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pg. 215.

Studies of pornography typically rely upon the methods stemming from film studies such as practices of close reading and visual semiotics to interpret moving image representations of sex acts, the angles in which said acts are framed, plot and narrative, set and costume design, and, much more rarely, sound. Many queer and feminist scholars of color have successfully employed these methods to analyze intersectional and asymmetrical power relations chiasmatically produced by racialized genders and sexualities are negotiated within, through and against depictions of hardcore sex. This approach opened up a variety of *meanings* made possible in the pornographic text, but the dominance of reading as a method brackets out other valences of the pornographic. Film scholar John Champagne views the overabundance of "reading" as a result of the heteronormative, increasingly corporate academy as increasingly hostile and disciplinary towards sexuality scholarship and even more so towards research about gay pornography and other expressions of the erotic. He observes this methodological "straightening" of gay porn "obscures both the social and historical conditions in which certain texts circulate and the everyday uses to which subjects put such texts," on the same note Champagne advocates for paying more attention to the "emplacement" of gay porno films. [73] And so, Champagne's study maps out a space of exhibition, circulation, and socialization, an adult arcade screening gay pornography, where men go to for semi-private and anonymous sexual encounters.

The appeal to "stop reading films," has rarely been taken up since the initial declaration in the 1990s. Refusal to disavow disciplinary constraints regulating not only *how* an object is studied but also *what* is even thinkable as a proper object of academic study is one possible

[73] Champagne, John. "'Stop Reading Films!': Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography. *Cinema Journal,* 36:4 (Summer 1997), pg. 77

explanation. For those in the social sciences, or fields and disciplines that tend towards ethnography and participant observation, pornography is only regarded critical when grounded in legal, labor, or medical frameworks.[74] Pornography, when reduced to a "text" rather than a practice or performance then impacts the processes for research and analysis. Cultural studies approaches to porn have yielded significant and erudite debates on pornography as a polysemic medium capable of being debated through a wide range of theoretical, moral, and aesthetic interpretations, but typically lack (however partial) a sense of emplacement and proprioception accessible through ethnography. Lack of access to the political economies of porn production as well as to porn sets are salient factors in the oversaturation of "reading" pornography as due to stricter zoning laws, gentrification, and the increased prevalence and availability of Internet pornography across multiple platforms have shut down access to porn shops, arcades, and theatres across the United States.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, kink.com is the only porn company consistently offering access into their studios, and because of the unique specificity of engagement provided to the public by kink.com, I will be directing my attention in this chapter more towards how pornography is produced instead of the final filmed product. I do so not to diminish the role or power of representation, but rather, allows us to think ecologically about pornography *as an industry* with the majority of creative and cognitive labor occurring *off-screen and behind the scenes.* In this chapter, I use ethnography and film analysis to explore how those conditions of

[74] Sociologist Chauntelle Tibbals chronicles the lack of intellectual, material, and affective support she received during her graduate studies in her book *Exposure: A Sociologist Explores Sex, Society, and Adult Entertainment* (Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2015). Notable exceptions to this include Mireille Miller-Young (2014) and Lynn Comella (2017), whose studies of the adult film industry are rooted in feminist analyses of labor and economics.

possibility and expression are made possible by taking seriously the work performed by the director of gay content, Vietnamese American porn star Van Darkholme, and the inanimate and inorganic sex/objects he and his co-workers perform alongside.

While the creative, performative, and manual labor of differentially racialized, sexualized, and gendered bodies human bodies will be discussed later in the chapter, by thinking ecologically, we can expand the scope of who and what are the agential players in constructing the BDSM event. Often the purview of new materialisms, object-oriented ontology, or vitalist thought, discussions of "thing theory"—or the potentiality of an inert or non-sentient object perform or "do"—have also emerged from theatre and performance studies. In *The Stage Life of Props,* theatre studies scholar Andrew Sofer belies the short shrift "stage properties," or "props" receive from "text-based critics" who only see props as symbols, symptoms, or ideological placeholders. Sofer also cautions if we focus only on scripts, or the lingual-verbal aspects of a play or performance, we do not see how props co-perform with the subjects speaking these words. Speculation plays a larger role in this research approach, and Sofer builds upon theatre historians Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume's "production analysis," an engagement of texts and objects described as "'reading with a directorial eye,' to imagine a series of possibilities emerging from the script and the attendant components, or, in other words, production analysis "*is a series of architect's sketches, not the blueprints that would be necessary to bring any one of them to actuality*." [75]Production analysis is not a project of finding a singular, specific, or definite instantiation, but more about the array of interpretations and choices what could be made available. By making the distinction between

[75] As quoted in Sofer, Andrew. *The Stage Life of Props.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003. Pg. 4. Emphasis in original.

"architect's sketches" and "blueprints" allows production analysis to have a more improvisational style in line with the ethos of BDSM that is also both against more proscriptive approaches to what bodies, objects, stages, environments, and thoughts can do. Furthermore, production analysis as an analytic fits more appropriately with an exploration of sets, stages, and objects not as ornamentation or accessories to a central character but to the status co-performer.

(Land)marking the Armory

As part of the production analysis, in this section I outline the conditions of possibility for the existence of the Armory, a history necessary to review as its past led to the building being preserved. In the 1920s, the drill court became a popular sports venue primarily hosting boxing matches earning it the name, "the Madison Square Garden of the West."[76] After the Korean War, many of the military technologies prioritized during WWII (such as air-warfare) rendered the coastal batteries outdated. Classroom instruction became the main usage of the building, and the California National Guard increased their local involvement in natural disaster relief and police support. In 1973, the Mission Armory building attained full obsolescence, and the National Guard decided to relocate to Fort Funston overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The massive building was sporadically used for sporting and education related purposes by various organizations in San Francisco but did not have a permanent purpose. After arts permits were applied for and granted in the Drill Court—which also extended to the rest of the property— in 1976, young director George Lucas filmed spaceship battle scenes for the *Star Wars* franchise.[77] Lucas's request opened up a new usage for the building broadly categorized under the umbrella

[76] http://www.armorystudios.com/history/
[77] http://sfport.com/sites/default/files/Executive/Docs/Commission/Minutes/M03222016.pdf

of “arts.” Unfortunately, plans to turn the Armory into a mainstream film studio fell through, and a couple of years later the National Guard returned with the intention of razing the building and rebuilding a newer, more modern facility with ample parking.

Those living in the Mission district, however, had different plans. The residents in the neighborhood banded together and fought against the destruction of the Armory building by seeking support from the State. To preserve the structure, Mission residents applied to the National Park Service for the San Francisco National Guard Armory and Arsenal Coastal Artillery Headquarters and training base (its former name) to become part of the National Register of Historic Places. Set into action by the prospect of this architectural institution from being removed from their community, residents sought for the Armory to become a historic landmark, a designation which would protect the external (and mostly interior) integrity of the Armory from being altered (mostly). According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, criteria for evaluation and inclusion is based on, "The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association," and

> **A.** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
> **B.** That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
> **C.** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
> **D.** That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.[78]

[78] https://www.nps.gov/Nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm

A review board grants each landmark, building, or site protected status after conducting historical, material, and affective assessments. Guiding these decisions are the four possible areas of significance, categories of inclusion based upon nationalistic merits standard to mainstream/canonical historicity. This is not to say each site selected for inclusion participates in reifying United States exceptionalism, as Tribal Lands receive explicit consideration (at least on paper). In 1978, Ross Worden, chairman of the Amory Committee/Mission Planning Council submitted a nomination form on behalf of the Armory building mostly foregrounding criterion "C," extensively detailing the building's "distinctive characteristics" and "high artistic values." At the time of application, the building is described as being in excellent condition, and in the opening section requesting a physical description of the Armory's appearance, Worden extolls the more gothic conventions of the building, writing, "the exterior of the building is designed to give the harsh impression of a fortress," that "the ground storey is very austere," and a "cruel expanse of rough burnt brick"[79]

During the planning and design stages of the Armory, such details were not without contestation, as the architect's initial sketches turned off many local community members. Because the Armory was popularly conceptualized as a civic building, to be used by both the military and residents as a social center, the façade was almost redesigned due to its "foreboding and warlike character." [80] Be that as it may, any oppositional critique was overridden by the then Commanding General who opined, “The design was very much in

[79] covers the outside. National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for the Armory. Submitted May 31, 1978, and prepared by Ross Worden. Spelling of "storey" in the original.
[80] Ibid.

character with its intended use," giving a militarized aesthetic appreciation of the building which would later be repurposed for alternative and authoritarian sex practices. The "intended use" referred to by the Commanding General is about the building's operationalization as a tactical military outpost in the San Francisco Bay Area, which also fits the first standard of judgment as "having made significant contributions to the broad pattern of our history."

On the local level, efforts were also made for the Armory building to become a San Francisco City Landmark. According to Article 10 of the City Planning Code, "San Francisco City Landmarks are protected from inappropriate alterations and demolitions, with all significant alterations reviewed by the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board."[81] Because the building was already listed with the National Registry, adding the additional layer of landmark status to the Armory was a relatively smooth process. At the national and local level, the Armory building was now officially recognized for its cultural and aesthetic contributions, a tactic of visibility by the residents of the Mission District which now meant the fortress was to be protected, administered, and subjected to a different set of laws and ordinances. Much more detailed than the National Registry, Article 10 lays out a clear awareness of the problems of over/rapid development, stating "that structures, sites and areas of special character or special historical, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value have been and continue to be unnecessarily destroyed or impaired, despite the feasibility of preserving them."[82] This opening/mission statement outlining the purposes of Article 10 demonstrates the political motivations behind preservation and commemorations. Within the details of the legislation,

[81] http://default.sfplanning.org/Preservation/bulletins/HistPres_Bulletin_09.PDF

[82] http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/planning/article10preservationofhistoricalarchite?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:sanfrancisco_ca$sync=1

although any changes require board consideration and approval, the visual aesthetics of the building's exteriority takes priority in any instances demolition, which one section narrowly defines as the removal of more than 25 percent of the surface of a wall that is facing the street.[83] And so, altering the a quarter of the street-facing façade, removing the foreboding character, would be equivalent to the edifice's annihilation; an act of erasure predicated upon the notion that by stripping away the decorative—not functional—qualities of the Armory would be to take away its character, personality, its capacity for evoking affect.

I highlight the processes and effects of state-sanctioned historical preservation on the Armory building as a performative act. Following the well-worn path initially treaded by J.L Austin, and later applied to a variety of discursive formations from law to theatre, speech-act theory posits a performative sentence does not only name or describe, "It indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action."[84] A pivotal shift in how we understand the possibilities of expression and interpretation, Austin's contribution allow us to perceive these illocutionary acts as things to be studied for their effects, not only their meanings. Theories of performance, as they are made legible through language, gesture, and affect, have tended to privilege bodies and subjectivities. Cindy Patton has criticized the emphasis on "the actant-subject," or humanistic beings capable of performance, and has called for a stronger consideration of "institutions and discourses, not as the 'cause' or 'context' of performance, but as another actant in the performative scene."[85] While Patton's argument is within the context of

[83] Ibid.
[84] Austin, J.L. *How to do things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. Pg 6.
[85] Patton, Cindy. "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology." *Performativity and Performance,* edited by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, New York: Routledge, 1995, 173-196.

epidemiology and public health knowledge production, I find it useful in this case because of how we can think of discourses—here historical preservation— as co-performing alongside flesh and blood bodies. This move to expand the boundaries of the performative to non-human and non-sentient objects for the sake of historical preservation resonates with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's concept of "landmarking," a performative instantiation of commemoration as an event, a stage, a marking of time as a point of unfolding.[86] "Landmarking" is a doing; it sires a structure, site, or object into a point of historical, cultural, and aesthetic translation. Where I diverge from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's usage, however, is while her proposition of the term is related to a culture-heritage industry nexus, the Armory serves no such function. Submissions to the National Registry and San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board accentuate the military past of the Armory, but this is not in the name of jingoism, as the option was available to rebuild a more grand training ground for the National Guard but the decision to do so sparked the desire to preserve the building, not the actions or functions as a military stronghold.

The following thirty years after being saved from destruction, the Armory building remained unoccupied and mostly unused. At least once each decade, development submissions proposed the acquisition of the Armory to turn it into housing, typically in the form of market-rate apartments and condos. These plans were met with fierce opposition from the city's fair and affordable housing advocates and would be unsuccessful. During the first dot-com boom, a bid to convert the Armory into a server farm also failed after a protracted protest from the neighborhood residents ensued. Unique to these anti-modernization campaigns (in case you were wondering why the Mission District is rapidly gentrifying) is the Armory's status as a

[86] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Pg 156-157.

historical landmark.[87] Whereas other privately owned and non-distinguished buildings and properties can switch hands or remodel without permission, the Armory's presence on the National Register and as a San Francisco Landmark makes the input of locals resolutely consequential.[88] In 2007, Acworth quietly bought the Armory, "due entirely to the fact that [kink.com] aimed to reuse the building without new construction, and their arts-activity did not require major life-safety upgrades."[89] Interested in maintaining the "creepy feeling" that first attracted him to the abandoned military fortress as well as the limitations upon remodeling without sacrificing preservation, "Acworth has been strict about the types of renovation he has done to the building: he has retained and restored original period details of the Armory such as wainscoting, stone staircases, sweeping corridors, cavern access to Mission Creek, and a massive drill court."[90] And so, the stage was set for kink.com to move in and begin.

San Francisco as a Node of BDSM

When Peter Acworth decided to leave academia and pursue the adult entertainment industry as a full-time venture, he chose San Francisco because he came to regard it as "the world's fetish capital."[91] Annual events such as the Folsom Street Fair and the Up Your Alley Fair mark calendars and a variety of year-round sex clubs, leather suppliers, and specialty sex toy

[87] http://www.armorystudios.com/history/
[88] Historic preservation is not exactly a silver bullet against redevelopment, as violations of building safety codes have been used to raze and displace protected sites. For more on this, see Dawn Mabalon's *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
[89] http://www.armorystudios.com/history/
[90] Cruz, Ariane. *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography.* New York: New York University Press, 2016.
[91] Mooallem, Jon. "A Disciplined Business." *The New York Times Magazine,* April 29, 2007. Accessed online March 2, 2017, at http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29kink.t.html

stores dot maps of the city. In the early 1980s, French philosopher Michel Foucault remarked that "emerging in places like San Francisco and New York what might be called laboratories of sexual experimentation."[92]

In *Global Divas,* Martin Manalansan views New York City as a stage for his league of flâneur *bakla*, asking us to consider how different spaces invite different performances and ways of being (64). Just as these men make and remake the world, they are made and remade—more often than not inequitably and asymmetrically—by the spaces they inhabit. Key to Manalansan's interdisciplinarity and the capacity for his scholarship to slide between drama and anthropology is Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* wherein he argues that walking through a city space is a speech act. Although spatial order organizes how bodies move, the walker "moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements" highlighting the role the walker has in "mak[ing] a selection" (98). de Certeau interprets walking as a space of enunciation, and akin to other forms of vocalization, has a phatic aspect: people do not merely walk just as they do not merely speak. They prance, dance, meander, trollop, drag their feet, and accent their movements.

Sex acts are also acts of enunciation. But, as sexual positions, tempos, and rhythms are found across multiple genres, pornography has found other ways of communicating phatic elements. In *Disidentifications,* Jose Muñoz analyzes the autoethnographic video *Chinese Characters,* by Richard Fung, noting the similarities between ethnographic and pornographic films and their tendency to assign the "colonized, colored, and queer, the status of terminally

[92] Foucault, Michel. *"*Sexual Choice, Sexual Act." *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, edited by Sylvere Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, pp 322-334.

‘other' object(s)" 78). The monotony of representations available at the video porn shop is limited to white "gay clones," so much so it constitutes its own genre (the racially unmarked “gay”), which Manalansan describes as a “porn taxonomy,” that also includes “heterosexual,” “S&M,” and “Oriental” (74). This observation resonates with Muñoz’s discussion of Fung’s film *Chinese Characters* and article, “Looking for My Penis.” Muñoz unpacks “the logic of porn,” which creates an equivalence between the sexual interactions of interracial or non-white bodies and with "other modalities of kink such as bondage, sadomasochism, or shaving," and so, "race *counts* as a different sexual practice (that is, doing sadomasochism, doing Asians). Race, like sadomasochism, is essentially a performance” (88). For both Manalansan and Muñoz, gay Asian American men are discursively produced through power and pornography but are not overdetermined by it, continually fashioning new methods of expressively embodying an otherwise to work on and against racism and homophobia.

Pornography, regardless of genre, is always a performance. What makes kink.com differ from other studios, beyond being an "extreme hardcore" company, are the gestures they make towards transparency; the tour and documentary function together as peeks behind the leather curtain revealing the inner machinations to “how the sausage gets made.” The tour, however, differs markedly from the practices of viewing a documentary because rather than bringing kink.com to you (by having the DVD mailed to your residence or ordering it to be streamed on your viewing device), you are bringing yourself to kink. The tour (or site visit) is a more active and invested form of embodied participation that has been long occurring across many genres of entertainment as a photo-op at a location seen in a movie or film, a site of memorialization of a

significant historical event, or a venue in which various clusters of ephemera are placed together for pedagogical purposes.

Between 2015 and 2017, I attended the ninety-minute tour nine times. Sometimes solo, sometimes accompanied by a friend, on late weeknights and early weekend mornings, and almost every month of the year, I traipsed through the hallways of the Armory touching, smelling, viewing, hearing, and being with the carefully constructed stages of kink.com. The smallest group was composed of five, and the largest was thirty.

Touring the Armory

The tour begins in the kitchen/break room area of the building. Interspersed among sinks, vending machines, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) posters are cases full of bondage gear, information about sexually transmitted infection testing and treatments, and photorealist paintings depicting scenes from the studio's pornographic web content. The breakroom is a threshold between worlds, where the securities of employment and comforts of the domestic welcome those first entering and those finishing the day. The mise-en-scéne announces this is a professional, clean workspace. At the beginning of the tour, a guide corrals everyone together to remind them that the journey they are about to embark on is of a porn studio. The visits do not overlap with shooting schedules, so there are no "hot" sets; however, the tour reminds us the objects encountered are of a sexual nature. Also echoing consent as a central tenet of the companies ethos, tour participants are instructed to ask permission when taking photos if a human is in the frame, making it a rule of the building more so than a rule for the website.

Although the company uses the motto “anywhere can be a porn set,” the majority of sets are located in the basement of the Armory. On every tour, the first set visited is the stage for the aforementioned the website that launched Kink.com, *Hogtied.* Formally a bunker where the National Guard stored ammunition, the wooden walls once providing shelving space are now lined with load-bearing rings to mount people using rope bondage. On screen, the area appears dank, abandoned, and possibly haunted. Splintery. When the visual distance becomes tapered by touch, the smoothness of the wooden planks becomes apparent. The old hardwood floors give way when stepped on but do not crumble, erode, or leave slivers on the skin. In the absence of weight, the "planks" spring back to their original state because they are athletic foam mats. In contrast to the earthiness of the bunker, the next set visited embraces bright lights and high sheen. Inspired by the George Lucas science fiction film *THX 1138*, the stage for *Electrosluts* is composed of sterile whites and pale greys. In contrast to the historical ruination of *Hogtied,* a minimalistic aesthetic temporally situates the room in the future, or occasionally, in an inconspicuous office space. Whereas rope bondage aims to limit mobility, the practices of submission and domination enabled by this setting deprive and heighten sensory engagement. Hideaway storage spaces in the floor allow the submissive's head to be placed underground, denying them sight and foreclosing the possibility of an optical awareness of when the shocks will occur. Forms of restraint are involved, but the electricity is the primary instrument for painful and pleasurable shocks administer via cattle prods, Tasers, e-stim machines, electrified dildos and anal plugs, wires, etc. A tactile connection seemingly undermines the visual narrative the expresses as the walls are soft, covered in fabric, and embraces the skin. I say seemingly because, for all parties involved (those in the scene and those watching from a device), the

sensations arrive via voltage, not blunt force. The guide asks if anyone wants to put their head into the hole and take a picture for their Facebook or Tinder profiles. Almost always, someone will jokingly nudge a friend to go in, which automatically prompts the guide to provide another reminder about the role of consent in everything transpiring in the building. When someone willing decides to crawl in an underground cage, the clumsiness with which they usually move alerts the rest of us how the final product viewable on their websites demanded a lot of precise, graceful movements.

Located across the hallway is the abattoir. Director Van Darkholme was responsible for the vision and production of this a slaughterhouse “wet room” with drains in the floor for water play.[93] As the sink is functional, concrete and metal construct the majority of the room. Slaughterhouses painted by animal rights activist Sue Coe were the inspiration for the design of this meatpacking shed. A short ramp leads to the walk-in freezer. Foam carcasses hang from long rusted chains. They are rough to the touch, and the guide makes sure to remind the group that any oxidized metal present on any of the sets is fake, as Tetanus is not sexy—it leads to lockjaw. Scenes of bovine and swine torture and murder for dietary consumption are the rehearsal scripts for doms/tops/sadists to discipline and punish subs/bottoms/masochists pushing the limits of their capacity for pleasure by transgressing the boundaries of "human." Again, absent from these rooms are the scents of anything the objects in the room index as well as the product used to sanitize. This confounding sensorial experience is more indicative not of what is occurring, but how predetermined narratives structure perception of ruined building materials or soiled flesh. Or how cruelty on display is pleasurable. Even though visual racial

[93] Like actual water. From what I have seen, more traditional iterations of "watersports" are not frequent.

markers are absent, this set should inspire us to think of how Asian Americans become legible to the eye and reconsider how the lack of definite racial difference does not always default to whiteness. What is important to emphasize here is the role of Darkholme's labor and skill for eliciting both pleasure and pain from bodies that is necessary for the creation and instrumentalization of this set.[94]

A group of sets for which the group is allowed to peruse at their leisure includes a padded cell, a police interrogation room, and a medical examination office. Visually echoing sites of knowledge production about sexual others, often performed under the pathologizing guises of authority and regulation, at Kink.com they still function as sites as scrutiny, but produce more pleasurable outcomes. Examination tables, two-way mirrors, and film noir-ish lighting invite modes of sexual role-playing where the fantasy is to exaggerate and embrace power differentials rather than strive for equality or equity. The sets could be for any police procedural. The load-bearing rings found in the bunker are also strategically placed throughout these sets as well, tying everything together. People generally tend to move through these sets quickly as the work environments are no different from the ones in their day-to-day lives.

If the medicine and the law function generally function more in the "public" arena, the apartment studio stage aims to recreate the "private." Set designers built a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen because there was a consensus amongst the directors that there be a "normal" place to have sex. It is the only place in the building you will find a bed. It is perhaps in these sets, however, where the notion of sensation management becomes abstract. Moving beyond the tidy compartmentalization of the senses, limited to five (taste, smell, touch, hearing,

[94] Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense,* writes, “Making possible does not mean causing to begin,” p. 181.

and sight), the feeling of safety or security as a modality of interpreting oneself in relation to other objects becomes the sense-deprived in this domestic space. Content for *TGSurprise* and *TGPussyHunters* are often filmed in this homey interior to heighten the eventual reveal that the guest brought home for sex is transgender. Whereas the abandoned slaughterhouse evokes a sense of doom, the mundane, mismatched IKEA furniture betrays quotidian heteronormative domesticities. Only the iron bars dripping down the side of a stairwell to create a cage/prison cell suggest bondage related activities.

The gym is the only set that prioritizes domination and submission through physical wrestling in comparison to prop-assisted bondage activities. The first thing I notice is the smell, or—more accurately—the lack thereof. As I walk down a few steps into a large room covered in wrestling mats, I anticipate the stench of dried sweat or the lingering scents of oral, anal, or vaginal secretions from the warriors who earlier in the day pummelled their competitors into submission and ecstasy to tickle my nose. Not even a trace of clinical strength cleansing agents activates my olfactory sense. The rows of lights above highlight no signs of wear on the maroon mats on the set of *Ultimate Surrender,* a website on Kink.com where two women wrestle each other. Fighters earn points based off how quickly clothes are torn off or digits enter into various orifices. Our tour guide, porn actor Be Nefarious (who looks like the progeny of Dee Snider and Christina Aguilera), explains the incentive to winning is extra cash, and, the winner gets to top the bottom. "And so," he smirks after flipping back a strand of crispy, crimped hair: "there are no losers in *Ultimate Surrender."* The almost entirely international group (did I mention it was Super Bowl Sunday?) laughs in European and Nefarious soon ushers us upstairs to “The Upper Floor”

where live streaming gangbangs—and brunch—occur weekly in an Edwardian boudoir where the tour comes to an end.

Accent(uating) Race

Roughly half of the tours I went on mentioned the role Van Darkholme played in the envisioning of the abattoir, and no one ever mentioned that he is Vietnamese American. Most directors are not discussed on tour, let alone their racial or ethnic composition, so the omission of Darkholme's Vietnamese heritage as symbolic violence is a critique too easily made and would reify the discussions possible to those claiming a spectrum of racialized-object-essentialism to be recognizable in the first place. To follow this line of thought, however, would more than likely lead back into Orientalist territory further perpetuating the feedback loops of stereotype criticism and representational respectability politics. But what if we opened up more of our senses to interpretation racialized sexualities and sexual labor even when sitting in front of a screen?

Like the docents of the on-site tours, the camera lens organizes our senses to what, how, and for how long we should be looking at something. In 2013, the documentary *Kink* (dir. Christina Voros) premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, offering a behind-the-scenes glance at how the business runs and how pornography is filmed. All aspects of production from casting, set design, boundary negotiation, rehearsals, and directing are interwoven with interviews from producers, performers, directors, and set designers about what BDSM is about and why Kink.com is a great place to work. The camera follows the performers, directors, and set designers down the same hallways as the tours I go on. The director of the gay content is featured prominently in the exposé, and he also happens to be the only Asian/American in the

documentary. In 1998, gay Vietnamese American porn star Van Darkholme was hired to produce, direct, and occasionally model in the site's gay content. When he performs in scenes for kink.com on sites such as *Bound Gods* or *Men On Edge,* he is always the one dominating, although more often he is only heard (through his accented English) in the interview portions beginning and ending each scene. Interestingly, his interviews in the documentary emphasize his upbringing and pathway to the BDSM community, whereas others interviewed focus on aspects of the business or scene production. His notoriety and skill within the BDSM scene got him recruited to kink.com, but his phenotype determines his legibility in *Kink*. As a teenager, he says he fantasized about tying up the straight white jocks at his school and having his way with them. On the surface, this scenario lends itself to the realm of a revenge fantasy, one in which the gay refugee youth in 1980s rural America gets his comeuppance as a racial and sexual other. BDSM is not about "revenge," for Asian/Americans or other minoritized bodies, as that suggests acts of restoration are achieved as a result for the aggrieved party.

Spectactularizing revenge as the animating force for people of color to be involved with BDSM also works to normalized whiteness with BDSM. Ariane Cruz astutely observes that "Race is marginalized in both scholarly literature and popular media about BDSM, contributing to the impression that it is not something black people do, and/or that race is not a salient factor in the power dynamics so essential to the practice," and this resonates with Darkholme's experiences as a gay Asian/American man in the BDSM scene in the documentary or on the tour (10). Darkholme's interview segments in *Kink* do not explore how he interprets or utilizes his racial difference in his practice. Whether tacit or explicit, racialized embodiments cannot be

evacuated, nor is a "colorblind" BDSM practice possible—or even desirable—for many[95]. Not only is Van Darkholme's role in the film as the racial outlier in the pornography and BDSM scene marked by a narrative difference, but the documentary's formal and compositional elements also work to "other" him as well. Towards the start of the film, different directors are introduced to the viewer through *images* of them at work before their voices (from within the diegetic frame of the scene or B-roll interview) are heard giving orders to their staff or responding to an off-camera interviewer. Van Darkholme is the only director heard before he is seen. His Vietnamese accent aurally contrasts with the whiteness of the other directors' American intonations or Acworth's English accent.

Besides his talking head moments, Darkholme's narrative unfolds his authorial vision as he directs a scene involving rope bondage and rough play. In one segment, we witness him chastising the "dom" in the scene for being too gentle. Darkholme then demonstrates how to *make it look as though* more pain is being inflicted, which he says comes from the position of the hand and *the sound* produced at the point of contact. After pounding the dom's chest Darkholme than orders him to mimic back what he just learned, a demand highlighting how quickly Darkholme toggles his roles as director, dom, and teacher. The desired result takes a few tries before it is achieved, demonstrating the limits of passive observation in mastering techniques of bondage, domination, and discipline. Through trading punches, Darkholme is transmitting decades of embodied experience and expertise to the dom to increase his—and

[95] "Race play" in BDSM openly utilizes racial difference in the sessions, often drawing from or recreating traumatic scenes from slave auction blocks, Nazi Germany, or immigration detention centers. For more on black women and race play see Amber Jamilla Musser. *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*; Ariane Cruz. *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*; for Latinas and race play see Juana María Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality and Other Fantasies."

the audience's—awareness of the labor and skill required to reach the liminal threshold of pain, pleasure, and performance. Van Darkholme models the striking position on the dom, demonstrating the precise interplay of knuckle alignment, points of chest contact, force of impact, and speed of retraction necessary to perform the most aggressive looking gesture delivering the least amount of pain with the most audible impact.

Sound produces a sensorial experience with the human body in ways the other senses cannot, but this is not an absolute as overlaps do transpire. Like sound, touch, taste, and smell can traverse the senses. For instance, being able to "taste" an object by how it smells. Visceral responses ranging from mouth-watering enjoyment to retching in disgust first start through the nose. However, these senses all require immediate proximity to the object, and their experience cannot be transported electronically like sound. As a sense of distance, sight can, and often is, technologically mediated (either electronically like cinema, or mechanically like a telescope). Among the five senses, hearing is unique not only for its ability to dissolve spatial categorizations but also in the way in which sound, according to Frances Dyson, is an immersive experience, enveloping human bodies in multidimensional ways. As made possible through the punch or slap, the ontology of forces, the externality of relations, and how these forces are "internalized," or perhaps more specifically—pass through contingent bodies—can be sensed in the form/force of a sonic touch. The haptic quality of the smack functions materially and immaterially on an affective level, synthesizing physics, biology, and emotions. We do not only "hear" with the ears, and the effects of sound felt throughout the entire body. Darkholme is very precise with the choreography. As a veteran dom top—with years of experience—he is not just a choreographer of movement; he is a conductor of sound and a regulator of pain.

In the essay “On the Outside Looking in with a Fist Full of Rope,” Van Darkholme reflects on his pathway into rope bondage and how he began to monetize his passions as a sex worker in Los Angeles. Recounting an encounter with a Hollywood Executive, he writes “Steve was experiencing sex in its purest form…Being bound, nothing was required of him…No time to be self-conscious about his body or his being because he was reduced to a powerless bound object. Steve’s humanity was pushed aside for the moment… In the self-absorbed culture of Los Angeles, the only kinky taboo left for Steve was to offer himself completely to someone like me on the edge of society” (34). Darkholme repeatedly locates himself away from a perceived center or interior within the BDSM circuit based upon whiteness. From a sexual ecology framework, Darkholme’s pleasure is heighted for him and his partner as a “taboo” object. Darkholme’s participation does not require—nor does he yearn for—recognition of (or as) a white liberal human subject. Instead, his affective investments are directed toward spaces, objects, and the making of human bodies into objects.

In this brief snapshot of the Armory's basement, the tour and documentary are more than the visual presentation BDSM porn sets and practices. It is an itinerary of the aesthetic perception of the senses and the sensational. Each room offers a different way of exploring and playing with sensations of varying degrees and intensities, such as the feeling of being shocked, of being wet, of being unsettled or being aroused. Across and within these virtual and material spaces emerges an invitation for a more relational, although not necessarily instantaneous, racialized sexuality. I harken us not to ignore the embodied labor, creativity, and skill going into the crafting of the BDSM event, but also the racialized and queer embodiments enacting these scenes of the sexual encounter. This chapter is not about bringing sexy back, but rather,

reminding us it was—and is—always there.[96] Multisensorial and multimedia immersive spaces organize the next chapter helping us also to understand another ecology working to redefine what we think of and recognize as sexuality and intimacy. Instead of playing with scale the subjects and objects of chapter four modulate intensity. Moving away from subcutaneous shocks and visceral reactions toward surface pleasures and lo-tech amusements, we trade the BDSM dominant leather daddy for an equally queer figure: the gay Asian American geek.

[96] In January of 2017, Acworth sold the Armory, and porn production was going to be moved. Rebranded, all-ages historical tours of the building's military history were to begin in the fall of 2017. As of June 2018, the website is now offline.

Chapter 4: Gay Geek Socialities and 8-Bit Aesthetics: H.P. Mendoza Queers the Asian Art Museum

Flashing colors emanating from a screen the size of an entire wall provide the only light as the synthesized sounds from a 1980s video game arranged into a jaunty tune called "In Ten Years (I'll be cool)" pulse from multiple speakers in each corner, filling the scant spaces left between the tightly compressed bodies, chairs, and tables in the room. The heat emanating from bodies in conjunction with their involuntary respiration and perspiration adds a physical layer to the visual and sonic connections transpiring between us all. I get the feeling this song is unknown to the crowd, as no one is singing along. There are, however, plenty of laughs and gasps of recognition at the song's pop culture references encompassing the lo-to-high-tech (Garbage Pail Kids cards and PC games like King's Quest IV) and compressing scales of the local and transnational (watching the Japanese anime classic *Akira* at the Roxie Theatre in San Francisco's Mission District). This unfamiliarity with the music translates into a lack of muscle memory, so, other than the bobbing heads around me, everyone else is standing still. To avoid being continuously bumped into by the human metronomes around me, I decide to stand on a chair. When two more bodies open the only door to leave, the temporary nuisance of outside noise is accompanied with a taste of brisk ventilation, a frigid suspension reminding me how cold and antiseptic museums frequently are. I adjust the cardstock 3-D glasses loosely fitted over my prescription ones and continue to watch the music video.

Three rules commonly taught regarding one's bodily comportment within the museum space (often uttered by a parent, teacher, or docent before even entering the front doors): First, no touching the exhibits unless explicitly told to do so. Science museums often buck this

trend, but art museums exhibiting one-of-a-kind pieces employ all measures of preservation for their paintings and sculptures; museums want their collections to last. Second, one must not be loud. Use your indoor voice, your library voice, and your six-inch voice as not to disturb the other patrons. Fine art, much like young children, are to be seen and not heard. The third rule is to walk in an orderly line at somewhat of a leisurely, but continuous, pace, parading around the perimeters of the walls clinging to the mounted exhibits. It is a well-rehearsed argument that museums function as a pedagogical space teaching not only a nation's values and history (American exceptionalism, heterosexuality, capitalism), but also how these values become translated at the site of the body inculcating the over-privileging of vision and seeing to the detriment of spontaneous interactions with others, both of which work towards fostering a disinterested manner of posturing at and with aesthetic objects. Of course, we must be careful not to overstate or overdetermine the power of an institution to so easily transpose dominant ideologies, as there does not exist the ideal visitor or viewer and a range of meanings are always in negotiation. What happens though when one of these divergent voices switches from interpreter to curator? How can we begin to understand the museum as a site of queer nightlife?

In conjunction with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) during the week of their annual film festival, on March 17th, 2016, gay Filipino/American musician, filmmaker, and artist H.P. Mendoza launched the San Francisco Asian Art Museum's newest series "TAKEOVER," where for one night a guest artist transforms the entire three-floor space into an indoor block party. Following many of the typical conventions of a fine art establishment, the Asian Art Museum primarily—but not exclusively—exhibits scrolls, paintings, sculptures, and

other enduring forms of material culture, the majority coming from China, Japan, and Korea, with smaller exhibits taking a more regional approach to areas such as South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Occasionally, a show will prominently feature the Philippines or Vietnam but tend not to be from artists whose work is more contemporary or abstract. "TAKEOVER" provides H.P. Mendoza the opportunity to redefine “Asian art” by putting pressure on the limits of the term “Asian” with his own installations and performances which would fall beyond the realms of the museum’s East Asian and “high culture” focus, but also rescript the practices of spectatorship by disrupting the regimes of visuality through the deployment of mediating technologies to emphasize the role of multisensorial embodiment. What does it do to recalibrate the concept of queer nightlife as not solely referring to drag queens, fruit flies, and twinks, but also considering geeks, nerds, and dorks? Occluded by the fabulousness of club kids and stifling heteronormativity of geek-nerd discourse, the elisions produced from these converging lines of inquiry makes possible the figure of the gay geek. Traversing the overlapping and competing discourses of queer nightlife, museum exhibition practices, and geek social worlds, this chapter argues that Mendoza achieves these poetic and political provocations by “taking over” not in a way intending to reproduce imperial logics of racial or sexual normativity by disciplinary force, but through queer(ing) digital aesthetic practices inviting more convivial—and geeky—socialities.

To explore these questions in relation to the more massive thread of sexual ecologies, what follows is a discussion of how queer nightlife is discursively framed by tracing the contours of this area of inquiry and its implications for the bodies involved, such as queer Asian American geeks, but also the potential foreclosures of spatial legibility and how sites such as museums

could be overlooked. It is the argument of this chapter, however, that the liminal, minor figures limned on multiple spheres have the potential to embody and enact geekiness in a manner addressing and foregrounding racialized sexualities. The chapter concludes with an ethnography of this immersive experience, detailing three transmedial and multisensorial performances play with and modulate different iterations of bodies and technologies to co-create and 8-bit sexual ecology.

On Queer Nightlife

"Queer nightlife" as a recent line of academic inquiry intends to capture an array of both historical and contemporary leisure activities and labor practices performed by minoritarian subjects including drag queens, club kids, fruit flies, and voguers in spaces such as bars, nightclubs, cabaret, bathhouses, raves, and ballrooms. As the appending term, "queer" is mobilized within and across these multiple instantiations of "nightlife" to refer to: the transgressive racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies of the participants; the deconstructive critique of heteronormativity potentially transpiring within these sites of sociality; or, the performances of worldmaking and the affective economies of pleasure[97]. Implicit in the description but more explicit in the application, an intimation of "sex/uality" charges the operationalization of queer when modifying nightlife, setting up the expectations for etiquette, demands of bodily comportment, and oddly, narrowing the conditions of possibility for what gets recognized—or even thought of— under the rubric of "queer nightlife." As the sexier term, "queer" is weighted more heavily for the means of producing political, theoretical, social, and aesthetic interventions. Whether or not it is "queer," "nightlife" demands further explication as

[97] Buckland, Fiona. *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

a performative object of knowledge production since it is often assumed to be a given, a more passive temporal marker of seemingly dormant spaces waiting to be animated by queerness.

"Nightlife" in its colloquial usage, however much the activities are improvised and open to a multiplicity of possibilities, indexes a highly organized industry transpiring in a specific economy, like bars, and dance clubs as sites of leisure, labor, and belonging are typically discussed in explorations of queer nightlife, in distinction from the often unnamed "day life" which is assumed to contain the 9-to-5 shift, or "straight time." In the introduction to *Everynight Life,* Celeste Delgado and José Muñoz recognize the "potential proximity of pleasure and political life," thereby refusing sites of "play" from serious consideration. Further explicating on Muñoz and Delgado's idea in his book *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret,* Shane Vogel writes, "Everynight life, then, extends this quotidian sphere of the everyday into the nighttime, delimiting a domain where minoritarian subjects enact theories and practices of resistance and social transformation" (17-18). Social justice and politics do not "clock out" at the end of the standard workday.

Much essential and generative theorizing in LGBT studies and Queer of color critique attends to the "queer" in "queer nightlife" with an emphasis on the worldmaking possibilities of sexual minorities. Although differentially experienced as utopian for those included in these nightclubs, others are denied entry based upon race, class, and gender performance. As geographic and affective nodes of contestation, bars and nightclubs disaggregate and reveal varying levels of power and privilege distributed unevenly amongst the various factions under the queer umbrella. These schisms manifest more often as a divide between gay, white, mainstream clones and queers of color resisting, negotiating, or succumbing to racialized

performances of white hegemonic masculinity. So as many scholars note, while nightclubs and bars potentially function as spaces of transgressive sociality, they simultaneously are the arenas of racial harm, police surveillance, and gentrification[98].

Studies of "queer nightlife" tend to focus on the role of dance, music, drag, disco, and erotic encounters as transgressive gestures against heteronormativity, but I want to spotlight the acts of labor producing "queer nightlife" as a condition of possibility, or even as smoothly unified locus where events take place. Also, except for anonymous sexual encounters (which I am bracketing out as hooking up is not limited to an industry or temporality), the bar, nightclub, or ballroom is centralized. These brick and mortar establishments function as hubs of political organizing, stages for drag performance, and zones of interracial and intergenerational contact. In *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone,* sociologist Martin Levine maps the contours of gay ghettos in urban centers during the 1970s and 1980s as densely dotted with institutions ranging from "sexual boutiques, to bars, bathhouses, and the ubiquitous gyms," all of which worked together to develop, sustain, and privilege a "hypermasculine code" (5). Although the narrative of gay male life Levine illustrates of "gay clones" has been directly and indirectly critiqued for its suffocating sense of whiteness, mythologizing of the urban gay mecca, and denigration of femininity, these discourses are sedimented into queer nightlife.

Despite experiencing massive levels of racism and discrimination from gay white clones within these spaces of queer nightlife, many queers of color use ballroom drag competitions, dance clubs, and cabaret stages as silos to perform resistance and embody critique, if even for a

[98] Ramon H. Rivera-Severa, *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012)

few hours, against the daily and sustained violences of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. Extolling dance clubs as relational queer worlds in her book, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making,* Fiona Buckland writes, "Any queer dance floor is a node in which many weaving, layered maps meet. Any one of these maps is part of a queer lifeworld: a mobile theatre or map of common relations" (3). Pinpointing the dance floor as a "node" provides a sense of dynamism to a geographically situated space, implying the dance floor is the result of intertwining intensities but also a point of embarkation for other events to occur. As a cross-section of "layered maps," suggests interactions of maps interfacing with one another, but that does not imply their easy fit or proper alignment. Buckland is aware "not everyone meets on the same dance floor," as there are differing scales of intention amongst the patrons who go—and those who do not go at all—that is largely dependent upon "economies of desirability" (4). One does not have to be a "gay clone" anymore, but there still exists an array of disciplinary norms metered out against different forms of cultural, social, and physical capital. More benign attributes such as knowing the latest music or dance moves are attainable, but immutable factors, such as phenotype, continue in a more invidious fashion through justifications of "preference."

What does “queer nightlife” mean in the context of for those who find the clone archetype unattainable, or more importantly, undesirable? In Harlem during the early 20th century, Marlon Bailey writes, “Black people who did not conform to gender and sexual mores of the time forged discrete spaces of gender and sexual fluidity, participated in transgressive forms of gender and sexual expression, …and developed new performance styles for pleasure and survival” (10). Cabaret clubs functioned as nodes of rebellion against the policing of

racialized sexualities compounded by prohibition, providing patrons and performers safety from the vice squads and also sites of affirmation and creativity. Bailey highlights the antecedents of ballroom culture to discuss how spaces of refuge continue to be found in queer nightlife by black and brown people. Queer of color performance studies scholars Jeffrey McCune and Ramon Rivera-Servera note the queer worldmaking potentialities of nightclubs for gay Black and Latino men as spaces where race and sexuality are not compartmentalized or denigrated.

In *Global Divas,* Martin Manalansan refers to gay bars as "the quintessential space for gay identity and culture everywhere," but also argues for the acknowledgment of difference within gay nightlife as Asian American men do not share the same utopic experiences as other gay and queer men of color[99]. Or to be more specific, the experiences heard more loudly are filtered through a mutually imbricated racialized-gendered-sexualized lens; they are made legible through lack or negation. Oral histories about the club scene during the 1970s and 1980s illustrate how the emergence of the "gay clone" structured the forms of legibility feasible for gay Asian American men. Ernest Wada, a gay Japanese American man, living in Los Angeles, recalled how he felt that "the whites set the standards of everything in this life. Whether we realize it or not, we tend to follow those standards and emulate them, which was no different in the gay circle at that time."[100] Wada identifies how hegemonic whiteness works to impel Asian Americans, regardless of sexual orientation, to adopt modes of comportment and sociality even if these tactics work against their interests. For those who yoke their sense of

[99] *Global Divas,* page 3.
[100] Eric Wat. *The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, p. 49.

belonging to an imagined, unified community (in this instance gay and queer men), the denial of or differential inclusion is attributed to racism, a diagnosis I fully support. However, in the naming of racism as *the* issue to contend with through a white-nonwhite binary, there has been a tendency to downplay or omit agonistic tensions stemming from differences informed by but not solely based upon race.[101]

Getting Geekier

Since the advent of smartphone technology in the adolescence of the 21st century and its rapid proliferation and accessibility, apps such as Grindr, Jack'd, and Scruff have altered the circuits of queer intimacy. The deployment of electronic mediation for meeting other queer folks for short or long-term encounters is nothing "new," as the "personals" section on the back of newspapers and voicemail accounts served as the low-tech precursors to internet chat rooms and message boards or digital community bulletin board websites like Craigslist**;** however, the portability of a smartphone combined with each apps' usage of geographical location services to other active users within proximity provides a different line of relation than web 1.0 and bars and nightclubs offer. With the heightened sense of communicative instantaneity and the ability to transform any place into gay cruising spot within the app's virtual radius, the gay millennial's foray into queer nightlife is more likely to transpire at the tips

[101] C. Winter Han's *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America* (New York: NYU Press, 2015) is an ethnographic exploration of gay Asian American men in Seattle who are still stuck in rice-queen/potato-queen drama, while still holding onto many of the notions of respectability.

of their fingers than entry to a bar, much to the lament of many club promoters and bar owners[102].

Apps like Grindr require the creation of a user profile but do not necessitate complete or accurate information on any of their categories for participation. Selections for age, weight, height, ethnicity, and other biometric measurements are juxtaposed alongside other options to select one's relationship status, what it is they are "looking for" on the app, and their "tribe." An array of gay archetypes based upon grooming habits, body size, hair distribution, gender identity, serostatus, age, and fetish, the "choices" (with the exception of "not specified") available for tribal affiliation work to nuance how "gay" is operationalized but also narrow the bandwidth of legibility by limiting the field to the following twelve selections: bear, clean-cut, daddy, discreet, geek, jock, leather, otter, poz, rugged, trans, and twink. The majority of these groupings have been in circulation long before dating apps and websites, and despite their attempted abstraction towards "lifestyle choices," are heavily racialized, classed, and gendered. Sharif Mowlabocus's study of Gaydar, a gay male dating and sex website in the United Kingdom, includes a competition the site held called "Sex Factor" where profiles could be voted "the hottest" in a variety of categories similar to the Grindr tribes. Mowlabocus found the Sex Factor categories mirrored genres of gay pornography or recently released gay porn titles, demonstrating how discourses of gay pornography make possible and foreclose at the level of software programming the "vocabulary through which the digital self is written into being."[103] Extending the logic of this argument, we can also observe similar impacts on brick and mortar

[102] John Lucas, "Gay Nightlife Is Dying and Grindr and Gentrification Are to Blame," *Vice*, July 27th, 2016, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/lgbtq-gay-nightlife-is-dying-and-its-all-our-fault
[103] Sharif Mowlabocus, *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010)

establishments known for attracting particular crowds (the "leather" bar) or hosting themed specialty nights (a nightclub might have a "jock" night with go-go dancers in athletic gear).

Within this brief sketch of the pornography-dating profile-nightlife entanglement is an outlier: the figure of the gay geek. Alongside "nerd," the Grindr tribe of geek does not have an accompanying genre of gay pornography nor are there weekly—or even monthly—"geek" nights at clubs or bars[104]. These elisions are not surprising, given the term nerd conjures "a pasty white guy wearing thick glasses, floods, and a plastic pocket protector while espousing mathematical and scientific minutiae,"[105] and "Asia and men of Asian descent [as] conflated with undersexual nerdiness,"[106] thereby naturalizing a presence on a smartphone application but being almost impossible to imagine in explicitly social and sexual situations. While the white racialization of the geek is tied to a failure to aspire towards hegemonic masculinity, Ron Eglash notes in his landmark article, "Race, Sex, and Nerds: From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters" that the "compulsory cool of black culture is mirrored by a compulsory nerdiness for orientalized others such as Middle Eastern groups, groups from India, and Asian Americans."[107] While a handful of gay porn titles feature "geeks" on their box covers, it is the accouterment of glasses performing geekiness. One critic writing about Asian American William Hung on the singing competition *American Idol* describes him as the embodiment of the "Asian nerd" par

[104] A search on gaydvdempire.com yields a handful of titles such as *Chic Geek*, *Smart Asses*, and *I Need Daddy's Seed,* all of which feature on their box cover a younger, slender, white male wearing black plastic framed glasses. Also, in 2015 a club in West Hollywood hosted a "Geek Pride" event in July for cosplayers, gaymers, anime lovers and the like.
[105] Christine Quail, "Nerds, Geeks, and the Hip/Square Dialectic in Contemporary Television," *Television & New Media* 12:5 (2011): 460-482
[106] Kenneth Huynh and Benjamin Woo, "'Asian fail': Chinese Canadian Men Talk About Race, Masculinity, and the Nerd Stereotype," *Social Identities* 20:4-5 (2014): 363-378
[107] Ron Eglash, "Race, Sex, and Nerds: From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters," *Social Text* 20:2 (2002): 49-64

excellence: "wearing a Hawaiian print shirt, slicked-back hair, buck teeth, and thick glasses."[108] Geeks and glasses are so tightly sutured that the author imagines glasses on Hung when *they are not even there.* Dominant discourses in both popular and academic presses of the reiterate heteronormativity and whiteness, thereby eliding the potentialities of queer geeks of color and the vibrant socialities emerging from embracing the seemingly abject performativity of geekiness. Rather than prolong the Sisyphean struggle for recognition or acceptance into the hegemonic fold, what if we explored other forms of sociality and leisure?

Exhibiting Gay Brown Geekiness

Best known for the independent films *Colma!: The Musical* and *Fruit Fly* (the only Asian American musicals ever following the 1961 film *Flower Drum Song*)—both of which center the lives of queer Filipino/Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area—Mendoza's low-fi, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic and queer sensibilities seem agonistic to the museum's predilection towards ancient wares, fine art, and tacit expectations for a refined sense of decorum. His filmic, musical, and artistic productions and performances highlight capricious misfits on the fringes of multiple spheres: the gay geeks for whom spaces of queer nightlife offer as much opportunity for the feeling of belonging as they do the anxieties of awkward silences and dances; the young Filipino/Americans who are disinterested in hip-hop, tinikling, or other aspects of Filipino/American youth culture filtered through Pilipino Culture Nights; the working class artists who stretch budgets as creatively as they do the possibilities and potentialities for their self-distributed works, parlaying any and all alternatives to the MFA-industrial-complex too often over determining what the qualifications of art are and who gets to designate what is

[108] Quail, 473

sayable, even thinkable, as such. To be clear, however, I do not intend to diffract and present as singularities Mendoza's ethnic, sexual, or class-based affinities or to deny their points of overlap and convergence. Instead, I aim to make clear the clusters of contingencies he works with, not as an effort towards an identitarian claim to inclusion, but instead to chip away at the museum's racial logics.

Making clear the political stakes at play in the curation a minoritarian exhibition and what happens to the bodies once they are displayed is an ethical question on the minds of some Asian American Studies scholars. Writing about the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California, cultural critic LeiLani Nishime harkens us to be vigilant about ensuring that "Asian American museums must transgress museum rituals that most fully confirm a white, male citizenry."[109] Her incisive critique is twofold: first, questions of the audience must be addressed if the space is to be one supporting claims to equity and social justice. The inclusion of a marginalized group or previously silenced issue does not always signal a sign of progress or goodwill. Second, the "museum rituals," or how exhibition spaces choreograph bodies, should not recreate the embodied viewing practices reinscribing vulnerable populations as "the other."

Konrad Ng, former Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Asian Pacific American Center, addresses the role of digital technologies in revolutionizing the sites, spaces, and styles of integrating popular culture into Asian American museum curatorial work as a way to enhance the experience of particular exhibitions as well as democratize participation in the

[109] LeiLani Nishime, "Communities on Display: Museums and the Creation of the (Asian) American Citizen," *Amerasia Journal* 30:3 (2004/2005): 40-60.

building of archives and access to exhibits through social media and video platform websites. More important than "digitizing archives," however, is how we can "[use] the digital to speak about race in the ways that people of color use the digital to create meaning."[110] "Digitization" is a term often used to describe the process of electronically scanning documents, of turning ephemera into data. Ng sees the potentiality in how museums are being modified by the digital, and by proxy, race. His thoughts about the necessary restructuring of what typically falls under the rubric of proper museum curatorial practices through the expansion of digital technologies are in line with (albeit in more of an avatar format) Nishime's consideration of altering the embodied kinetic performances, or rituals, of brick-and-mortar museum visitors. H.P. Mendoza's "TAKEOVER" aligns with their analyses of race, technology, and spaces of museum work, but also invites a further consideration to how sexuality and gender augment and recalibrate notions of being Asian American geekiness, the roles of sex/objects, and the power of emplacement.

As this was a one-time event, the following observations and analyses are drawing from my own experience attending the takeover. As this dissertation explores the role technologies and objects play in reinstating the sensorial to the Asian/American sexual body, I knew beforehand I would be more attuned to how Mendoza, as a multimedia artist, would incorporate more sonic and haptic ways of knowing, being, and experiencing embodied aesthetic encounters formed and informed by visuality. Promiscuously drawing on methodologies from performance studies, feminist anthropology, and queer theories of affect,

[110] Konrad Ng, "Online Asian American Popular Culture, Digitization, and Museums," Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha Oren, eds., *Global Asian American Popular Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

what follows are three snapshots detailing the tour, exhibition, and musical performances Mendoza curated as part of his takeover, paying close attention to the ways in which embodiment and the senses are emphasized more so than the language or text used to describe an object. In doing so, I am more concerned with what these objects are doing to reconstitute the spaces of the museum and the bodies coming into contact with them over what each mode of participation means[111].

Super Museum Hunt!

Part and parcel of the normative museum experience is the docent-led tour, wherein a single guide performs as the "expert," transmitting knowledge and directing groups of people through a series of exhibits. Docents tend to be human, although many museums offer self-guided audio tours using special listening devices designed to play a pre-recorded message when activated in proximity to a particular painting or sculpture. H.P. Mendoza riffs off the format by incorporating the viewer's smartphone as a gaming console, turning the traditional gallery tour into a scavenger hunt. Reminiscent of 8-bit video games from the 1970s and 1980s, *Super Museum Hunt* transforms the viewer into a player tasked with solving riddles relating to the various works within the museum. In order to answer the questions asked by "OScar," a floating blue orb voiced by Mendoza, players must navigate the exhibits, closely examining images on paintings or vases and carefully readings placards providing background on the accompanying piece. As players move through the terrain of the game—and concurrently, through the museum space—rewards are unlocked such as songs or movie clips from

[111] Some key texts include D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), and Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

Mendoza's oeuvre. While the museum is being "queered" through the interfacing of exhibitions through the smartphone apparatus, the queer mobile device is also being "geeked" as the hunt is for a painting of a peach and not what a peach emoji might stand in for on a gay dating app[112].

The avatar's name, "OScar," also refers the lingua franca of computers, as the capitalized "OS" is shorthand for "operating system." As OScar notes during an introductory screen before gameplay commences, he is "taking over" your phone throughout the game as he sasses, "until you A: win the game, or B: give up…Either way, I'm only in your phone for a short while." By highlighting how his occupation over your mobile device—your way of seeing as well as communicating—is only temporary, OScar echoes a similar sentiment to the night overall: The "take over," in contradistinction to the paintings, artifacts, and sculptures curated from the main collection, is an ephemeral event. Noting the imbricated relationship between new media, race, sexuality, and technology, Kara Keeling identifies "Queer OS" as practice, project, and politics that "understands queer as naming an orientation toward various and shifting aspects of existing reality and the social norms they govern, such that it makes available pressing questions about, eccentric and/or unexpected relationships in, and possibly alternatives to those social norms."[113] OScar, as the avatar of Mendoza, and more broadly, *Super Museum Hunt* employs the smartphone as a platform to augment the practices of perception and engagement typically codified by the museum apparatus. Although the game states it is an "alternative reality," I argue it functions more to alter reality by using the handheld screen to make the space participatory and access the senses in a multimodal manner. In place of a

[112] A "peach emoji" is often used to represent a human posterior.
[113] Kara Keeling, "Queer OS," *Cinema Journal* 53:2 (Winter 2014): 152-157.

didactic docent, users are met with a playful game show host who blends the visual, sonic, and the haptic on and through the smartphone. Temporal demarcations are jettisoned, as the concept of "museum time," in this instance premised upon the start times of docent-led tours, is rendered obsolete as anyone may begin to play the game at any time. Instead of relying upon the well-treaded territory of Filipina/o/Americans as perpetually late, or, a queering of temporality premised upon what is considered "straight," the queer OS undisciplines time by allowing for multiple points of departure.

Once the game begins, OScar's voice becomes the background track to images of whatever piece of art is in question. The answers to the clues involve the histories and uses of food, significant celebrations or rituals, and other modes of embodied socialities. Within the realm of the game, the museum artifacts become transmedia objects as they transcend their primary role as one of exhibition into landmarks on a pathway towards game achievement and completion, especially as for the player/viewer, they are first made aware of the piece through the game screen. *Super Museum Hunt* navigates players through the museum's second and third floors, zigzagging back, forth, and across different epochs and art forms of ancient Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and South Asia displays. Similar to a docent-led tour, a pre-planned itinerary of requisite stops is already laid out within the game design with guidance toward particular visual and verbal cues. The mode of engagement diverges, however, as the objects in the museum are not passively looked at but actively probed and investigated. Unless playing solo, teams composed of friends, family members, and co-workers can play off a single device, creating a consistent movement of bodies calibrating around a single screen and then diffusing in search of the next piece of information to collect. Unlike the structured tour, such scattered

and unruly explorations can result in diverse experiences even in the same groups. In a queering of the self-contained model of a group, however, are chance opportunities to bump into and cross paths with others whom proper museum boundaries and bodily comportments would discourage. On the night of the takeover, answers were being screamed across different galleries to anyone who can hear, resulting in teams being bigger at question five than at question one. As an electronically mediated amusement, *Super Museum Hunt* disrupts the visual practices of the tour process. By rerouting eyes and ears away from the oscillation between docent and artifact, and the distracted, isolating gaze of the visitor locked onto their phone, *Super Museum Hunt* engages more fully with the embodied socialities within the space visually, sonically, and haptically.

Seeing in Stereo

Located on the first floor of the museum in a room tucked away in the corner is the 3D Lounge, a repurposed resource center where the exhibit *Anaglyph: The Stereoscopic 3D art of H.P. Mendoza* provides visitors with a different type of immersive experience. Whereas *Super Museum Hunt* facilitated movement from room-to-room and exhibit-to-exhibit, the lounge provides seating, so the viewer is stationary while the visuals and sounds rotate. It is as though one has stepped right into a diorama, an effect made more potent by the clear glass doors allowing passersby to see the installation also being viewed by others. The room is entirely dark other than the lights and colors emanating from a projector turning one of the walls into a giant canvas. Further emphasizing the role of scale, the sound is thunderous; this is a space commanding your audiovisual attention. On the left side is a menu with the titles of music

videos Mendoza created from a selection of his albums are on autoplay and repeat throughout the night, looping a continual invitation into the worlds he imagines.

Mendoza's style of music is a formulation of electro-pop synthesized by way of a 1980s arcade game. The instrumentation of 8-bit technologies to produce sonic compositions is known as "chiptunes," an aesthetic categorization, cultural practice, and technological innovation media scholars Kevin Driscoll and Joshua Diaz note was "born out of technical limitation."[114] The lo-fi sonic aesthetic heavily influences the visual form of the music videos which are more of an homage to a creative influence than they are a nostalgia or feeling of longing. Extending Mendoza's DIY and gay geek sensibilities, chiptunes are a wink at an earlier mode of "hacking," or repurposing and maximizing the potential of an object. The music video "Yamanote," the soundtrack for an eponymous fictional video game named after a Tokyo train line, is modeled after a 2D side-scrolling video game where a fighter jet defends the citizens of Japan from alien invaders. Undulations of the buzzing square wave bass align with the jet's maneuvering away from the wily horde of digitized monsters with tentacles above a rapidly accelerating train car. During the bonus round, chirping arpeggios alert us to the celebratory confirmations to the acquisition of power-up icons which take the shape of Mendoza's partner Mark del Lima. Rewriting the scripts of heteromasculinist video game plotlines, in this rendering of an intergalactic attack, it is the queer bonds that function as the fuel and reward for saving the day. The frenetic soundtrack and dynamic visuals are amplified by the darkness of the room, and as it was crowded most of the night, it was quite warm.

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[114] Kevin Driscoll and Joshua Diaz, "Endless Loop: A Brief History of Chiptunes," *Transformative Works and Cultures* No.2 (2009): http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/96/94

Movement occurs in this exhibit by way of retro 3D glasses, altering the capacities for observation and experience by achieving a sense of depth perception. Without the donning of a mediating technology—in this case, the thin cardboard glasses' frame with a thin layer of red plastic for the left eye and blue plastic for the right—the images projected are a flat, blurry mélange of twinned shapes requiring heavy lifting to be done by both the eyes and the brain. First emerging in London during the mid-19th century, the stereoscope emerged as a prevalent mode of entertainment, as visitors were enthralled by the "immersive and embodied, yet virtual, viewing experience" that seemingly transported the viewer to other places[115]. Unfortunately, it required lifting as the viewer held the stereoscope up to their faces to see through the lenses, which would then combine the two nearly identical images on the other end of the device creating the illusion of depth and a single image[116]. Eventually, the cheap 3D glasses as we now know them came into existence allowing for a cheaper and less bicep intensive method for viewing anaglyph images. I sketch out briefly the history and function of 3D glasses and the possibilities they engendered for not only viewing but for *feeling* as though one was being reached out to and touched by whatever images were being projected for asserting how Mendoza brings back an older form of technology into the Asian Art Museum. Again, I am cautious in ascribing the reintroduction of inexpensive 3D glasses from kitschy monster B-movies and comic books as a sign of arrested development or a queer

[115] John Plunkett, "Depth, Colour, Movement: Embodied Vision and the Stereoscope," James Lyon and John Plunkett, eds., *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).
[116] Pagan Kennedy, "Who Made Those 3-D Glasses?" *The New York Times Magazine* (December 14, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/magazine/who-made-those-3-d-glasses.html

sentimentality, despite their invocation as "retro," since no one seems to think admiring a thousand-year-old tapestry would be a throwback.

The brightly colored yellow cardboard glasses are decorated with giant earphones, a linkage towards how listening is integral to seeing. Alongside the music videos is another series of stereoscopic clips called "Both Eyes Open" which a placard outside the doors explained as "a 3D meditation on the identities of mixed race couples." Although "mixed race" is a term more commonly used to describe the children of interracial couples, it was the only place within the museum explicitly integrating multiple races and ethnicities. In each of these videos, interracial same-sex and heterosexual couples sit side-by-side facing the audience as they share a story related to the challenges, surprises, and pleasures of being in a romantic relationship with a person of another race. One of the couples discussed what foods they cook at Thanksgiving, and for the most part, the narratives leaned toward the more mundane elements of a relationship.

At one point, I had to remove the 3D glasses to adjust the glasses I usually wear. Upon looking at the video without 3D glasses, the people did not only look blurry, but were integrated, each sharing one half of the other's face. Putting the 3D glasses back on not only closed the distance between the screen projections and myself but put into clear relief the racialized and queered bodies which would be imperceptible to those only walking by. One could push back that I was surrounded by queer and raced bodies, and of course, anyone walking by would see the dark outlines of a large crowd. But as an exhibit at the Asian Art Museum, it was an old-school technology and the immersion into a virtual space compounded

by the flickering illuminations and waves of sound washing over us that I, as a viewer, was implicated in the act of watching, listening, and feeling *with* the other people in the room.

From Screen to Scene to Screen

Unlike the avatar or filmic representations of Mendoza, the only scheduled portions of the night were the musical performances by Mendoza himself who was singing in the flesh as one of the many instantiations of Mendoza scattered throughout the exhibits. Later, he brought in cast members from his different films to perform live versions of beloved hits from the films *Colma! The Musical* and *Fruit Fly.* For one night, the grand Samsung Hall, complete with marble flooring and giant columns lining the walls, where San Francisco's elite celebrates weddings and corporate events, was turned into a low-key, intimate space with Mendoza and his pals in jeans and t-shirts, flooding the space with their ballads about cemeteries and jaunty tunes reflecting about life as a film while the credits are rolling.

During the mini-concert, Mendoza, L.A. Renigen, and Mike Curtis, the stars of *Fruit Fly*, perform the song "Fag Hag," in which a gay white male sing-splains (singing while explaining) to a heterosexual Filipina/American at a gay nightclub the wide variety of synonyms for a straight woman whose group of friends is comprised of primarily gay men. Blurring the lines of film, concert, and karaoke, the muted scene in which the song is originally performed is projected onto a large screen while the actors sing in the hall. Towards the end of the film scene, the lyrics split the screen with the actors, effectively converting the screen to be watched into one that facilitates orality. The song initiates its conclusion with the relational possibilities of fag-hag-ness, implicating the room by exclaiming, "EVERYBODY: Fag hag, homo honey, fruit loop, Goldilocks, faggot lover, fairy princess, hag along, fag whore, bummer dummer, sticker licker,

queer steer, poofter pousse, sissy slut, swish fish, fancy nancy, fag hag!" The spatial logics of the museum, when confronted with practices of a concert, produce a conflicted reaction as about only half of those present sang along, while the other half continued watching, occasionally laughing, as the litany of queer friendships bounced off the walls and ceiling, reaching their ways into the hallways of the Japanese Tearoom exhibit. In *Fruit Fly*, each name (although it is by no means exhaustive) is hollered by a different heterosexual woman identifying her bonds of affinity toward and with gay men and diagrams a different taxonomy of gay man/straight woman permutation of animal, vegetable, and mineral life coexisting in these worlds.

In *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America,* performance studies scholar Christine Balance provides us with the useful analytic of the "musical scene," noting that it is "a network of relationships, a social ecosystem where every member is necessary despite the overwhelming idea that their purpose emanates from the scene's musicians. A music scene consists of all those involved in the making, distribution, and consumption of music."[117] Balance's definition is useful to think through in relation to Mendoza and friend's performance because while perhaps centering a singular figure as commencing the event, the creation of a "scene" involves the affective attachments and investments of a variety of people. I extend her deployment of ecosystem to include objects, built environments, and non-human animals. "Scenes," however, are not narrowly place-based and emerge from the bodies (widely construed in my iteration of the term) that are present at the site of lyrical, rhythmic, and melodic happening. Following this logic, three musical scenes simultaneously co-exist: the one being screened in the diegetic space of the film *Fruit Fly*, the transpiring within Samsung Hall,

[117] Christine Bacareza Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)

and lastly, the musical scene conjured during the lyric “everybody,” transporting the site of gay nightlife—the club—into the Asian Art Museum as people on both sides of the screen sing along to the chorus of fag hags.

The final musical performance of the night extends the reaches of the musical scene to the entire night. Integrating the style of animation from *Super Museum Hunt,* the 3D glasses from *Anaglyph*, and continuing to perform live while a video backdrop projects a stereoscopic portal provides a welcome—or possibly an exit—to another world. Giant balloons were brought out for the outro, and the audience turned co-performers hop around the room volleying the neon balloons into the air and ensuring they never reach the ground in an approximation of geek choreography. There is no definite directionality to where people should be looking. Bodies are moving in an uncoordinated fashion, following only the barrage of balloons floating around, creating multiple centers to which people are oriented. It is no longer a requirement to face the performer, as the standard proscenium stage comportment has dissolved. The epic extraterrestrial chiptunes blasting through the ring of speakers aurally engulfs the space, becoming the soundtrack for the fun, low-tech toy of playing with balloons.

H.P. Mendoza's takeover of the Asian Art Museum is an exercise in what happens when gay Filipino/American geek culture flirts with an institution of memorialization, exhibition, and power. The entanglements of technology, attention to embodiment, and reorganization of the museum apparatus from a didactic to a participatory scene of encounter all typify Mendoza's more queer approach to curatorial practice. Feminist scholar Jennifer Tyburczy offers in her book, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display,* a praxis in response to the dominant ideologies perpetrated by museums she identifies as a “queer curatorship,” which

"stages alternative spatial configurations for two distinct purposes: to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors and to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures."[118] As the ways in which bodies are choreographed through museum space and the objects they encounter more often than not tacitly reinforce the ideologies of proper racial, gendered, and sexual citizenship, or, confirm one's allegiance to normativity by starkly contrasting "the other" as a special exhibit one can encounter, a queer curatorship charts out the tactics necessary to rupture—or at least relax—the firm grasp of respectability politics. Not everyone danced, played with the balloons, or sang along, but nobody left or turned away, suggesting that while the shift may not be immediate, the possibilities and potentialities of queer curatorial practices sparked. Mendoza, a triple threat of director-musician-writer, traverses the domains of representation, exhibition, and performance, accenting Tyburczy's formulation of queer curatorship by queering not only the layouts of exhibits but also the embodied practices of perceiving and interpreting these objects. As both Konrad Ng and Kara Keeling astutely note, technology— in regards to racialized and queer modes of being—alters the capacities for being rendered legible, and Mendoza's deployment of gay geek aesthetic practices demonstrated how technology in/for nightlife—especially in a rapidly gentrifying gay/tech mecca like San Francisco—for even one night, can be with one another to not only see but to hear and feel geeky. Throughout the body chapters, sexual ecologies have been explored within the public spheres. In the epilogue, I return to the domestic space this dissertation opened with to explore how *anything* has the potential to be a sex/object and become a conduit for intimacy.

[118] Jennifer Tyburczy, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Chapter 5: Prosthetic Intimacies: Sexing Queer via Rico Reyes' *AC/DC*

Recently, I attended a panel at an Ethnic Studies conference which gathered established and emerging scholars from all over the United States to share work claiming to be the future of Filipino American studies[119]. Collectively, the panelists were examining questions of subjectivity, aesthetics, activism, memory, and colonization through literature, performance, film, and other mediums of art. Each object of cultural production discussed produced for me great heights of excitement; however, they were quickly countered with disappointing lows as one by one every talk at some point pondered—with the utmost sincerity—"what does it mean to be Filipino American?" Flashbacks of my youth returned me to noisy coffee shops where born-again Filipino American college students espoused bad spoken word poetry, often asking the same identity-based question using the metaphor of a "brown mango revolution" while a live artist painted scantily clad Filipino women on Acuras and Hondas with "Pinoy Pride" spray painted at the bottom. If the content related to an urgent social issue, say, a multinational corporation preventing unionization, a bloodied version of the company's product would be on display. For art to be political, to serve the purpose of galvanizing others towards social justice ends, it had to be pedantic. "This is so nineties," was the only thought in my head for the duration of the panel. However, for many of the Filipino American spaces I have been in, the utilitarian rationale for art was to be a representative mirror of an oppressed and silence community that leads to an increase in social, cultural, and political participation and recognition. These artists and performers mean well, but for their desired intentions to be

[119] It was not in San Diego.

recognized by their audiences requires enacting violent limitations on what Filipino Americans can be and do.

Admittedly, my generalization of 1990s Filipino American politically informed artistic production (and the residue still clinging to many) is sweeping, one queer Filipino American performance artist, Rico Reyes, stands out for his more abstract and nuanced projects, namely his video AC/DC (1995), in which he engages in a multiplicity of sex acts with domestic appliances while in various states of undress. Other Filipino Americans engaging with film and video such as Celine Parreñas and Ernesto Foronda were also creating insightful and provocative projects on gender, sexuality, and colonialism, but were always in frank dialogue with Philippine-Spanish-American colonial and imperial histories. This chapter is not in favor of valorizing ahistorical cultural productions nor is it suggesting we avoid overt messages of imperialism should. Instead, this chapter is following the call of Performance Studies scholar José Muñoz to focus "on what acts and objects do in a social matrix rather than what they might possibly mean," so that videos like AC/DC, which do not romanticize the past and are in fact future-oriented, are not evaluated on how accurately they represent Filipino American people, but instead are considered for what possibilities are opened up and how alternative ways of resisting, hence surviving, can be imagined (Ephemera 12). The intimate acts performed by Rico Reyes in AC/DC with inanimate and inorganic objects create (the possibilities of) a queer world by disrupting static notions of race, sexuality, gender, activism, and resistance. A slang term for someone identifying as bisexual, "AC/DC" is also shorthand for "alternating current/direct current."[120] Instead of focusing on the self-selection of a category of

[120] According to dictionary.com, a site listing the slang definition first

identity, I want to emphasize the performative aspects of this electro-sexual metaphor embodied by Reyes in the video. Not only does he demonstrate adaptability for what he chooses to engage with erotically, but also in how he does so. The predilection for alternating sexual roles and reconfiguring the parts of his body for input or output is performative in that his capacity to do so does not come into being until interacting with a said object. Reyes' "being" as AC/DC is not an inherent, essentialist trait but a relational, world making "doing."

In 1995, Filipino/American performance artist Rico Reyes produced *AC/DC,* a twelve-minute video wherein Reyes peruses his apartment as he admires, embraces, and eventually engages sexually with domestic apparatuses ranging from a small, sharp, and unplugged food processor to a large, in operation top-loading washing machine. Both definitions of the term “AC/DC” come into play in this video, not only as a category of recognition but also in the portrayal of oscillating sexual energies and intentionalities. There are multiple ways of deciphering the carnal connections between human and non-human objects, but for this chapter, I will be formulating my analyses in response to a negative review of *AC/DC* in The Boston Globe in 2013. The video was part of the exhibition "Me Love You Long Time," a reference to the line in the 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket* (spoken by a Vietnamese sex worker to entice United States soldiers), highlighting aesthetic productions by Asian/Americans on the topic of sex work. In her review of the show, journalist Cate McQuaid writes, “Some of the work feels obvious, throwaway, or silly,” and describes *AC/DC* as "a video in which a man pretends to get excited by rubbing himself against home appliances," a one-note joke "that doesn't have

much to do with sex work.[121]" Perhaps due to her limited definitions restricting the potentialities of "sex" and "work," McQuaid's interpretation reveals how sexuality, race, and labor are differently felt, embodied, and expressed. Every year, more than 10 percent of the population of the Philippines (about 8.1 million people, of which 65% are women) leave to countries like the United States, Canada, England, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Hong Kong, and Dubai to work participate in service economies as "maids, nannies, nurses, entertainers, and sex workers" (Tadiar 103). Every profession listed for Filipino overseas contract laborers involves a sensual engagement with and for the body and occupies the realms of reproductive and affective labor. Sex work, for McQuaid, is equated with standing on street corners, whereas Reyes finds such intimate labors sutured to the sphere of domesticity they aim to transform and reimagine through performance.

My project is not one of evaluation, neither towards *AC/DC* as “good” or “bad” performance art nor towards the reviewer as being “right” or “wrong,” but to find a different way to observe, and perhaps even interpret, not only what is going on in the video but where it has the potential to lead us. In contradistinction to the art reviewer who approached *AC/DC* as a representation of sex work, I come into contact with this piece as a transition to how sex *works*. Within technoscientific iterations of affect, “bodies” break free from skin envelopes to include the non-living, the inorganic, and the immaterial and are recognized for their abilities to not only be acted upon but also act. As Filipina/os labor globally in multiple spheres and are often rendered as objects—or as mere instruments in the household— what we are witnessing in *AC/DC* is not a catalogue of domestic onanism, but an affective modality of sexual relations

[121] McQuaid, Cate. “What’s up at Boston-area art galleries.” *The Boston Globe* 26 March 2013. Accessed online 10 December 2013.

between and among seemingly discrete migratory bodies (and I am referring to both Reyes as well as the appliances—many of which are made in Asian countries—as similarly traveling to America to perform domestic labor) coming together through and being made legible by prosthetic intimacies, a queer affinity not only describing the events transpiring in the video but also as a prognosis for what is to come and what can be.

At first glance, "prosthetic" and "intimacy" appear to be strange bedfellows, with the clinical, perhaps even cyborgian imagery invoked by the prosthetic cooling off all that is conjured by the familiarity, warmth, or even the humanity intimacy vows to offer. However, they have been kept apart not because of differences in outcome, but by the linguistic borders of what they are. For Brian Massumi, prosthetics function as extensions, not merely *of* a body but *between* bodies, observing "the thing, the object, can be considered *prostheses* of the body—provided that it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing" (95). The theory of affect employed by Massumi emphasizes mobility and connection. This relationship to the world facilitates perpetual reciprocity where the beginning and the end are indeterminate, forcing a reorientation of relationality wherein objects extend bodies in the same way that bodies extend objects. Lauren Berlant writes in *Intimacy: A Special Issue,* that "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation" (2)[122]. She identifies intimacy, like affect, as not existing innately within bodies but as a result of the encounters themselves, with the generative capacity to transform and transport. It is within and through the tethering of these two ideas that make possible a promiscuous mode of intelligibility where *AC/DC* swerves away from the pathological diagnosis of "misplaced" sexual

[122] Berlant, Lauren Gail, ed. *Intimacy*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.

energy but points to an otherwise and otherwhere indexing an alternative iteration of how bodies are being and how bodies are relating both in the diegetic reality of the film but also for the audience co-witnessing the performance. Affect, intimacy, and prosthetics are not unidirectional, but alternate in multidirectional pathways[123].

A deep grunt, before any title card or image is visible, announces the start of *AC/DC*. Sounds of rhythmic inhaling and moaning continue as a blurry, point-of-view close-up shot of a digital alarm clock comes into focus, revealing the source evoking Reyes' sonorous pleasure. The camera's, and thereby Reyes', proximity to his clock, telephone, blow dryer, and washing machine in relation to the frequency of his groans establish the site of intimacy. Maintaining his perspective through the subjectivity of the camera, Reyes visually consumes various appliances throughout his kitchen: a food processor, coffee maker, rice cooker, microwave, and refrigerator. After lingering on the food processor, the camera slowly zooms out, increasing his line of sight and accordingly his capacity to admire simultaneously what his scullery has to offer. The sonic and visual interplay are synced, so the escalating volume and intensity of his guttural responses coordinate with the widening of the camera's frame. Reyes utters few words or phrases, but when he does, he constructs his sentences from the labels branded onto the domestic gadgets in conjunction with sexual innuendo. For instance, after vertically eyeballing the refrigerator Reyes purrs, "Oh, sexy! I'm going to fuck a frost-free Kelvinator. No frost, baby!" As if reading the name badge of someone he met, Reyes refers to the refrigerator by the name it offered him, Kelvinator, demonstrating the dialogue transpiring between the two

[123] "Prosthetic intimacies" maintain the mutually constitutive nature/co-implication of the process between two or more objects/bodies, whereas "intimate prosthetics" would render the intimacy as an adjective/descriptive, and not as a space or conduit for the transmission of/to other things and places.

bodies as to foster their familiarity and develop the grounds for future, more carnal, intimations. Rather than interpret the material lust with western wares as *because* of colonialism, I find It more productive to read this scene as exemplar of "the colonized condition as a state of consumerism without means, in which colonized subjects are simultaneously interpellated by and distance from—economically, culturally, politically—the glamorized images of American life that constantly surround them" (Hong 119). Instead of lingering in the colonial past as something that is haunting the queer Filipino American body, these objects—which also are often deployed by Filipinos in the diaspora for the service of others, Reyes is going to use them in ways to service himself and conceive a different future. Also noteworthy is Reyes' sexual proposal towards an object without gender, an act that confounds the reliance upon regimes of identity and demands for a greater proliferation of what sex and sexuality can be.

After expressing similar sentiments towards a Zenith television, the camera cuts to a medium shot of the washing machine. Reyes, wearing a plain white t-shirt and khakis, enters the frame and immediately starts to caress and grind upon the metallic box, eventually mounting it. The origin of his thrusting switches from his pelvis to his derriere, as Reyes turns himself over to begin riding the automatic clothes washer. As the machine hums, Reyes begins removing articles of clothing. First, his shirt. Next, his belt. He then unzips his pants and dismounts from the washer so his khakis can fall to the floor. In peeling his clothes off, Reyes can increase the feelings between him and the objects, intensifying the frictive bodily energies Martin Manalansan as not only social but "part and parcel of world-making and world

imaginings" (2).[124] Standing only in thin white briefs with his back to the camera, Reyes undulates along the angles of the machine. Lest his pleasure not be limited to primary sexual organs, the sheerness of his underwear makes visible his posterior's clenching; this is a full body experience. The camera transitions back to his point-of-view as he surveys the knobs and handles indicating what the washing machine is capable of. When the lid lifts, we witness the dynamic inner workings of the spin cycle. Although the washer is stationary, this perspective shows its internal rhythms and the length of the agitator that Reyes synced up with earlier through his gyrations and spins. The camera tilts down, exposing Reyes' penis engaging in frottage with the front panel; the fleshiness of his warm body relinquishes to the sturdiness of the cold enamel of the washer as they collide. And yet, this moment of intimacy is not too surprising, as the presence of a clothes washer inherently implies that clothing must be removed for it to perform its functions.

Of course, what is important is how the objects are not used to dice fruits and vegetables, make coffee or rice, heat food, or prevent items from spoiling in a climate-controlled box. A jump cut returns us to the kitchen with a now fully nude Reyes. In this next scene, he revisits the smaller appliances his libidinal urges lusted toward at the start of the film. After unplugging the food processor, he activates it for alternative uses by rubbing it up and down the length of his body as a form of foreplay. The gadget instigates waves of pleasure, causing his legs to weaken and Reyes to sit on the floor. From this vantage point, he can straddle the device, repurposing the food processor from a receptive container to something capable of insertion. One by one, each appliance is removed from the countertop to join a

[124] In a special issue of the Journal for Asian American Studies, Martin Manalansan plays off the accented intonation of a native Tagalog speaker speaking English, where the “F” slips into a “P.”

rapidly gyrating Reyes on the floor in a multitude of sexual positions. It would be too easy to assign this orgy as a domestic fetish or one man's perversion of housewares. To leave *AC/DC* as uncomplicated would be to comply with the maintenance of heteronormative structures pathologizing non-normative sexual practices. Instead of moving away from the products as an act of defiance, Reyes moves in closer as a queer cultural worker who is "able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity[125]" (Munoz, *Cruising Utopia* 9). Looking to quotidian objects and altering how we engage with them is a local, but necessary and useful, way in which performance operates in *AC/DC*, where pleasure is generative in making new worlds. As sex with inanimate objects is not for everyone, it is vital to keep in mind the power of performance is how possibilities and potentialities proliferate, not how they are proscriptive or prescriptive. Also, attempts to diagnose these transactions limits the objects to only being capable of being *acted upon*, and does not consider the affective potentiality constructing and connecting all forms of matter.

Feminist technoscience scholar Jennifer Terry argues for the capacity of non-human bodies to be in relationships with human bodies in her article "Loving Objects," and views those "who disavow the multi-faceted pervasiveness of object love in postmodern society and, therefore are complicit in the oppression of people who declare their desire for objects, not as fetishes, but as amourous partners" (34). Key to Terry's call— for a more inclusive conceptualization of the intimate— is how the interspecies dyad also implicates people outside of the "proper bounds" of the relationship. Following the proposition that we are all interconnected affectively as prosthesis suggests we are also playing a role in the processes of

[125] In this instance, Munoz is referring to poet Frank O'Hara and Andy Warhol's works that find queer possibilities in quotidian objects such as a bottle of Coca-Cola.

world-making produced by and through varying instantiations of intimacy. Acknowledging non-human objects as partners is also in line with the meaning, which is also a doing, of the video's title *AC/DC.* Affect, intimacy, and prosthetics are not unidirectional, but alternate in multidirectional pathways.

After exhausting all possibilities with the more portable kitchen technologies, Reyes fulfills his earlier desire to "fuck a frost-free Kelvinator." We witness the refrigerator's capacity to affect Reyes, as it draws him in for purposes other than retrieving or storing food. Since having the Kelvinator on top of him in the missionary position would ultimately result in his death, it also makes sense that Reyes would have to work around the abilities of the fridge. To access a greater variety of surfaces and sensations, he opens the door and begins humping the space now made available. Using the door as leverage, Reyes proceeds to rapidly squat with the refrigerator door between his legs. The distinctions between which body is the "active/top" and which is the "passive/bottom" are rendered temporarily futile as deciphering who is putting what where and for how long is eclipsed by the prosthetic intimacies produced through their points of contact. In line with how Terry describes the encounters between humans and objects, "theirs is an *intra*- rather than *inter*-action," meaning that any iteration of agency or affective capacity will be legible in the space of their enactment (68). Reyes slithers along the metallic contours, baring all to reduce the interference between skin and metal, just as the Kelvinator supports his weight by remaining upright and scaffolding his passionate acrobatics. Reyes' vocalizations are sparse as the communication between the two objects happens on a physical register.

A blow dryer becomes the object of affection in the final scene. Through a point-of-view shot, Reyes grabs the handle and massages the nozzle in a circular motion against his semi-flaccid penis in a literal interpretation of a "blow-job." His pubic hair bristles as the cycling blow dryer conceals and reveals his penis like an on/off switch. When the cord is plugged in, the blow dryer is already turned on. Reyes switches to the highest setting and a loud whirring accompanies the gusty winds funneling in the air he breathes and redirecting it towards his fluttering brown penis. It is at this moment that I would like to discuss his penis further, which throughout *AC/DC* has exhibited varying degrees of tumescence but has never been fully erect. This liminal solidity does not signal a lack of arousal or pleasure on the part of Reyes, as his entire body is used to express gratification, but rather, indexes an alternative mode of observing (and experiencing) pleasure that is not reducible to a handful of organs. Perhaps a tad unfashionable to revisit a well-worn argument, but while feminist film theorists belie acts of male-dominated and phallic driven scopophilia, how does the queer, Filipino American, and semi-erect penis de-universalize this claim? In *Straitjacket Sexualities* Celine Shimizu tackles how distinctly racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies on the screen resonate differently, suggesting that, “Instead of understanding the penis as representing male phallic power absolutely, let us consider how the penis hardens temporarily…Thus, to make a distinction between the penis and the phallus then allows for us to identify what is undesirable in aspiring to dominate others” (6). Asserting a constant phallic state locates its power internally, and implicit within Shimizu’s proposition is the contingency of the penis. It hardens situationally, in response to external stimuli. *AC/DC* exhibits Reyes’ vulnerability, not domination, towards each appliance; a tenderness from which differentially human and non-human objects align,

retaining their singularity but yielding an unconventional, yet intimate, sociality as they are both repurposed for activities exceeding the labor demands placed upon both of them.

AC/DC ends how it started, with a point-of-view shot, but this time from the perspective of the blow dryer. An extreme close-up of Reyes' flickering tongue and smacking lips fill the frame as the nozzle reaches down to continue their make-out session. A perspective always present throughout the video, but now made explicitly to the audience, is that of the appliances. The blow dryer, along with the washing machine, the Kelvinator, and the Zenith television, is always a mutual collaborator in every encounter. One does not exist in service *to* the each other, and *AC/DC* shows how all objects potentially exist *for* each other. Prosthetic intimacies are not what this video performance is, but what it is enacting. Rico Reyes crafted an excessively somatic film that documents the mobilization of seemingly inanimate objects with implications on multiple levels. For Reyes, a domestic remapping of his relationships to what queerness is, where it exists, and what it can do transpires. The non-human objects are also animated, and their ability to affect how human bodies move, act, and feel within their presence is to be taken seriously. By observing their interactions differently, we (as the audience) co-witness a re-worlding, as even though we do not partake in the filmic space, we are mutual extensions of one another.

French philosopher Jacques Ranciere, ruminating on the politics of aesthetics writes, "Fiction invents new communities of sense: that is to say, new trajectories between what can be seen, and what can be done…doing art means displacing the borders of art, just as by doing politics means displacing the borders of what is recognized as the sphere of the political" (86). Fiction, akin to performance, in this instance, does not equate to "false" or "untrue," but works

to move towards creating a space to disrupt the quotidian doldrums of pragmatic and compartmentalized modes of thought and action. Even by juxtaposing two things not expected to go together commonly, pubic hair and kitchen appliances challenges the expectations of Filipino/American workers as hygienic and celibate (due to Catholicism introduced during Spanish colonization) and incites other ways of deciphering what is going on. *AC/DC* bumps and grinds its way across multiple contexts, asking for the dissolution of the strict and straight demarcations placed upon concepts such as race, sex, art, and politics. The power of adaptability is not found in the results, but the process facilitating different conditions of possibility.

Still Touching, Still Feeling, and No Longer Looking for Anybody's Penis

While the ocular, as well as the sonic, work to cohere these chapters through their similarities (which are not always immediate and do require some zooming in and out)[126], the other senses, particularly touch, do not have the same collectivizing result. The audio-visual, so often put in service to ideology, work to as senses of distance to interpolate the receiver. Images and sound effectively *bring together* disparate people because they facilitate larger *shared experiences.* Feelings of belonging and understanding are fomented on the dance floor, achieved in movie theatres, or attending a concert or festival and bonding with someone you never met before because a certain song is giving you both life. The audio-visual even traverse temporal and spatial boundaries, as watching a major blockbuster movie on opening weekend at any time (from a Thursday night pre-screening to the Sunday night crowd wind-down) and any place (from Hawaii to New York) can still bring people together. However, touch works

[126] For more on "zooming in and out" see Katie King's *Networked Reenactments.*

differently, as do the other senses of proximity, which also have the strongest ability to make you feel *different,* to feel individuated from the collective. Some common examples to start: consuming a morsel of food you register as spicy, but others do not; wearing a cologne or perfume you find alluring until someone else is nauseated by it and becomes repelled, or your body not being acclimated to the temperature/climate resulting in your feeling colder or warmer than others. Each instantiation of difference necessitates a two-fold reevaluation of your body: the first is to figure out why your body is feeling this way. The second is to question your relationship to your body's capacity to perceive the world ("It is not cold. It is all in your head). We are encouraged to separate the two, mind vs. body, and to practice "mind over matter," thereby delimiting and skewing our capacities for sensory cognition.

One of the underlying questions this dissertation explores is what happens when you feel differently—or off—from the collective? The cultural, social, aesthetic, and political concerns of Asian American Studies prioritize social justice, serving the community, and similar sentiments reverberating with the grassroots movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Unless you are a raging homophobe, unapologetic misogynist, proud white supremacist, and overall champion of capitalism (to name but a few possibilities), an aspiration for equity is not controversial. Robyn Wiegman's discussion of identity knowledges (her term for fields of study which name in their titles that which is not being carefully studied by traditional disciplines) in *Object Lessons* is instructive as she proffers that "Social movements… are no less disciplinary than academic fields of study, just differently so" (17). For example, Marxist thought travels widely through activist, academic, and artistic circles, painting large targets to fight against (Institutions! Structures of oppression! Ideology!), spectacular modes of engagement and

resistance (Mass protests! The revolution!), and invests in a specific conceptualization of the human. This conceptualization of the political rhetoric agitating the masses toward social justice becomes positioned and coordinated in the Asian American Studies nexus. A very flexible term, "social justice" names specific goals while giving the appearance of being open to amendments, and yet, strongly privileges certain objects and methods.

Holding on to this formulation of social justice, particularly for those studying aesthetics and performance, leads to the revisiting of familiar forms of cultural production, or, draws the researcher towards those objects most amenable to this style of politics. Returning to Dean Spade's numbness critique discussed in the introduction, an assessment of the disciplinary training and strategy for maintaining asymmetric power relations through affective regulation, the artists I discussed in this dissertation are proponents of feeling differently and in ways not immediately intelligible to "the problem" of racialized sexualities. The sites and performances explored in this project were deliberately selected as none of the artists, while associated with different institutions, held MFA degrees at the time the works were produced.[127] Not having a formal education does not somehow mean their performances are more ethical or radical, but it does demand an adjustment to the frequencies of legibility beyond a shared ideological or theoretical affinity typically linking cultural producers and cultural critics.

I have explored the concept of sexual ecologies across a sexual health non-profit agency, a (now closed) BDSM pornography studio, a museum-cum-block party, and within the confines of the home to illustrate how various structures, affects, sounds, pains, textures, policies, economies, and pleasures enable and restrict what "sex/uality" is, can be, and most

[127] To be transparent, Rico Reyes was in an MFA program but had not yet graduated.

importantly, do. Following an array of multiscalar bodies limning the boundaries of subject and object across different sites of transmedial performance, from the microcellular HIV prevention medications in the public service announcements at API Wellness Center to the wall-sized art exhibits at the Asian Art Museum, helps us to see how visual scales operate. In many ways, each of the sites could have served as a point of entry, since how racialized sexualities slide and toggle through and within each chapter helps us to see how ecologies, like platforms, are multidirectional. For example, Asa Akira is an award-winning Japanese American porn star. She chose the stage surname Akira after her favorite Japanese anime movie, *Akira,* which is what H.P. Mendoza sings about in his song "In Ten Years (I'll Be Cool)." At nineteen, she began working as a dominatrix in a New York City BDSM sex dungeon. Akira actually prefers being a "bottom/sub," and has filmed multiple gangbangs at kink.com in San Francisco, where Van Darkholme relished in being a "top/dom." When it comes to HIV/AIDS activism, Akira participates in AIDS Walk Los Angeles. Although not the same as the immunological prosthesis PrEP/PEP being touted at API Wellness Center, but still a form of safer sex, Asa Akira did get intimate with a life-size synthetic version of herself. Like Rico Reyes, Asa Akira has humped (non)living and in/organic objects as a human *and* as a sex robot. Her prolific career in porn extended into a writing career. When Akira's first book, *Insatiable: Porn- A Love Story,* debuted, an undergraduate at UC Irvine informed his teaching assistant (me) about her book talk in Los Angeles. Out of curiosity, I went. I laughed. I learned about her Fleshlight and its impact on her marriage. I was in awe.

And so, I do not think an Asian/American sexual ecology can ever truly end. Ecologies are multifaceted relations, not "wholes." It is because, within, and through these relations with

a seemingly infinite amount of places, objects, people, and things they exist, transform, and extend. Throughout this project the actants reject the constraints of respectability politics, follow their curiosities, and instead of asking, “why do that?” invite us to think “why not?” Sexual ecologies close with openings.

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