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# Constructing Asian/American Women on Screen

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# CONSTRUCTING ASIAN/AMERICAN WOMEN ON SCREEN

by

CHARLEEN M. WILCOX

Under the Direction of Angelo Restivo

## ABSTRACT

Asian/American women occupy a highly circumscribed subject position in popular Western culture that entails a unique reading of our bodies. My discussion of this group will gain greater depth and scope by using Black body theory as a theoretical framework to better understand how Asian/American bodies become a site to enact a multitude of fantasies, fears, and anxieties. I will examine three case studies: the construction of the interracial “romance” featuring Asian/American women produced in classical Hollywood cinema, interracial pornography featuring Asian/American female performers, and the independent works of Asian/American femi-

nist filmmakers. Topics interrogated include the over-determination of non-White bodies and possibilities for destabilizing bodies and crafting their new legibility.

INDEX WORDS: Asian/American women, Race, Interracial pornography, Feminist filmmaking, Interracial “romance,” Hypersexuality, Yellowface, Blackface, Masquerade, Black body theory, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Helen Lee, Homi Bhabha, Pier Pasolini, Robert Colescott, Robert Mapplethorpe, Miscegenation, Miscegenated images, Slumming, Free Indirect Images, Free Indirect Discourse, Paul Robeson

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CHARLEEN M. WILCOX

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## DEDICATION

For my Mother, Ko Chong Im.

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## 1 A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Asian/American filmmaker and scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu begins her first book by disclosing a startling event from her past. In 2007's *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women On Screen and Scene* (Duke U P), Shimizu candidly recalls how, as a teenager riding a bus home alone one night, a fellow passenger hails her in a very peculiar and disturbing way. An older White man *insists* that he knows her, that he has seen her shoot ping-pong balls from her vagina in Manila, Angeles, or Olongapo (Shimizu, *Hypersexuality* 1). Shimizu suggests that this event served as a watershed moment for her—an uncomfortable, shocking, and vital moment that told her something significant about being an Asian woman living in the West.

As a young Asian/American woman, I identify with the struggle of visibility that Shimizu interrogates in her books, articles, and films. Of course, this struggle isn't inclusive to the Asian/American community. Eminent Black scholar Frantz Fanon described this phenomenon as “a structuring of the self and of the world” that results in the development of a bodily schema heavily reliant on the perception of others. Essentially, Fanon is saying that we experience ourselves *through* others and this truth is well demonstrated in Shimizu's startling account. In that brief but profound moment she was *made known to herself* in a disturbing and new way. Like Shimizu, my own awakening to the development of my bodily schema was triggered by the perceptions of another. During my first year as an undergraduate at a small, tightly knit private college, a fellow Asian/American student inquired about my family background. Here, I need to preface my story by defining more precisely what I mean by “Asian/American.” It is an understood truth within

many Asian communities that not all “Asian/Americans” are, in fact, “Asian.” There are distinctions upon distinctions that come into play that distinguish, for instance, “full-blooded” Asian/Americans from “mixed” or biracial Asian/Americans. While I claim the Asian/American moniker for myself, there are many within the Korean community that do not see me as one of their own because I am half White. However, the larger White community would not see me as “White” because my ethnic diversity is “written” all over my face. I’ve encountered curious White Americans who have questioned my ethnic background by prefacing their inquiries with the assertion that they *know* I’m “something” but they’re just not sure what that “something” is. Undoubtedly, my own experiences have been leading me towards this interrogation of the struggle of visibility. Keeping the difficulty and complexity of defining absolute racial identities in mind, let me continue sharing this particular experience of my “structuring.” After inquiring about my family’s background, this fellow Asian/American student didn’t try to mask her disapproval of my White Father and Korean Mother; instead, she told me point-blank that she found their union repellent. Unlike me, both of her parents are Korean—something she didn’t have to explicitly say but that I understood immediately and completely not just by her tone but also by looking at her. For the next three years, I found myself on the receiving end of her dirty looks and whispered hostility. Years later, I still dwell on this moment because of what it supposedly says about me and my existence in this world. I suspect this student chose to focus on a few select details of my story, particularly my mention of my Father’s military service and his assignment to Korea—where he met my Mother—to form a picture of the dynamics of my parents’ relationship that taps into larger cultural mythologies about interracial couplings. Did she think my Mother was a Suzy Wong-type to my Fa-

ther's amorous American enlistee? That's a powerful and pervasive image suggesting how Asian women have been perversely linked to White men through various outlets, including mainstream cinema and media, anecdotal stories, and even interracial pornography. These texts help form a cache of public knowledge about Asian women that essentializes them as warm bodies ready, willing, and available to White men. In this work, I examine how the Asian/American woman is constructed in popular American culture by interrogating the narratives and mythologies that shape and inform her image on-screen. A careful examination of the body itself will help me launch into my investigation because the physical body serves as a testing ground for playing out many of the fantasies, fears, and anxieties that shape popular ideas of the Asian/American woman.

## 2 THE RACIAL SIGNIFIER AND THE BODY

The application of critical race theory or more precisely, *Black body theory*, will help provide a critical framework for my investigation into the treatment of the Asian/American female body in the Western imagination. Allegorically, in popular American culture, the Black body *is* the fundamental "Other" and the treatment of all other non-White bodies derives from the fantastical construction of the Black body. For example, as the springboard into my investigation, Black body theory allows me to "see" how strategies of containment and management used to process Black bodies are also used to process the bodies of Asian/American women. That said, however, there are also differences specific to the racial construction of the Asian/American body that must be understood and developed in this project. For example, the over-determination of the

Asian body in the White imagination stems from fantasies specific to ideas of “Asian-ness” that diverge from those of “Black-ness” and thus produce an over-determination with different codes that must be sorted. These differences will be fleshed out in the chapters to follow. But first, an introduction to some of the foundational elements established in the literature of Black body theory will help kick-off my discussion of Asian/American women by providing a touchstone from which to proceed.

An important concept in Black body theory that I develop in my project involves the “mask” worn by Blacks and other non-White bodies. In his seminal work on the Black experience, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon develops the idea of a “mask” that interrupts the perception of the Black individual. Instead of seeing the individual, the mask substitutes a predetermined perception of the body informed by racial stereotypes that help establish a racial hierarchy privileging White superiority. This also reinforces the White “gaze” that oversees Blackness itself. The mask prevents Whites from perceiving a mental interiority in Blacks, leaving only an exterior—what Charles Johnson calls the “[B]lack-as-body” predicament. This tactic of containment steals their mental lives and reduces Blacks to their exterior bodies, helping construct a view of Blacks as savage and animalistic—these characteristics being specific to ideas of “Black-ness.” This same strategy may be applied to Asian bodies, but with results that reflect popular ideas of “Asian-ness.” Instead of being “contained” with ideas of savagery or animalism as Blacks have been and are, Asians are “managed” through stereotypes of mental cunning and effeminate bodies. In both situations, Fanon’s concept of the “mask” prevents the observer from “seeing” the non-White individual and instead substitutes the crude façade of the racial stereotype. The application of the mask results in the “authentic” person be-

ing hidden from view, presenting instead the inauthenticity of the racial stereotype, which is itself a strategy of containment.

The presence of the mask, furthermore, not only results in the creation of a gulf or distance between the individual and their perception by another, but can also result in a sense of distance from one's own body. Because others' perceptions of ourselves may not align with our own ideas of identity, this leads to a figurative blindness when people [do not] see us as well as a curious sense of alienation from oneself—as if we're never just who we believe we are, but are being pulled into something outside of ourselves that we never expected to be. Charles Johnson reflects on this strange experience of bodily alienation in his 1975 essay, "The Phenomenology of the Black Body." Johnson comments, "I know that I cannot see myself as others see me...as if the secret of my body and the objectivity of its 'outside' belongs, not to me, but to everyone else" (604). Just as Blacks may experience an alienation from their bodies, Asian/Americans also feel the presence of a gulf between what they believe about themselves and what others may believe about them.

The gap or distance inherent in the presence of Fanon's concept of the "mask" also applies to the masquerade. In her seminal essay on female viewership, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," Mary Ann Doane develops Joan Riviere's concept of feminine masquerade. Doane says, "To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image" (766). Women are assumed to have a "closeness" or similarity to the constructed image of their sexuality—as opposed to the innate "distance" enjoyed by men that allows them to have control over the image (Doane 762). Masquerade allows women to take control of their image by pro-

ducing this “distance” or “lack” themselves through an exaggerated performance of femininity. Essentially, Doane argues that the concept of masquerade exposes the performance of gender. She localizes this masquerade in the femme fatale figure, who ““plays out her sex in order to evade the word and the law”” of Western patriarchy (766). Unlike the “mask,” the masquerade implies a *choice* to be seen in a certain light and the usefulness, productivity, or subversive potential in that choice. Doane argues that masquerade destabilizes the image of feminine gender created by a masculine structure of looking (766). To masquerade is to pose a threat to patriarchal systems of looking because this is an intentional performance that allows the actor to subvert the objectifying male gaze that would have the actor seen as “less than.” For example, in Charles Vidor’s *Gilda*, Rita Hayworth performs masquerade as an alluring femme fatale negotiating her survival in the casino underworld of Buenos Aires. Her performance is especially telling in the club scene where she sings, “Put The Blame On Mame.” Hayworth flaunts and revels in the feminine sexuality constructed by the male gaze—the femininity that supposes a weakness, an inferiority to masculine identity—as if to say, “Hey, it’s not so bad being female.” Her exaggerated performance functions as a subversive technique that allows her to have a kind of power over those who have power over her (i.e. the film’s male leads, Ballin Mundson and Johnny Farrell). Furthermore, the lyrics to Hayworth’s song rewrite history by blaming an amorous woman for causing numerous deadly disasters like the 1871 burning of Chicago and 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The song reinforces the subversive quality of Hayworth’s masquerade performance. Even though she sings about the dangers of woman while oozing an exaggerated feminine sensuality, this performance allows her to capture the attention of everyone around her—undoubtedly,

with men wanting to sleep with her and women wanting to be like her; in other words, she gains a kind of momentary power made available through the masquerade.

Here, I would like to interject a note about the relationship between the classic femme fatale figure and the Asian/American woman. Film scholar Cynthia Liu makes some provocative connections between the two. In an article “re-imagining” Anna May Wong, Liu prefaces a brief discussion of the femme fatale and the Asian/American actress by borrowing a line from Eugene Wong to lament that most Asian acting is merely “a display of ‘directed Oriental affectations’” (26). She argues that the “made-up-ness” of the female Asian character in popular movies signifies her difference so much that she becomes the ultimate threat to White patriarchy because her super difference (feminine “lack”) elicits castration fears (34). And, unlike the White female who can be “made-up” or “un-made-up” (i.e. Gilda), the Asian female is always flaunting herself because she cannot escape the conditions of her bodily exterior (Liu 34). In other words, the Asian woman is always signaling her sexual difference and, thus, is always to be feared (and desired).

Similar to Hayworth’s femme fatale, Charles Johnson’s Trickster John figure performs a masquerade that allows him to move through oppressive structures and subvert the White gaze that seeks to punish his Blackness. In “The Phenomenology of the Black Body,” Johnson outlines what he calls “[B]lack modes of flight from the [B]lack-as-body situation” (608). Among these “modes of flight,” is the adoption of the Trickster John figure. This involves using the “invisibility of [an] interior to deceive, and thus to win survival” (608). According to Johnson, the Trickster John figure would rationalize, “[N]ot being acknowledged as a subject is my strength, my chance for cunning and mas-



querade, for guerrilla warfare: I am a spy in the Big House. I cynically play with their frozen intentions, presuppositions, and stereotypes” (608). If he shuffles his feet and speaks slowly and with poor grammar, Trickster John knows that Whites will most likely let him pass unscathed, thinking that he poses no threat to their sense of authority (609). Additionally, this concept necessitates that both parties play into predetermined roles: Trickster John slides into the racist mannerisms expected of him by Whites, while Whites are willing to believe in his masquerade because the racial hierarchy that privileges White superiority necessitates that they believe in this performance of depthless Black identity. Johnson’s citation of Richard Wright’s novel *The Outsider* perfectly describes this dynamic: the Black protagonist “‘knew that deep in their hearts those two [W]hite clerks knew that no human being on earth was as dense as he made himself out to be, but they wanted, needed to believe it of Negroes and it helped them to feel racially superior. They were pretending, just as he had been pretending’” (609).

Similar to the femme fatale and Trickster John figures, one example of an Asian masquerade performance may be revealed through the dynamics of the everyday situation of being hailed in the street. When a non-Asian accosts an unknown Asian person, s/he can shrug off or diffuse the situation by claiming, “No speak English.” This response becomes believable because our culture is still willing to pander to stereotypes of “Asian-ness,” one of which purports that we speak little or no English. This brief, everyday interaction reveals a lot about performances of race and our willingness to participate and believe in these depthless interactions. In the same way that Trickster John avoids being hassled by Whites through his performance of depthless identity, every Asian person can choose to avoid hostile situations by sliding into a ready-made and already-waiting iden-

tity specific to popular notions of “Asian-ness”—one that plays into White racisms but also allows the Asian to maneuver through systems of oppression that would otherwise demean them. Like Hayworth’s femme fatale and Johnson’s Trickster John, we can temporarily have a power over those who would have power over us through the performance of “Yellow” masquerade.

A visual illustration of both the “mask” and the performance of masquerade may be found in the works of American painter Robert Colescott. The artist’s deployment of these concepts brings us to a legitimate issue surrounding raced bodies: their representation to the masses. How, after all, do we depict a raced body? I would like to launch into this question by examining the theoretical “work” being performed in Colescott’s paintings including the deployment of the “mask” and the masquerade.

The bold representation of Black bodies is perhaps the first thing that viewers will notice about Robert Colescott’s paintings. The artist depicts Black bodies in the extreme; in fact, he presents them in Blackface. The Black bodies are rendered especially dark, often with bright pink or red lips that create a sharp contrast between the two colors—the sharp, exaggerated contrast of lip color with blackened skin being a defining characteristic of Blackface. Why does Colescott depict Black bodies in this way? Before we can fathom an answer for this question, we need to understand how Blackface “works.” Blackface simultaneously deploys the “mask” and the masquerade. However, unlike Fanon’s discussion of the “mask” as a *figurative* veil obstructing the viewing of the authentic person, Blackface provides a *literal* façade that puts on display the White racisms that form this specific perception of the Black body that exaggerates Black features and invents Black mannerisms. This last part brings us back to the idea of masquerade. Not only does Blackface provide the literal (and literally painted-on) representation of the

“mask,” it also enacts the performance of masquerade. Blackface, after all, has origins in Vaudeville where both White and Black actors performed a version of Black identity that exaggerated, invented and lampooned the features and behavior of an entire racial group for White entertainment. Perhaps, then, Colescott depicts his Black bodies in Blackface as a protective measure meant to disrupt the smooth consumption of this marginalized group by the White majority. For example, in *Feeling His Oats* (1988), Colescott conveys a sense of self-reflexivity about the Black experience of being a body-on-display—the “looked-at-ness” of Black bodies. In this piece and others, White women are shown looking at the bodies of Black men. Even though the White woman’s body in *Feeling His Oats* appears scantily dressed in only underwear, her body does not become the central object of our gaze. In effect, we look where she looks. She smiles as she looks pleasingly on the body of a muscular Black man shown in motion lifting a heavy piece of exercise equipment. Here, Colescott’s piece performs a bit of self-reflexive work by *showing* the objectification of the Black body *instead of participating in it* in a way that every attempt at representing non-White bodies will risk. By shrouding his Black bodies in Blackface, the artist prevents our consumption of these bodies as *merely* bodies devoid of a mental or spiritual interiority—something that we, as viewers of art and as viewers bringing our learned racisms, would do otherwise.

If we delve deeper into this line of thought—that Robert Colescott “protects” the Black bodies in his paintings from White consumption by putting them in Blackface—it becomes pertinent to return to our larger question of how we depict non-White bodies. Jeffrey Stewart’s discussion about the transformation of the body of Paul Robeson into an art object offers tremendous insight into this issue. In his essay “The Black Body: Paul Robeson as a Work of Art and Politics,” Stewart tries to understand why and how the famed Black athlete and actor rose to

popularity within the White intellectual class of the 1920s and '30s. He examines photographs showing Robeson's nude body in various poses taken by famous celebrity photographer Nickolas Muray—the medium and presentation differing greatly from those of Colecott. Stewart concludes that Muray's choice to pose Robeson's body in ways recalling neoclassical heroes and myths allowed this Black man, for a time at least, to become a site of identification for White Americans. Muray's photographs “dignified Robeson's image by placing it within a European artistic frame, by making his body into an object of fine art, thereby shifting the interpretation of that body away from the narrative of the primitive, the beast, and the animal in which most Black bodies were interpreted in American popular culture” (Stewart 152). These nude photographs of Robeson were prized because “they accomplished a double task and fed a double consciousness--a desire to see the Black body displayed and revealed, and also a desire to see it revealed in such a way that it was assimilable into a Western, European sensibility and tradition” (Stewart 154). However, Stewart also points out that this method only worked so well—because to be made assimilable also meant being contained. While Robeson took on heroic status through Muray's neoclassical gaze, these photographs contain and limit his body in ways that made him palatable to White intellectual audiences of that period. The neoclassical framing of his body tries to limit it of its racial and sexual energy in an effort to contain Robeson's threat *as* a Black body (Stewart, 152-153). So, his popularity during this time may be understood to have been possible because his body was mediated by Muray's lens in a way that fit White expectations and simultaneously satisfied their curiosity of the Black body while also containing it to allay White fears and anxieties. Additionally, the Muray portraits reduce Robeson's person to just a body, and a Black body at that. His face mostly hidden from view, his body becomes romanticized and valued for its physical beauty and strength--in a sense, making Robeson into an anonymous

Black body primed for appropriation by White eyes as a fetishized object (Stewart 150).

We can look to Nikolas Muray's photographs of Paul Robeson to provide helpful background in our interrogation of Robert Colescott's paintings. Colescott's use of Blackface may function as a method of resistance to the kind of exploitation and appropriation of Black bodies that Jeffrey Stewart suggests about Muray's photographs. The use of Blackface interrupts the process of feeding a White double consciousness because it obscures the "authentic" Black body from view. Blackface prevents any sense of sensuousness being read into the Black body--a process that commodified Robeson's body as a fetishized one. Viewers can linger on his body's physical beauty, something that the medium--black and white photography--certainly encourages with its ability to capture the smoothness and touchable sheen of Robeson's skin and muscles.

In place of the sensuous Black body, Colescott presents viewers with a stand-in whose crude exteriority implicates an inauthenticity that is unavailable for exploitation. This idea of hiding the "authentic" Black body from view in order to prevent its exploitation relates to issues of desire. The desiring of the bodies of Others in our culture has roots in segregation practices. The separation of the races has helped encourage a curiosity of the Other--something that can be seen in the myth of the Big Black Buck, his supposed sexual prowess being both feared and desired. Citing Alain Locke, Jeffrey Stewart explains that "segregation is ultimately self-defeating because, by separating [W]hites and Blacks physically and socially, American society made us desire one another even more than if the 'relations of races' were left alone" (155). Colescott's works do not provide the realization of this desire to simultaneously expose and contain the Other because the artist substitutes "authentic" Black bodies with those in Blackface. By doing so, his pieces aim to avoid the sense of availability that Muray's nude photographs of Robeson

implied about this Black man's body. Stewart explains, "Whites...desire to cross over and experience--sexually, culturally, photographically--something that had been defined as verboten. That desire for the Other operated in Robeson's life, and Muray's pictures freeze that moment in time...What is not voiced directly but is nevertheless implied in these photographs is that a key to Black success is Black availability to [W]hites, something graphically represented in the Muray photographs" (156). Colescott responds by making the Black body unavailable for White appropriation and he does this by replacing the "authentic" Black body with the inauthentic body-in-Blackface. This idea is supported by Stewart's assessment that Robeson began to become more guarded in front of the camera in later years, conveying a new consciousness of his commodification and demonstrating an attempt to resist it.

Colescott's pieces suggest their weariness of allowing their Black bodies to be seen as art objects--the way that Stewart chronicles the process of Paul Robeson's body becoming an art object. Being seen as such entails the commodification of these bodies. Stewart is absolutely right: there is a contradiction between looking at someone as an art object and portraying his or her identity. This last point comes into play, in particular, in *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960) in which William Holden contains Nancy Kwan's "Asian-ness" by making her the object of his paintings. She becomes the art object, defined and brought into existence by Holden's brush and his interpretation of her body. Her "Asian-ness," furthermore, becomes a fetishized commodity through Holden's paintings by the fact that his pieces only manage to sell in London, where they feed a market hungry for the exotic. A lengthier discussion of this film is included in my discussion of interracial "romances" in Chapter 2. But if we return to Colescott, he appears to tread especially carefully because, as an artist, he produces visual objects meant for display and ultimately for commodification. His work conveys a keen consciousness of wanting to avoid the ob-

vious exploitation of the Black bodies he depicts.

Charles Johnson's essay, "A Phenomenology of the Black Body," not only touches on this idea of avoiding commodification of the Black body but also fleshes out specific ideas of "Blackness" that inform perceptions of this group. Johnson's idea of the "[B]lack-as body" predicament describes how dominant cultural assumptions work to lock Blacks into their bodies. In this process, Blacks are "stripped of a mental life, which leaves them only a bodily existence" (Johnson 601). This process of reducing the whole person to an outer shell produces anxieties in the Black psyche that can translate into everyday behavior. Johnson shares, "I must forever be on guard against my body betraying me in public; I must suppress the profile that their frozen intentionality brings forth--I police my actions, and take precautions against myself so the myth of stain, evil, and physicality...does not appear in me" (Johnson 607). Johnson's admission suggests a mistrust that our culture has caused him to cultivate about his own body--that he must be "on guard" against its Blackness. This sense of danger or mistrust of the self that stems from being interpellated into merely the exteriority of one's body presents the case for consciously interrupting that process by substituting the more vulnerable "authentic" Black body for the inauthentic body-in-Blackface, as Robert Colescott seems to do in his works. There arises a need to combat "a European cult of male individuality and control over the bodies of others" (Chadwick 3). It's as if Colescott's pieces perform this resistance by giving back what has already been given to him. His works return what has been given, as if saying, "You want 'Black' bodies? Then I'll give you 'Black' bodies." His bodies-in-Blackface represent the exterior shells that White culture already interpellates Blacks into. In this light, Colescott's act of resistance to the commodification of Black bodies becomes the foregrounding of the inauthenticity of the Black-as-body identity assigned to Blacks.

Several issues have now been introduced about the concerns complicating representations of the non-White body. We have interrogated this issue by looking at two examples of representation of the Black body: through the crude exteriors of Blackface in Robert Colescott's colorful paintings and through the framing lens of Nikolas Muray's neoclassical-inspired photographs of Paul Robeson. While these two cases may suggest an "either/or" dynamic in how we represent non-White bodies—either in a purely representational way like that found in Colescott's works or in the capturing of literal, actual bodies like that found in Muray's photographs—it would be oversimplifying the issue of representation to believe that this kind of binary dynamic constitutes the state of the issue. A move away from an "either/or" dynamic or tradition of creating "counter-images" is supported by Robert Stam and Louise Spence in their article, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction." They argue for an anti-colonialist approach to minority representation in the cinema that must "[transcend] the usefully angry but methodologically flawed 'image' analysis" that privileges the social portrayal of a group (878). Stam and Spence are warning against the fruitlessness of focusing on a "positive/negative" image dynamic that really only perpetuates dominant structures of seeing. They are critical of this kind of dynamic in minority cinema because they argue that it concerns itself too much with the misguided burden of conveying a "realism" or "reality" about minority groups. Presenting only "positive" images of Blacks, for example, not only sows mistrust in that group because they are present only on their "best behavior" but also re-envelopes them into the larger White narrative that polices ideas of what a "positive" image of a Black person looks like. In other words, this preoccupation with "good" or "nice" images further locks minorities into the White narrative that rationalizes their differences as reason for their oppression. Similarly, the same futility exists through a focus on the "negative" minority image. The authors argue that a focus on the "negative" image



can lead to the same kind of reductionism that encourages viewers to see crude stereotypes behind every minority character on-screen regardless of conditions specific to genre or narrative and also perpetuates dominant forms of oppression (884). For example, Blaxploitation films that substitute Blacks for White leads still leave intact the same problematic narrative plaguing mainstream White action films such as paternalism and sexism. Additionally, Stam and Spence argue that the “counter-image’s” emphasis on “realism” forgets the fact that cinema itself is a construct, that the camera cannot capture the “truths” of an individual or of a people, at least in an absolute sense (878). They encourage Third World and feminist cinemas to focus on the importance of the structural mechanisms of the cinema (scale, sound, point-of-view editing, etc.) in order to combat structural oppressions on-screen.

This idea of moving beyond “positive/negative” images is echoed in articles by Robert Dowling about White slumming in New York City and J. Green’s interrogation of the works of Oscar Micheaux. Dowling explains that there were two distinct schools of thought that emerged from the "New Negro Renaissance" of the 1920s and '30s about how to manage representations of Blacks. On the one hand, there was the NAACP/W.E.B. Du Bois/Jessie Fauset/Charles Johnson group who all argued for a "genteel" and "overly literary" representation of Blacks (i.e. they wanted “positive” images of Blacks to counter the “negative” images). Then, there was the Claude McKay/Langston Hughes group who wanted to confront the "demonic" and give a "bottom-up" representation of Black life that could show a multi-dimensional Black character (Dowling 141). White author Carl Van Vechten's book *Nigger Heaven* was published during the height of this fight of representation, with Hughes throwing his support behind it and Du Bois condemning its portrayal of Black jazz culture. On a related note, J. Green argues that early twentieth century Black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux featured caricatured Black figures in his films in

order to judge them and to be self-reflexive about their popular presence in White entertainment. Black audiences weren't encouraged to identify with the Black minstrel-like figures who often found themselves literally in the foreground of the frame while a skeptical Black chorus looked on with “a cutting gaze” from the background (Green 19-20). The presence of a “knowing” Black chorus brings to mind a film from another era and genre: Melvin Van Peebles’s *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (1971). However, unlike the Black chorus on-screen that grounds the Black spectator into a middle-class mentality critical of “negative” Black characters in Micheaux’s films, Van Peebles’s film includes an off-screen Black chorus that encourages the film’s untraditional protagonist and helps align the Black audience with his struggle to evade White law. During a significant stretch near the end of the film, we hear the off-screen Black chorus singing lyrics like “They got your Brother; they got your Sister; don’t let them get you!” and “Run, Sweetback; Run, Motherfucker!” as we watch the protagonist stumble through the arid California desert away from an all-encompassing sense of White despotism towards a vague freedom in Mexico. It appears that Micheaux would fall into the first school of thought (the Du Bois/NAACP group) who wanted to provide “figures of uplift” for the Black community to aspire to. As for Van Peebles, it can be argued that his film’s philosophy falls into the second school of thought advocating for a “bottom-up” representation of the Black experience. However, the logic overseeing this concern for providing either “positive” or “realist” figures, of course, falls into the “counter-image” tradition from political modernism that Stam and Spence argue against.

Another film scholar, Cynthia Liu, also writes about the limitations of a “positive/negative” image deconstruction specifically in reference to Asian/Americans on-screen. In her discussion of Anna May Wong, Liu argues for the creation of a “space for analysis that ac-

counts for new formulations of these circulating images [of Asians] rather than placing us in the realist trap of proving and disproving them” (36). She is critical of the same kind of circular logic that shuts down possibilities for change in the “good/bad” image dynamic interrogated by Stam and Spence. She lays out the presence of two schools of thought concerning the management of Asians on-screen: the “dismantling stereotypes” school and the “re-functioning representation” school (27). She self-identifies in the latter group and explains that its function is to provide the “caption” to on-screen images of Asians. Although all three scholars are critical of a “positive/negative” image analysis, Liu diverges from Stam and Spence by arguing for the merits of the star study as a way out of the “realist” image trap. While Stam and Spence argue for the usefulness of manipulating the various structures of cinema like scale and point-of-view editing, Liu looks to the star study to provide supplementary narratives for the [often problematic] images on-screen. She argues for the usefulness of the star study as a way for fans to look to a star’s personal life for either confirmation or refutation of her images on-screen (30). She uses this methodology to discuss Anna May Wong and attempts to “re-function” images of the iconic actress by drawing from sources outside of cinema. Liu cites a 1989 poem, “No One Ever Tried to Kiss Anna May Wong,” by John Yau to suggest how poetry “complicates what a counter-image in film to Wong’s screen stereotypes cannot: By using the poetic form, [Yau] can paradoxically unveil the act of looking and the kinds of positions occupied by those who look” (31). While Liu’s use of the star study allows her to bring in sources outside of the cinematic image, she shares the common goal of overcoming the shortcomings of modernism’s tradition of creating “counter-images” with Stam and Spence—she’s just advocating accomplishing this task in a different way. Liu talks about working to “unveil the act of looking” and implicating spectator positioning, which is precisely what lies at the heart of the struggle of visibility—but, her choice of

methodology doesn't allow us to change the parameters of the image itself. If we want to recuperate or "re-function" images of Asians on-screen, then we must interrogate them through the medium in which they exist. Stam and Spence compellingly argue for the potential of an anti-colonist filmmaking practice that can tackle these goals through the manipulation of structuring strategies inherent in the cinematic medium.

Indeed, Stam and Spence present an argument that can provide yet another dimension through which to view Nikolas Muray's photographs of Paul Robeson and critique their containment of the athlete's body. Using the language of Stam and Spence, we can understand how the way that Muray chose to photograph Robeson—by placing him in neo-classical poses that were "positive" to White audiences—re-inscribed him back into the closed circuit of dominant White racisms. As for Robert Colescott, his works seem to prescribe to the call by Stam and Spence to ditch the "positive/negative" dynamic in representing non-White bodies. Colescott breaks away from modernism's tradition of creating such "counter-images," most immediately by his inclusion of Black characters wearing the crude, disfiguring mask of Blackface.

But how does the daunting question of minority representation become complicated by the works of someone like Robert Mapplethorpe? How do Mapplethorpe's works, which include photographs of Black male genitalia, dialogue with Stam and Spence's discussion of overcoming the "positive/negative" image analysis? Perhaps more than Colescott or even any other artist trafficking in "controversial" imagery, Mapplethorpe's photographs would seem to offer the absolute embodiment of the problematic with "counter-images." His graphic photos can elicit strong, visceral reactions from viewers, probably with many writing them off as "negative" or offensive. For example, just consider scholar Kobena Mercer's reaction upon his first viewing of Mapplethorpe's works. In his article, "Looking for Trouble," Mercer details how he initially believed

that Mapplethorpe's photographs merely provided the evidence to confirm viewers' previously held fantasies about differences in race. For instance, the artist's photographs of Black genitalia would confirm the cultural myth of the Black man's sexual prowess and threat to White masculinity. However, Mercer later amended his original judgments about Mapplethorpe's photographs to allow for the "work" being performed by his own desire to be acknowledged. This led to Mercer's "shock effect" theory. He argues that a "shock effect" is produced in viewers of Mapplethorpe's works. Mercer explains that this shock effect, not unlike Roland Barthes' "punctum," jolts viewers to consider their own position within the racial fantasies that their own identities depend on. Unlike Robert Colescott's bodies-in-Blackface and similar to Muray's photographs of Paul Robeson, Mapplethorpe's Black bodies are sensuously on display *as bodies* in high-resolution, glossy photographs. If Colescott's works appear to interrupt the consumption of Black bodies by substituting crude stand-ins, Mapplethorpe's photographs appear to offer them up willingly and excessively—perhaps more so than Muray's. But Mercer argues that Mapplethorpe's visual fetishism of Black bodies works to reveal the precariousness of White identity through the shock effect brought on by the photos; that, as viewers, we will be compelled to consider our own role within the racial hierarchy that we live in. Essentially, Mercer is saying that Mapplethorpe's photographs reveal less about the actual bodies they depict and more about the viewers looking at them. But how would we distinguish between the bodies in Mapplethorpe's photographs and Muray's photographs showing Paul Robeson? As discussed earlier, Robeson's body became a fetishized object popular among the early twentieth century White elite. It is doubtful that viewers practiced the process of self-implication that Mercer's shock effect supposedly enacts because Muray's photographs of Robeson do not compel the same kind of "work" in viewers; this labor on the part of viewers is inhibited because Muray contains Robeson's body

through neoclassical framing. In Mapplethorpe's "Man in Polyester Suit" (1980) the artist confronts the mythology of the Black male's sexuality by showing the object of White fear and fascination: the Black dick. Whereas Muray's photographs of the nude Black male did everything to avoid this confrontation while simultaneously feeding a double White-consciousness, Mapplethorpe gives us the "thing itself" in a blatant and deliberate way that opens up the possibility of experiencing Mercer's shock effect of self-implication.

Additionally, we can use Pier Pasolini's concept of "free indirect discourse" to understand the "work" being performed in Mapplethorpe's photographs. In his seminal essay, "The 'Cinema of Poetry,'" Pasolini sets up cinema as a medium housing "irrational, oneiric, elementary, and barbaric elements" that have been forced below the level of consciousness (172). Here, he is talking about the pre-linguistic, practically "animal-like" quality of images, or "im-signs" (with im-signs consisting of dreams and memories). He also argues that because images are subjective, they also have the potential to be poetic. Pasolini argues that the director's task is to make the images "speak," a difficult challenge because the objects that make up an image store a multitude of meanings all at once and the director must sort through the "chaos" of these objects to form the image on-screen (170). He develops "free indirect discourse" as a form of contamination between the filmmaker/artist and the work's subject. In this way, the artist appears to be speaking through the subject—the perfect way, Pasolini posits, for the director to express herself through the cinematic medium the most freely because her vision of the world becomes melded with that of her subject. This unlocks the poetic potential of the image by "free[ing] the expressive possibilities compressed by the traditional narrative convention through a sort of return to the origins until the original oneiric, barbaric, irregular, aggressive, visionary quality of cinema is found" (Pasolini 178). Pasolini cites Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964) as an exam-

ple of mobilizing “free indirect discourse.” Antonioni “looks at the world by immersing himself in his neurotic protagonist, reanimating the facts through her eyes...By means of this stylistic device, [he] has freed his most deeply felt moment: he has finally been able to represent the world seen through his eyes, *because he has substituted in toto for the worldview of a neurotic his own delirious view of aesthetics*” (179). Like Antonioni, we can argue that Mapplethorpe shares a kind of contamination with the subjects of his photographs. In other words, the Black male subjects of his photos are partly speaking through Mapplethorpe and the artist is partly speaking through them. If we return to “Man in Polyester Suit” (1980), we can now understand the image on another level: Mapplethorpe expresses his positioning as a gay White male through the fetishistic framing of a Black man’s genitalia; and the Black male subject expresses his positioning as a marginalized minority both feared and desired for his constructed sexuality and his frustrations related to the process of assimilation into middle-class White society (i.e. underneath the polyester suit intended for him to gain passage into middle-class respectability, he still carries the signifying appendage that works to reinscribe him back into his body : a big Black dick).

At this juncture, a return to Colescott’s paintings can help us discern another dimension shaping the issue of representing non-White bodies. Now that we have worked through some of the different methods of representing the actual, physical body (the curious rendering of bodies being the first aspect we notice about Colescott’s paintings), let us consider the entirety of the artist’s composition and its implications. Perhaps the second thing viewers will notice about Colescott’s paintings is the *positioning* of the Black bodies. The artist has reworked paintings by van Eyck, Delacroix, Manet, Picasso, Leutze and others by replacing the White bodies in these iconic pieces with Black bodies. His paintings upset the placidity of Western culture’s visual bank by confronting (and often confounding) viewers with images that introduce new ideas into

our mental processes when we consider what the original pieces have meant to us in a cultural and social light. Considered thus, Colescott's disruptive technique of "re-doing" classics may be understood as playing with the concept of miscegenation, a concept that works on different levels in his paintings. As Colescott "plays" with iconic imagery and the bodies within them, he engages in opportunities to upset dominant power structures and governing ideologies, including those that oversee ideas of miscegenation. In her discussion of Man Ray's *Noire et blanche* in "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture," Whitney Chadwick states that Ray's photograph "gains its meaning not from unmotivated juxtapositions, but from the fact that the specific images and objects which [Ray] employs are already assigned complex and powerful meanings within social, sexual, and cultural hierarchies" (3). Because cultural and social forces help dictate the conditions of our experiences, the miscegenated image may be viewed as a highly useful site in which to renegotiate the guiding terms of these experiences and how they affect the production of our public or seen identities. Miscegenated images can function as sites of resistance against dominant ideologies and governing systems. We understand images by participating in the reading of the surface and, when applied to bodies, we create social categorizations like race that depend on the exteriority of the body for traction. In other words, the conditions of legibility—or how we frame something to give it meaning—depends on the exterior when it comes to the Black or non-White body. But miscegenated images can act as the medium through which renegotiations of identities are made. In a sense, the reclamation of the identities of certain groups may be possible through the crafting of miscegenated images. This involves the confrontation of mythologies and their renegotiation—found in the work done by Colescott and others.

There are two understandings of this concept of miscegenation that we can trace in Colescott's paintings. First, we can understand his work as "miscegenating the archive" of what is



considered “high” art—a canon of revered works by Western European artists like Picasso, Manet, Van Gogh, and Botticelli. This archive functions as a way to preserve the “official” narrative of [White] history because, as a collection dominated by White European artists, it helps construct a specific version of history biased towards a White experience or point-of-view of lived or imagined events. The archive also creates specifications for what is considered “high” art and excludes works by minority groups, who are seen as producing non-traditional (i.e. non-European) or “native” pieces. We can see this first kind of “miscegenation” at work in Colescott’s *Les Demoiselles d’Alabama vestidas* (1985) and *Les Demoiselles d’Alabama: Desnudas* (1985), which are both reworkings of Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907). The composition of Colescott’s paintings mimics Picasso’s original work depicting five women in alternating poses. However, Colescott presents the women in a style greatly divergent from Picasso’s cubist vision. Colescott’s women are cartoon-like: unlike Picasso’s sharp edges and angular bodies, these women are round, fleshy, and buxom. They also wear vibrant colors like magenta, primary red, golden yellow, and saturated green unlike Picasso’s palette of matte creams, muted blues, and tans. Colescott also plays with the naming of these pieces; although he follows Picasso’s lead by copying the first part of the name in French, *Les Demoiselles*, he changes the location of the women to Alabama from Avignon and adds an extra descriptor in Spanish to both of his pieces. In addition to the cartoon-like rendering of the women, Colescott’s inclusion of both French and Spanish further dilutes the “purity” of the original work. His miscegenation of this canonical piece, furthermore, also helps reveal the disparate quality of the supposed “purity” or authority of Picasso’s work as a member of the archive of “great works.” Colescott’s miscegenation of this piece inspires us to consider the original in new ways: like Colescott, Picasso also produced a “miscegenated” work because he included women wearing African-esque

masks. Additionally, Picasso was himself an exile of Western European notions of “purity” because of his Spanish heritage. Colescott’s pieces reworking canonical favorites helps us realize that the archive itself hides its disparate origins behind a false sense of standard; there is no origin that is pure in its authority to set standards for “legitimate” or “high” art. In this way, Colescott’s pieces help destabilize the authority of the archive. The official archive is already plural and de-centered, but this is repressed in the designation of the archive as an official tradition or standard representing “high” art. For example, in *Feeling His Oats* (1988), Colescott includes a depiction of the red and blue cylindrical canister of Quaker Oats oatmeal bearing an oversized oval portrait of a Black Quaker dressed in the likeness of the product’s original iconic figure. In the background of this same piece, Colescott includes a Black Superman zipping past a city skyline with arm extended and fist balled, recreating this iconic figure’s forward-charging flying pose. What does it mean that he incorporates “throw-away” objects or “consumer refuse” in his paintings, thereby elevating these objects to a certain status of “art” by means of their very inclusion? His inclusion of such “throw-away” objects or consumer refuse is another way that he miscegenates the archive of “high” art.

A second understanding of “miscegenation” deals more specifically with the literal mixing of bodies in Colescott’s paintings. Miscegenation stems from the legalized, institutionalized, and systemic effort to separate White bodies from non-White bodies in American and European histories. Colescott literally creates an environment of physical miscegenation by placing White and Black bodies together in his pieces—with many showing graphic sexual scenarios involving interracial couplings or the threat thereof. This is particularly true of *The White Man Blues* (1994), the title tapping into our culture’s anxiety about Black men’s sexuality and sexual practices. In this piece, Colescott depicts the troubled psyche of a White man pondering the paternity of his

children. While Black babies in blackface cry and wail in the corners of the piece, the White man considers his White wife's proclamation of "It's yours too, honey!" on one side while a Black man in Blackface "reassures" him, "It's yours too, man!" on his other side. In this way, Colescott presents the White man's fear and anxiety about the sexuality of the Black man, believed to be super-virile and threatening to the former's paternity. The end result of literal miscegenation, of course, is "mixed" or biracial babies. This end result has particular poignancy in Frantz Fanon's discussion of French colonial Martinique in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In his chapter, "Colored women and [W]hite men," Fanon establishes the idea that, for Black women, "saving" their race did not mean protecting it from outside forces, but rather, that its salvation lay in its "[W]hiteness." The author argues that Black women in French colonial Martinique were obsessed with marrying White Europeans because they knew that "[W]hite was better."

But how is the dynamic that Fanon constructs between Black women and White men different from that between Asian/American women and White men? A key difference lies in the fact that Black women are not constructed as "naturally compatible" with White men in the way that Asian women are. Fanon points out that, although the Black woman longed for marriage with the White man, the White man did not return this sentiment. Although a long narrative of interracial couplings between Blacks and Whites has been constructed through many different texts (i.e. *Mandingo*, *Behind the Green Door*, slave accounts), it has been constructed in a way that plays into popular ideas of "Black-ness" that tint these unions to suggest their "walk on the wild side" quality that, while exciting for the White male to indulge in, also suggest their impermanence. However, the coupling of White men with Asian/American women has a suggestion of permanence or "natural-ness" because of how Asian/American women are constructed as idealized, pre-feminist havens whose otherwise "natural" partner—the Asian male—fails to be an

adequate lover because of his construction as effeminate, impotent, tyrannical, or cruel. Thus, the White male easily becomes the “natural” partner to the Asian woman. But just *how* is the Asian woman constructed as compatible with the White man? My discussion of Asian/American women in Classical Hollywood Cinema in the following chapter will unpack the racial and sexual dynamics that this question alludes to. Specifically, I look at examples of interracial “romances” featuring White men and Asian women. The interracial “romances” depicted in these classic texts will allow me to further develop the characteristics specific to popular ideas of “Asian-ness” and explore what this means for the Asian/American woman living in the West.

### 3 THE INTERRACIAL “ROMANCE”

Asian/American women occupy a highly circumscribed subject position in popular Western culture. Hollywood continues to contribute greatly in the creation and reinforcement of her peculiar identity through films like *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *Sayonara* (1957), *South Pacific* (1956), *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960), *Year of the Dragon* (1985), *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), and *Sideways* (2004), which all inextricably bind together the Asian/American woman’s race, sexuality, and body. The sexualization of her race, so central in the creation of her identity on screen, then shapes her identity in our popular imagination. This has led to a social demand for Asian/American women to be quiet, passive, and eager-to-please model minorities who are sexually available to White men. This demand complicates the everyday experience of Asian/American women because we are constantly being hailed in a way that binds us to fantasies created on screen. Celine Shimizu comments that we “cannot but live through [our] racial

sexualization; it hails [us]” in our interactions with the world (Hypersexuality 17). Shimizu’s description of how we encounter the world echoes Frantz Fanon’s assertion that we develop or coming into being *through* others’ perceptions of our bodies. Both scholars’ related ideas also suggest the concept that the non-White person lives through a multitude of histories instantaneously—a phenomenon made possible by the visual signs denoting her race: skin color, hair texture, eye shape, etc. When someone looks at me, they are seeing more than my individual person; they are also “seeing” the multitude of narratives defining people with my skin color, eye shape, etc. A very good example of this occurs in Michael Cimino’s *Year of the Dragon* (1985) when Stanley White tells Tracy Tzu, “I hated you in Vietnam.” Of course, White never actually encountered Tzu in Vietnam; rather, his statement reveals his struggle to see her as an individual and not merely as a member of an imagined Asian “master race” that reduces and simplifies all Asian ethnicities into one homogenous group (Tzu is Chinese, not Vietnamese). In this chapter, I will discuss this film and several others that form a subgenre of the romance film: the interracial “romance.”

To begin with, we need to understand how this subgenre serves our purpose of interrogating the construction of the Asian/American woman on screen and in the popular imagination. Cinema scholar Laura Hyun-Yi Kang’s article, “The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies,” suggests that modern tensions about racial difference are reduced to the manageable realm of the interracial romance between White men and Asian women (74). She argues that this subgenre of film allows “racial conflict and sexual domination [to be] reconstructed as complementary difference” (74). This is how the Asian woman comes to be seen as a “natural” or suitable partner for the White male. On the one hand, we have the constructed gender non-equivalence of the East, and on the other hand we have the sense of complementarity in the Western conception of sexual dif-

ference. Kang argues that this subgenre is used to ease tensions about racial difference and challenges to patriarchy by making everything fit into the established White male worldview. Not only does the Asian female character come into comprehensibility through her liaisons with White male protagonists, but the White male identity is articulated through the presence of the Asian female body (Kang 78). The author argues that these films are not about the Asian female protagonist at all; instead they're about reinforcing White male identity (92). Basically, this subgenre serves to "[W]hitewash" all other tensions including anxieties about racial and gender differences. This films "[articulate] a certain fantasy of manageability" about social and cultural differences (94). In an era of increasing multiplicity and hybridity, it doesn't seem unrealistic that we would find ways of "reducing difference into complementarity that upholds power arrangements" (95). Kang illustrates this point well in her example from *Year of the Dragon*. When Stanley White asks Tracy Tzu, "Why do I want to fuck you so bad?", his question reveals how he has to conquer Tzu sexually to bring her within the terms of his comprehensibility (Kang 90). There is an implied connection between an exotic woman's body and a foreign land being conquered and suggests that the biracial person's origin or conception is a site of violence and domination. Kang's article does a good job of establishing how the Asian woman's body is used to articulate the White man's masculine identity and reassertion of his dominance; but what the author's article does not do is delve into what the Asian woman thinks about her relationship to the White man and also what she thinks about herself.

Similarly, Sabine Haenni's essay "Filming Chinatown" also focuses on how a White identity is articulated against the backdrop of Asian bodies. These two articles explain how White anxiety can be "managed" through different tactics: the interracial romance and the slumming tours of American Chinatowns. In the latter, Haenni argues that these Chinatown tours of-

ferred White slummers the chance to renegotiate their own identities and be in control of a racialized, urban modernity. These tours afforded a transformative effect for Whites by presenting a diversity of new sensorial experiences; basically, that a new sense of self could be grounded in a different experience of one's senses (Haenni 38). This is similar to the mythical construction of Black Harlem in the early twentieth century, in that the myth of this neighborhood acted as a "reconciling agent for an irreconcilable paradox: disjunction between the socioeconomic reality and its appeal as a distraction from this reality for Whites" (Dowling 168). These exotic spaces and the exotic people inhabiting them provided the environment for "[W]hite slummers [to search] our new moral regions to plumb for cultural regeneration" (Dowling 168). Additionally, these slumming tours helped stabilize the middleclass White nation by encouraging a new kind of White hegemony united against the strangeness of the Chinese and Black peoples and the spaces they became limited to (Haenni 25).

Additionally, Haenni's article is useful for considering Cimino's *Year of the Dragon*, as the dominant narrative focuses on Stanley White's attempts to police the people and space of New York's Chinatown, a task that echoes the author's argument of using Asian space and bodies to define White identity. But first, let me preface this discussion of the space and people that make up Chinatowns with a quick note from film scholar Eugene Wong. Wong gives a brief history of the origin of the Fu Manchu character in classical Hollywood cinema. He digs up a damning quote from Fu Manchu creator, Sax Rohmer, in which he admits that he knows nothing about Chinese people, but did "know something about Chinatown" (Wong 57). Rohmer's assertion of knowing something about Chinatown relays the intriguing bewilderment that Whites anticipated experiencing in this space and through its people—a phenomenon that promised contact with the exotic but only in a highly mediated, if not superficial way. Understanding the mystification of

Chinatown is important because it functions within a larger fantastically constructed narrative about Asians and what constitutes “Asian-ness.” In addition to arguing that the space and people of Chinatown provided a way for White slummers to transform their own identities and negotiate an increasingly racialized and urban modernity, Haenni also discusses what she calls “the [White] consumption of a surface aesthetic” found in Chinatowns in the U.S. (29). She is talking about the illegibility of Chinatown’s buildings, signs, painted symbols, etc. to White slummers. These unknowable symbols could be “appreciated” by Whites as a new, exotic kind of aesthetic. This stands in sharp contrast to the threatening immediacy of loud, foreign sounds and unfamiliar, noxious smells also found within Chinatowns. These sounds and smells threaten a kind of contamination that the illegible but “pleasing” aesthetic sights do not.

Just as White identity can gain definition through contrast with Asian spaces and bodies, the White presence in interracial romances affects how both male and female Asian identity comes to be shaped in this subgenre. For example, the process of priming Asian/American women for coupling with White men involves, among other factors, an assault on the sexuality and morality of Asian/American men (7). Laura Kang argues that the latter are constructed as villainous and cruel towards their female counterpart, often willing selling them into sexual slavery in various cinematic narratives. Because of their supposed innate cruelty, Asian men are viewed as unsuitable and even morally inferior partners to Asian/American women, suggesting that the “neat dyad of man/woman is uncoupled for these others” (7). This uncoupling from her male Asian/American counterpart purportedly leaves the Asian/American woman open and receptive to couplings with White men. Here, morality or a lack thereof becomes a determining factor in which group is deemed as appropriate suitors for Asian/American women. On the flip



side, we rarely see White women coupled with Asian/American men on-screen—undoubtedly due in large part to the latter’s construction as villainous, asexual, or both.

Although the constructed morality of White men is posited as superior to that of Asian/American men, the former are nonetheless guilty of taking part in the trading of Asian/American female bodies in American cinema. White men often work in complicity with villainous Asian male characters to jointly denigrate and restrict the agency of Asian/American women. Laura Kang elaborates on this point in her discussion of 1991’s *Thousand Pieces of Gold*. She uncovers instances of “masculine bonding over the body of the Asian woman” in the film that serve to restrict the female protagonist’s agency despite the men’s individual struggles to establish dominancy over her sexuality (10). In spite of these moments of complicity among the film’s ethnically diverse male characters, there is a pecking order governed by race that continues to inform the film. Simply put, the White male always takes precedence over other male characters. However, always at the bottom of this arrangement is the Asian/American woman, oppressed by multiple males spanning multiple ethnic lines. Her body is not her own. Instead, the body of the Asian/American woman becomes a site of colonization in Hollywood cinema.

Furthermore, Asian/American women too often come into comprehensibility and individuality through their relationships with the White, male protagonists of popular film (Kang 9). Their characters are mediated through their relationships with these White male protagonists suggesting their inability for self-actualization or agency in the identity-making process. The individuality the Asian/American woman gains through these relationships contrasts with the anonymity and ethnic interchangeability that often accompanies the minor Asian characters in these films. “The Asian woman is rescued from the perpetual facelessness and otherness that mark the other Asian bodies,” explains Kang. “She becomes a subject in both senses of the word; she is

granted (relative) subjectivity through her (understandable) desire for the [W]hite male hero but this is crucially contingent upon whether and how she is subjected to his desire” (9). Her relationship with the White male protagonist brings her forward from a background of characters anonymously colored as Asiatic and allows her to have some amount of individuality. Here, a key point is her regrettable dependence on these relationships for her character’s limited actualization on-screen.

In addition, the ease with which Hollywood cinema substitutes Asian ethnicities for one another serves to affirm American imperialism in Asia. “These cinematic distortions of [ethnicity],” Kang explains, “have been naturalized by the representations of Asians as largely interchangeable—a cinematic articulation of the age-old ‘All Orientals Look Alike’” (8-9). This interchangeability among Asian/American people is made possible in large part through their absence of language. They too often find themselves in the narratives of White men in Hollywood cinema. These ethnic groups must acclimate and acculturate to White male hegemony. These characters are too often depicted speaking some form of Asiatic-sounding gibberish meant to represent whichever language their characters purportedly speak. The inclusion of Pidgin English also serves to universalize the spoken experience of Asians. It’s no wonder I was once asked by a naturalized American if I spoke “the Asian language.” Popular media, owing much to Hollywood cinema, has propagated the idea that Asians are all the same: in culture, in look, and in language. This process of universalizing Asian ethnicities helps contain and manage them in a steadily globalizing world.

This process of universalizing becomes especially detrimental to cinematic representations of Asian/American women because they are not able to define themselves through speech as well as image. This is compounded by the fact that Asian/American women are not depicted

as characters who have mastered speech but rather as nymphs who speak broken English or are otherwise giggly or silent. By severely inhibiting their ability to define themselves through speech, Hollywood cinema harmfully manages their identities.

This process also allows the delineation between White males and Asian/American males to come into sharper relief. As previously discussed, White male hegemony has striven to divide the dyad of Asian/American man and woman by positioning itself as the superior choice in sexuality and morality over Asian/American men. By lumping all Asian ethnicities into one, homogeneous Asiatic group, the White male hegemony is better able to diminish the characters of all Asian/American males.

Exploiting the bodies of Asian/American women also serves to alleviate White masculine hegemony of its guilty consciousness concerning its imperialist endeavors. “The struggle over indigenous female bodies is...metonymical of the struggle for geopolitical territory that is the goal of imperialist domination” (Kang 8). This sentiment echoes those found in Deborah Gee’s 1988 documentary, “Slaying the Dragon.” The idea behind this tactic boils down to this: “If I dominate your women, then I have dominated you, too.” Women are often included in the spoils of war and conquest. By exercising their sexual domination of Asian/American women, White male hegemony also asserts its dominance over the Asian cultures and nations it infiltrates. It allows a “re-visioning of U.S. history that not only incorporates but relies upon the dark, female body to redeem the American myth of manifest destiny and its [W]hite male actors” (Kang 11).

Although she urges for an active resistance to the acceptance of this narrative, Kang does not specify a particular course of action. However, Celine Parreñas Shimizu presents an interesting form of resistance in *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on*

*Screen and Scene*. Shimizu's resistance depends on the embrace of sexuality. Instead of shying away, the author argues for a conscious and purposeful interaction with the politics of Asian/American female sexuality. She explains, "When we tend to run and hide from sex, we do not solve the problem of how the pathology of hypersexual images will haunt and return publicly, privately, and intimately—invading our self-perceptions, defining our most important relations, and our very movements in the world. If the Asian/American woman cannot be imaged outside of sex, her self-formation must occur in terms of redefining sex" (20). Shimizu introduces the concept of "politically productive perversity," which involves working to establish a different identity through the already-established sexual imagery prevalent in popular media (21). Rather than ignore or disown the grossly flawed stereotypes of their sexuality, Asian/American women must engage the hypersexuality assigned to their bodies in order to begin scrutinizing the rhetoric relegating them.

In addition to tracing the cinematic roots of the lotus blossom and dragon lady polarity in Hollywood cinema, Gee's documentary provides a platform for ordinary Asian/American women living in the U.S. to discuss their experiences coping with the limitations imposed upon their bodies by White male hegemony. Several of the women interviewed in "Slaying the Dragon" discuss troubling interactions with White men that hinge upon mistaken identity. These men are not looking for individuals; they are looking for an image disseminated through popular media, especially by Hollywood cinema. The women relate experiences in which White men have approached them with assumptions about the women's sexuality stemming from stereotypes about Asian/American women. Reading a certain kind of sexuality into the women's race, these men overlook the qualities of the individual woman in favor of stereotypes about an entire group of people.

The Asian/American woman's body, moreover, continues to be appropriated by White masculine hegemony to serve as a site for negotiating anxieties about White masculinity. This denaturalized purpose for her body may be most overtly understood in the American films inspired by WWII and the Vietnam War. Particularly in light of the latter's implications about American national identity in the face of public defeat, the bodies of Asian/American women were exploited in the recuperation of American masculinity in many of the films produced after this event. *Year of the Dragon* depicts White male resentment directed at the bodies of Asian/American women. The film's protagonist, New York City police captain and Vietnam veteran Stanley White, blatantly and violently harasses news reporter Trazy Tzu. "In fact, all displays of Tzu's body in *Year of the Dragon* are coupled with moments of violence" (Marchetti 208). His "I hated you in Vietnam" statement, mentioned earlier, speaks to this argument. White transfers his feelings about one group of people to Tzu's body, making it a receptacle for his rage and frustration. This is also an example of what Shimizu recognizes as mistaken identity. He even calls her a "phony white bread cunt," an insult illustrating his layers of hatred directed not only at Asian/American women but also at women in general.

White's racial slur also insinuates Tzu's desire for assimilation into White America. This idea finds support through the Asian reporter's complicity with the police captain's plan to undermine the internal dealings of Chinatown as well as his plan to bed her. Although Tzu recognizes the captain's racist attitude towards herself and the Chinese community, her actions continually contradict this recognition. Even though she tells Rourke's character that she is "not some gook hooker in Saigon" as he harasses her from inside his car while she walks down a busy street, she eventually accepts his harassment as charming banter and gets into his car. Tzu's character, while outwardly assertive and independent, reveals herself as only a façade of a

strong, modern woman. Although she enjoys a fulfilling professional career and financial stability, her interaction with White reveals a truly problematic vision of romance. Tzu's susceptibility to White's racist pick up lines is truly disturbing. Since when is "I hated you in Vietnam" a cue to fuck? Although outfitted with a flashy job and fancy apartment, the narrative undermines Tzu's modern woman and reveals that she harbors, underneath the accoutrements of '80s yuppie materialism, stereotypical qualities of an obedient Asian/American woman from an outdated era.

Additionally, it's worthwhile to comment on how the naming of the film's lead characters plays into its treatment of racial difference. The film sets up a conflict of racial allegiance and loyalty that Stanley White struggles to work through. The character's family name, truly lacking subtlety, lets us know where he stands on the racial divide the film constructs. He identifies himself as a working-class "Polock" who deeply resents what he views as an uppity Chinese community usurping his claim as a descendent of White immigrants to America's riches. His resentment promotes the idea that "the American dream" belongs legitimately to only White immigrants and their descendents. Furthermore, audiences are given a glimpse into his troubled home life, where his marriage to his childhood sweetheart (also from the same working-class Polish neighborhood) is troubled by the economic realities of their social position. In our first introduction to his wife, we see them arguing about financial woes and household chores. For example, White's wife wields a wrench as she fixes the kitchen sink—a job that she angrily points out should have been completed by her husband. By emasculating White in this way, this scene helps construct the sense of "naturalness" in his coupling with Tzu's character—whose "Asian-ness" is seen as "righting" the traditional gender balance that is lacking in White's marriage to his [White] wife. And, conveniently to the development of White and Tzu's interracial "romance," White's wife is murdered by the Chinatown thugs he hunts—an event that not only frees

him to be with Tzu but also helps reinforce the “naturalness” of their coupling by degrading the Asian male as corrupt, villainous, and therefore unfit to be the partner of the Asian female.

In this same vein, let us consider the naming of the lead female character, Tracy Tzu. The alliteration of her name isn’t a practice unique to this film. For example, Nancy Kwan played “Linda Low” in *Flower Drum Song* (1961). This alliteration is mirrored in real-life: actresses China Chow and Lucy Liu, and newswomen Connie Chung, Lisa Ling, and Laura Ling all share short Americanized names that can be described as “tidy” and accessible. In essence, the naming of these Asian/American women helps them become more “palatable” to White America and this tactic is being perpetuated to younger generations: Disney starlet Brenda Song stars in the “Wendy Wu” made-for-TV movie series for the kid-friendly channel. This kind of alliterative naming practice may be understood as a tactic of containment that helps diffuse their racial difference for a White American audience.

Although corruption is shown infiltrating other ethnic communities in addition to the Chinese community, *Year of the Dragon* attempts to trace the origin of corruption to Asia and in the process colors all Asian people as inherently corrupt. Joey Tai, the young, new leader of Chinatown, travels to Thailand to carry out an international drug deal and unexpectedly discovers his old mentor in a state of heroin-induced dementia. The narrative constructs this discovery in a way that recalls the journey to find Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. After traveling upriver in the dense Thai jungle on donkey-back, the young Chinatown boss finds the “old general” barely conscious and slumped against a wall in the back room of a dilapidated barracks. The film’s narrative locates the origin of corruption far away from America in the jungles of Thailand in the Yellow body of a sickly, old man. White, in fact, not so subtly asserts the idea of corruption’s

Asian roots throughout the film. He proclaims, “The mafia concept isn’t even Italian, it’s Chinese. They invented the mafia.”

The captain’s assessment of Asian corruption deeply affects his relationship with Tzu. He shouts at her: “You goddamn people, you keep everything a secret.” Although White suspects Tzu for harboring what he views as a natural or inherent Asian corruption directed against White male hegemony, this suspicion proves unnecessary in her case. As discussed earlier, the reporter’s façade of modern female independence makes way for her unveiling as a stereotypically obedient and passive Asian/American woman—she is more lotus blossom or China doll than dragon lady. “Through her involvement with White, Tzu renounces her Chinese ethnicity and subordinates herself to White’s championing of mainstream ideals” (Marchetti 206). During the funeral of a Chinatown elder, Tzu aggressively attempts to interview the deceased man’s family as they walk in the funeral procession behind the casket. She repeatedly directs her cameraman to “get the daughter’s face,” as she bombards the family with questions. Although she demonstrates behavior that is disrespectful to her community, behavior better suited to the idea of a modern woman doing her job as a reporter, Tzu’s complicity towards White undermines her autonomy. “Both as a woman and as an Asian, Tracy has submitted to Stanley’s authority, and, through their romance, the film legitimizes Stanley’s right to dominate her as a woman and as a Chinese American” (Marchetti 213).

Gina Marchetti approaches Cimino’s film as an example of a postmodern text in her essay, “The Postmodern Spectacle of Race and Romance in *Year of the Dragon*.” The danger of postmodernity, however, is that the opportunity for real activism is lost in the distance created by use of irony and pastiche. Even though Tzu and Herbert Kwong, the new police academy graduate recruited to help White infiltrate Chinatown, directly address many of the stereotypes sur-



rounding the Asian/American community, this is undermined through the film's heavy use of ironic distance and pastiche. How are we supposed to view Cimino's film? At face value or from a comfortable distance wherein the film's overt racism and sexism can be consumed with nary a guilty conscious? *Year of the Dragon* attempts to discount its problematic treatment of race and sex by providing a disclaimer stating, "This film does not intend to demean or to ignore the many positive features of Asian-Americans." This tactic, however superficial, attempts to sidestep accusations from critics about the film's representation of the Asian/American community. If it's just a movie, should audiences be comfortable consuming it despite its overt racism and sexism?

In an earlier example of a Hollywood interracial "romance," Richard Quine's *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960), many of the themes of constructed "Asian-ness" are played out and given validation. For example, in her first meeting with Richard Lomack (William Holden), Suzy Wong (Nancy Kwan) makes up a story about how she is already promised in marriage to a Chinese man she has never met. She says matter-of-factly, "Contract's already signed." Lomack, although shocked, readily believes in the reality of this situation among Asian people—that Asian fathers have no qualms about trading their daughters away in such a manner. This scene helps encourage the belief in the supposed barbarity of the Asian male—that he doesn't value his women, thus leaving open the door for the White male to become the new "natural" (and supposedly kinder, more humane) partner to the Asian female.

Additionally, *Suzy Wong* is rife with statements made by various characters that ultimately serve to contradict the sentiments they're meant to convey. For example, the hotel owner tells Lomack, "This is not a brothel," when it clearly is—with giggling Chinese women being escorted by American sailors in and out of various rooms within the hotel and into an adjacent bar. These flying-in-the-face-of-the-obvious statements only hold more weight as the film con-

tinues. Several times Suzy tells Lomack, “I not dirty street girl.” The more she repeats this line, the more the idea that she *is* a “dirty street girl” becomes planted in our minds. This identity for the Asian woman becomes reinforced when the bank manager explains to Lomack that he can’t hire someone involved with “that kind of girl” because the wives of the bank’s board of directors are prejudiced against the Asian women who sleep with their husbands. Of course, the bank manager could be referring to Suzy’s occupation as a prostitute instead of her identity as an Asian woman; but this is never clarified. The fact that the film casts Kwan’s character as a prostitute only attempts to cloud the exact nature of the accusations hurled against her and against her relationship with Holden’s character. Kay, the rival for Lomack’s affection, rages: “It’d be laughable if it weren’t so filthy.” Is it “filthy” because Lomack is involved with a prostitute or because he’s involved with a Chinese woman? The narrative conveniently sidesteps this question by having Kwan’s character perform double-duty; she beautifully performs “Yellowface,” wearing tight cheongsams and speaking broken English, while also taking up the role of prostitute. Suzy’s occupation is just a guise to distract from the real tension troubling her relationship with Lomack: the fact that she’s an Asian woman.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* (1958) remains another defining text in the interracial “romance” subgenre. A close reading of certain key scenes will help us understand the film’s problematic treatment of interracial couplings. A really telling moment occurs during Lt. Cable’s seemingly heartfelt ballad about rejecting learned racisms. There’s something “off” about his song that undermines any real progressive attitude about interracial couplings in this film. In his song, Lt. Cable’s protestations against behavior driven by racism are oddly phrased as statements that, taken literally, would seem to read as a guide to how one cultivates such racisms instead of an upfront rejection of them. He sings, “You’ve *got* to be taught to hate and

fear...You've *got* to be taught to be afraid of people who's eyes are oddly made, and people who's skin is a different shade...You've *got* to be *carefully* taught." His emphasis on the word, "got," changes everything; it's as if he is demanding rather than discrediting a standard of racist behavior. Essentially, his delivery is too convincing; his strange enthusiasm performing these lines undermines the supposed message of tolerance. This scene actually reinforces the very racisms it supposedly condemns. It sets the tone for *how* Lt. Cable tells Frenchman Emile De Becque that he's decided to take part in a dangerous mission in enemy territory. He tells Emile, "Back home, whenever I got into a jam, I used to go hunting. So that's what I think I'll do now. Good hunting up there around Maria Louise [island]...Big game." His hunting metaphor positions the Japanese as animals, conflicting with his song's supposed message of tolerance. Here, our reading of Lt. Cable's song as a rejection of tolerance is reinforced by his hunting metaphor, which comes immediately afterwards.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable scene in *South Pacific* is when island girl Liat and her mother Bloody Mary perform the "Happy Talk" song for Lt. Cable on Bali Ha'i. This performance has Bloody Mary singing about what amounts to distractions from the difficulties of the young lovers' interracial relationship, like looking at the moon or watching birds learning how to fly. Her delivery of these lines is punctuated at key moments that lend her singing a staccato quality; or, more precisely, her singing style is meant to mimic the choppy or broken sound of Pidgin English. Liat's animated hand gestures that accompany her mother's song make for a strange and uncomfortable spectacle that reinforces this idea that Asians lack an ability to express themselves verbally. Liat, in fact, barely speaks at all except for a brief moment when she repeats her name upon first meeting Lt. Cable. She is meant to be looked at and nothing more. In

several close-ups of her face, the frame's outer edges are blurred as if boxing her into a dream-like gaze where we can dwell on her physical beauty.

Many modern viewers would probably share in the surprise that I experienced when I discovered that the actress who played Bloody Mary, Juanita Hall, was actually an acclaimed Black performer. Hall's presence in this film (she also shows up in Rogers and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* as "Auntie Liang"), in which she passes as a "Tonkinese" (i.e. northern Vietnamese) woman, is indicative of the common Classical Hollywood practice of assigning leading "Asian" roles to non-Asian actors. This phenomenon points to what Robert Stam and Louise Spence call a "structuring absence" that serves to reinforce a White worldview in such films (881). The bodies that are missing—real Asian bodies—form an absence that helps structure viewers' perceptions of the cultures and peoples being portrayed. For example, Stam and Spence point out, "Many American films in the fifties gave the impression that there were no [B]lack people in America" (881). This "structuring absence" also helps encourage the development of an aesthetic that becomes immediately recognizable to mainstream viewers as "Asian." However, "Asian" is such an unstable identity category. Scholar Nguyen Tan Hoang describes this phenomenon of mashing together different cultures and peoples to form a vague but recognizable sense of "Asian-ness" in his article about gay porn star Brandon Lee. Hoang calls it an "all-encompassing Orientalia" that actually provides the element of "Asian authenticity" for White viewers when they encounter the "Asian" themes in porn videos featuring Asian performers (246). This "all-encompassing Orientalia" also applies here. This is how a Black woman could play an Asian islander; in fact, in the scenes showing Lt. Cable's arrival on Bali Ha'i, we see what appears to be Black actors mixed in with Asian-looking actors meant to portray the native islanders. This echoes Sabine Haenni's idea of Whites' consumption of a "surface aesthetic" in

U.S. Chinatowns. *South Pacific* provides the opportunity for White viewers to participate in just such a consumption of a “surface aesthetic” because it mashes together several different cultures and races and presents it as “Asian-esque.”

Bloody Mary also typifies the dragon lady archetype. She is calculating, proving herself to be a savvy businesswoman navigating the rules of the U.S. occupied islands to her benefit. She also pimps out her underage daughter. Upon presenting Liat, she asks Lt. Cable, “You like?” Her willingness to give her daughter to a stranger plays into the archetype’s cruel and even ugly reputation. Even physically, her character typifies a certain unattractiveness consistent with being a dragon lady: a mustache is clearly visible on her upper lip, her thinning hair is pulled up tightly into a bun giving her face a severe look, and her larger body stands in stark contrast to Liat’s petite, more “traditionally Asian” frame. Holding Liat’s small face next to her own, she asks Lt. Cable cryptically, “We are very pretty people, no?” He doesn’t appreciate the full extent of the joke, at least not until he learns that Bloody Mary is Liat’s mother, which alarms him terribly. The threat that one day Liat may turn into a dragon lady like her mother unsettles Lt. Cable. During another scene, Bloody Mary tells Lt. Cable, “You have *special* good babies,” with ominous music immediately playing after this statement. It is with her words that Lt. Cable realizes he can’t marry Liat because of the biracial children they would produce.

The film’s other romantic storyline proves just as problematic. When Ensign Nellie Forbush, a self-proclaimed “hick” from Arkansas, realizes that the brown island children she meets after a party are really the children of her love interest, Emile De Becque, she literally runs away! The idea that Emile laid with an island woman and produced these children is so horrifying to her. Even though Nellie and Emile get back together at the end to form a mis-mash family with his two biracial children, the act of interracial sex is never deemed acceptable. Examining

the spectacle of the biracial children is key to understanding the logic informing the film's treatment of interracial couplings. Nellie waters down or pads the reality of how Emile's children came to be, by containing their otherness as "cuteness"; she dotes on their "big, brown eyes" and coos, "aren't they just the cutest things ever?" How can they be so "cute" when the idea of how they came to be is so horrifying that it literally elicits a fight-or-flight response from Nellie? This scene of recoil or mortification recalls an idea presented in Laura Kang's article, "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies," where the author briefly touches on what can be called the "origin story" of the biracial person. Kang suggests that, in line with dominant ideas about interracial couplings as it relates to White colonization of "foreign" lands, the biracial person's origin or conception becomes a site of violence and domination. The author explains that "[c]asting territorial struggle in terms of an exotic/erotic encounter with the Eastern female conceals and justifies the realities of forced penetration, territorial dispossession, and colonial domination" (76). Here, the body of the Asian woman becomes equated with the very land being colonized, thus setting up a metaphor of violence in how her coupling with White male partners is enacted; as the land is conquered and devastated, so is she. Thus, the "origin story" of the biracial person becomes informed by a metaphorical violence that cannot but taint them. When Nellie realizes that the "cute" brown children are from the union of Emile and an island woman, she recognizes the taboo of this violence subconsciously. This tension is never really resolved, despite how she gets into mother-mode at the end, telling the children to "learn to mind her and be nice to her." Even though they're supposed to be a family now, the film isn't advocating interracial couplings. In fact, the film suggests that the act itself--the [interracial] sex--is lethal. Emile's island wife is long dead and Lt. Cable is seemingly punished for laying with Liat with his own death. The act itself--the sex—is what makes interracial couplings so terrifying and threatening.

The Hollywood movies discussed in this chapter dance around this act, with some even showing bits of it like in Cimino's *Year of the Dragon*, but are not capable of addressing it directly because of the conditions in which the stories are told; Hollywood simply cannot be so explicit because of censorship already in place. This is where pornography comes in. This is a genre capable of addressing the act itself directly--and exploiting it. This is what Nellie was so afraid to imagine: the sex act that produced the biracial children. The following chapter confronts the sex act that simultaneously drives and terrorizes the Hollywood interracial "romance."

#### 4 SEEING IS BELIEVING: THE SEX ACT IN INTERRACIAL PORNOGRAPHY

If pornography provides the stage where identities based on race, sexuality, and even economic status come together and enact a multitude of narratives, then we can understand how the on-screen sex act can be viewed as a powerful site of identity-making and thus recognize its importance to our interrogation of the Asian/American woman's on-screen presence. In this chapter, we will specifically look at the sex act in interracial pornography—perhaps the site of the ultimate miscegenation, if it is to be understood as trafficking in an excess of bodies and the taboos, desires, and pleasures shaping their interactions in this medium. Why is crossing the color line sexually exciting? Interracial pornography exploits this mercilessly, with its sense of eroticism dependent on our awareness of a taboo being exploited. In other words, this kind of porn relies on the public's fluency in certain taboos and mythologies to achieve its erotic appeal. These texts highlight the mythologies of racial difference that mainstream "respectable" texts try to hide. Mainstream texts, driven by the modern political agenda of convincing us that "we're not that different from each other" in a bid for tolerance and political correctness, are under-

mined by the graphic scenes of interracial pornography that absolutely necessitate racial difference and exploits them. The sex acts performed in interracial pornography truly function as sites of power in this light and suggest the great potential in “re-functioning” the racial identities that the genre traffics in.

The sex act in interracial pornography becomes a site of identity-making not just for female Asian/American performers but also for Asian/American women at large. The scenarios in these films often invoke the subservience of Asian/American women through their narratives. For example, the sex acts found in these films frequently pivot on situations where the service industry and the sex industry come together to doubly inscribe Asian/American women in the service of [often White] men. This double inscription reinforces the attribution of sex work to this group of women. Set in massage parlors, tea houses, and the like, these films not only provide the pretense for the sexual subservience and availability of female Asian/American performers but also work to naturalize the hypersexuality of these women.

Linda Williams and Celine Parreñas Shimizu have each made great strides in the unpacking of sex acts in pornography as well as this genre’s influence on popular culture, with the latter specializing in interracial pornography featuring Asian/American women. Williams skillfully convinces us of the importance of the sex act as a site of identity-making in her seminal work, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible.’* Moving images are used to “make sex speak” in an attempt to satisfy our curiosities about our human condition (Williams, *Hard Core* 2). Williams’ work moves beyond questioning whether pornography *should* exist towards an examination of what it *does* for viewers. Coining pornography as one among several “body genres,” Williams unpacks this [White] male-oriented genre’s visceral appeal to the body. She makes the case that while “goose bumps, tears, laughter, and arousal may occur, may seem like



reflexes...they are all culturally mediated” bodily reactions (*Hard Core* 5). It is our task to understand how these bodily reactions have been, as she puts it, “culturally mediated.”

Shimizu’s work has a foundation in Williams’ scholarship. Viewers’ pleasurable responses to Asian/American women in pornography have been culturally mediated in the same way that Williams’ discussion of bodily reactions to “body genres” have been mediated. Viewers find Asian/American women desirable in pornography because they have been made legible in a way that tightly binds together their race with a constructed aura of hypersexuality that constitutes the sexual thrill of watching them perform (Shimizu, *Hypersexuality* 28). Shimizu argues, “[R]ace is the primary identity for Asian women in porn. Racialization constitutes their perversity so that Asian women must perform [Y]ellowface in order to be legible in pornography” (*Hypersexuality* 28). This means that in order to elicit desire and sexual titillation from viewers, these women must play into the tropes of the Asian/American female that are simultaneously created and reinforced through the medium of pornography as well as more mainstream moving images.

Consciousness of her hypersexual identity does not necessarily contribute to the positive evolution of the female Asian/American performer’s identity in traditional hard-core pornography. As just discussed, the Asian/American woman must play into the tropes of her hypersexuality in order to be legible—that is, erotically desirable, in the image economy of pornography. Even when certain characteristics composing her hypersexuality are confronted and then disputed, the overarching narrative and the power structures built into these texts help to negate the progressive potential of such confrontations. For example, Spice Studios’ *Fly Spice: Pacific Rimmed* (2007) presents a moment of direct confrontation of one aspect of the Asian/American woman’s hypersexual identity--her passivity as exemplified by a lacking command of speech. A White male performer, temporarily adopting Pidgin English, asks a group of Asian women, “You

“speak-y English?” One woman boldly steps forward and retorts, in perfect English, “Probably better than you.” In this moment, she confronts a long-standing trope about Asian/American women and momentarily suggests her ability to encompass more than the caricatured identity assigned to her. Unfortunately, this remains the singular instance of such confrontation in the film.

In addition, we can understand this encounter as a moment meant to ease spectators’ guilt about fetishizing the female Asian/American performers in this film. It’s as if including this bold, 10-second refutation of one aspect of the caricatured Asian identity--a poor command of the English language—can excuse the other two hours of graphic sex acts hinging on the passivity of the female Asian/American performers. For example, one sex scene involves a small, quiet Asian/American woman performing fellatio on a significantly larger and highly vocal White man. Several times during this sex act, she begins to choke and must stop and lean towards the floor to gag and cough. However, her choking is constructed to be part of the erotic appeal of this scene. The male performer encourages her to gag and choke by grabbing her hair and forcing her head closer to his body, thereby pushing his penis deeper into her mouth and throat. When she pulls away to gag and cough, we hear him telling her repeatedly, “That’s right, choke on it.” We must ask, “What makes something “sexy” and what part does power play in the sexualization of a person or situation?” This sex act becomes “sexy” because of the violence it incurs on the body of the female performer. This idea recalls Laura Kang’s argument of the violent nature of the sexual conquest of the non-White woman as it connects to the White man’s conquest of “foreign” lands and their “native women” (76). Seeing sexual violence done to their bodies in this film and in countless others contributes to the naturalization of the idea that Asian/American women are “made for” these kinds of perverse, hypersexual acts.

*Pacific Rimmed* also works to naturalize the hypersexuality of Asian/American women by relying on a scenario that brings together the service industry and the sex industry. Asian/American women are often depicted in various modes of servitude, including sexual servitude. The pretense for the sex acts in this film revolves around the roles of the female Asian/American performers as flight attendants servicing passengers aboard “Spice Air.” This scenario recalls a specific commercial for Korean Air shown on cable television within recent years in which the faces and bodies of the Korean flight attendants are featured prominently as a persuasive factor in choosing to fly this airline. In fact, the advertising for major airlines based in Asia has created at least part of their appeal from the exploitation of the bodies of their female stewardesses. Singapore Airlines encourages customers to “rediscover the romance of flying” and features the bodies of Asian women prominently in their advertising materials. These advertising campaigns traffic in the physical beauty of their female staff, constituting a major selling point for their airlines. Additionally, the emphasis on the bodies of the female staff is coupled with an emphasis on the exceptional service provided by these bodies. In an advertisement found on Korean Air’s website, a white male passenger is attributed to have the following thought about the quality of the Korean Air experience: “From departure to arrival, there’s someone who knows me better than myself.” This testament creates and reinforces the idea that Asian/American women are service-oriented and eager-to-please, a characteristic that helps constitute their erotic appeal to White men who begin to view them as pre-feminist havens of female sexuality.

In SEXZ Pictures’ *Memoirs of Mika Tan: Happy Endings* (2006), the pretense for the sex acts performed in this film also brings together the service industry with the sex industry in a way that naturalizes the hypersexuality of Asian/American women. The sex acts take place in a

massage parlor where the pretense for sex depends upon the idea of providing good customer service to the men who pay for massages. These massages quickly escalate into different kinds of sex acts because the bodies of the female Asian/American performers are read as “available” to the White male customers. About a minute or two after the female performer begins the massage, the male performer begins groping her body as she works. She does nothing to stop this and soon the scene escalates into various sex acts. This suggests that part of providing her service to men in any kind of professional capacity would also involve the Asian/American woman’s legibility as sexually available to them. This scenario grounds her identity in sex and service or in a kind of subservient hypersexuality.

*Happy Endings* depends on the public’s fluency in these mythologies to achieve its erotic appeal. For example, the cover art of this film places great value in the power of the female Asian face and body to convey this kind of appeal. Her heavily powdered face, made up in the style of a geisha and contrasting dramatically with the black background, is enlarged to take up half of the cover art. The other half displays the majority of her body; dressed in a green kimono left open in the front and wearing a heavy, highly styled black wig resembling a geisha’s head-dress, the actress stares out from the picture with a serious yet suggestive gaze. Mika Tan’s face and body are presented in a way that capitalizes on the above-mentioned mythologies clouding Western perceptions of Asian women. By appearing in *Yellowface*, she represses any sense of an individual identity in order to showcase the identity of hypersexualization assigned to female Asian bodies in general. And, of course, the film’s title links this production to the more mainstream Hollywood film *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Dir. Rob Marshall, 2005), attracting potential viewers by capitalizing on their desire for themes and situations where the subservience of Asian women is already built-in.

Although this distinction has become less clear within the recent decade, what does it mean that pornography has been relegated to a restricted existence? While the influence of this genre and what writer Ariel Levy has coined “raunch culture” have broken through into mainstream popular culture to a greater degree than in decades past, hard-core pornography still comes with certain barriers like age restrictions and social taboos that help restrict direct access to this medium of “low” culture. However, regardless of its restricted accessibility, I have been making the case for hard-core pornography’s great influence on the identity-building of Asian/American women in Western culture. But how can this genre exercise such influence if a majority of people have not directly viewed such texts? I believe an explanation lies in making the connection between interracial pornography featuring Asian/American women and more mainstream moving images showcasing this same group. These mediums work together in a dialectical process where each informs the other. As I have already mentioned, many of the scenarios in pornography featuring Asian/American women rely on narratives set in service-oriented environments such as bathhouses, massage parlors, etc. Additionally, the characters performed by Asian/American actresses in mainstream Hollywood films often recall this same sense of passive, sexualized service. It’s as if the fantasy of the pornography film begins where the scene of a Hollywood film must end. The pornographic film can allow viewers to see the continuation of a scene that would normally end in a mainstream film because of production and censorship codes. Imagine, for instance, the possibilities of the scene involving Lucy Liu’s character and Tim Curry’s character in *Charlie’s Angels* (2000) in which she performs an erotically-charged massage by walking on his back with her small feet as she wears generic but sexy geisha garb. While this scene must end without any explicit depictions of this erotic encounter, a pornographic rendering of this same scene may pick up where Hollywood leaves off. And many por-

nographic films already have! For example, *Happy Endings* and *Pacific Rimmed* may be understood as providing a sordid continuation of more mainstream Hollywood scenarios featuring Asian/American women.

Similarly, we can trace the influence of pornographic texts upon more mainstream texts. We can ask, “Why does this same scene involving Liu’s character and Curry’s character elicit an erotic or titillating undercurrent in the first place?” We do not need to have seen hard-core sex acts involving Asian/American women and White men to feel the erotic tension invoked through this scene. In other words, we are already reading Liu’s presence as erotically charged because we have learned to read the bodies of Asian/American women through a lens of hypersexuality. Mainstream images of Asian/American women and those found in hard-core pornography inform one another in a dialectical process that clouds the definitive origin of the creation of her hypersexuality. It becomes less crucial where the inscription of hypersexuality in the Asian/American woman’s identity *first* occurred—in the pornographic or mainstream text—because the fact that it *has* occurred and *continues* to occur through *both* kinds of texts emerges as a more pressing realization.

The relatively restricted accessibility of hard-core pornography to those under-age and those socially embarrassed into avoiding it, which arguably constitute a great deal of people, also functions to make the reworking of identities created in and emanating from these texts (in addition to mainstream texts) that much more difficult. Because a majority of the public need not have directly viewed hard-core scenes with Asian/American women in order to read her hypersexuality in contexts outside of pornography, renegotiating her hypersexual identity becomes an important concern among Asian/American feminists—as it becomes, in effect, a renegotiation of our own identities within popular culture. Where can such a renegotiation begin? Since both Wil-

liams and Shimizu argue the power of the explicit sex act in the process of identity-making, the pull of the pornographic text overrides that of the mainstream text in addressing this particular aspect of the conundrum of the Asian/American woman's identity. Whereas locating the origin of the first instance of her assignment of hypersexuality in either a specifically pornographic or mainstream text becomes less important than the fact that *both* texts function together to do so, Williams and Shimizu advocate that the renegotiation of this identity, at least, will originate from the pornographic.

Although she argues for the value of the explicit sex act as a site where renegotiation of the Asian/American woman's identity can begin, Shimizu also acknowledges the trauma potentially felt by female Asian/American viewers of this niche of pornography. As a female Asian/American viewer, seeing her/your hypersexuality on screen "leads to a traumatic viewing experience...[There can arise] confusing feelings of political impropriety for receiving pleasure from images 'targeted at a heterosexual man'" (Shimizu, *Hypersexuality* 34). On the other hand, denying our pleasure restricts us as well. The author argues that allowing ourselves to feel pleasure does not need to necessitate our participation in our own destruction by assuming the subject position of the White male spectator. Shimizu asks, "What if we completely go against the instinct of averting our eyes and disciplining our bodily response to seeing sex and instead look at it head on for what sexual visualization may say about race and its complicated desires and unexpected affinities?" (*Hypersexuality* 25). Unlike critic Renee Tajima's conclusion that it's a no-win situation for female Asian/American spectators in her article "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women," Shimizu argues that the experience of viewing hard-core scenes of Asian/American women by Asian/American women does *not* have to follow a binary model of reaction calling for either the repression of our pleasure and expression of our disgust *or* our

alignment with the White male gaze and destruction of the self. Shimizu advocates that our spectatorship doesn't have to amount to a no-win situation. In fact, she argues that it's more like a double-edged experience, both painful *and* pleasurable.

This idea is similar to scholar Peter X. Feng's argument of viewership in his article, "Recuperating Suzie Wong: A Fan's Nancy Kwan-Dary." Feng tackles the problematic viewing of *The World of Suzy Wong* by suggesting that Asian/American audiences hold the key to "recuperating" Kwan's performance in this highly mediated text. He argues that non-White viewers can extract pleasure from a racist text by "constructing an entirely separate narrative from scavenged bits and pieces of a film" (47). Here, it should be clarified that Feng isn't encouraging us to cling to fleeting moments of resistance within such texts, but rather that we completely "re-narrativize" a star's performance; it's about tapping into a resistance within spectators instead of merely clutching onto "resistant" moments, which can only ultimately succumb to "climb-down resolutions" in line with an overarching heteronormative narrative (48). Feng wants us to mobilize these moments into a completely new narrative space outside of the image and suggests the usefulness of the star study as a way to accomplish this task because it allows meaning to be cobbled together from sources outside of the filmic image. Like Cynthia Liu's discussion of Anna May Wong, Feng tries to address the problematic of Asian on-screen representation by relying on the star study to perform a rehabilitative mission. He also poses the astute question of where meaning-making occurs: from the apparatus or the socially contextualized viewer? Although he argues that the answer is found in a middle ground, his solution of encouraging resistance within spectators to form new narratives outside of the image does not change the way we continue to be represented on-screen and thought of in the White imagination. While an Asian/American audience can perform the "work" needed to "re-narrativize" or rehabilitate an



Asian star's on-screen image, White audiences have no impetus to do so. Thus, both Liu and Feng's reliance on the star study and their focus on the labor that Asian audiences must perform presents its limitations in addressing the struggle of visibility head-on; their methodology can only deal with the fallout of highly mediated, problematic images.

Returning to Shimizu's notion of a double-edged spectator experience, we can understand how it brings up issues of our interpellation as viewers. *What are the terms of our self-recognition in these texts?* Who do we identify with? Are we interpellated into the position occupied by the female performers? Or do we participate in this spectatorship on a take-it or leave-it basis (which so many critics, including Feng, discuss and incorporate into their own suggestions)? That is, we can take what we want from the performances (i.e. what we find pleasurable) and leave that which we find un-pleasurable behind, in a sort of selective-viewing process. But if we participate in this selective-viewing process, does this mean that we are "okay" with the pornographic texts themselves and how they depict our identity as hypersexualized? In other words, can we live with these texts as they are presently constructed? This kind of selective-viewing practice would seem to downplay the need to renegotiate our identities as hypersexualized beings since we could simply overlook the parts we do not gain pleasure from. But even this line of questioning assumes that we act as a uniform group, when in reality it is much more plausible that what is offensive to one Asian/American woman can be highly pleasurable—perhaps *because* it is "perverse"—to another. In fact, Shimizu strongly advocates the ability to find pleasure in the perverse in the construction of what she calls a "politically productive perversity." She defines this concept as "identifying with 'bad' images, or working to establish a different identity along *with* established sexual images so as to expand racial agendas beyond the need to establish normalcy and standardization" (*Hypersexuality*, 21). As female Asian/American viewers, it is

possible to take what we deem as pleasurable from these texts but we must also acknowledge and be in-dialogue with the “perverse” in our efforts to renegotiate our identities.

Returning to the female Asian/American performer’s stinging retort in *Pacific Rimmed*, we can also understand this moment as one of pleasure for female Asian/American viewers. In this moment, we find an unexpected instance of the affirmation of our power, which is a real pleasure in itself. This moment is akin to one discussed by Jessica Hagedorn in her essay “Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No luck.” Hagedorn points out her pleasure as a female Asian/American spectator watching the Jade Cobra gang girls in the mainstream Hollywood film *Year of the Dragon* (Cimino, 1985). She points to the following scene as especially pleasurable in this otherwise dismal film:

Mickey Rourke looks down with world-weary pity at the unnamed Jade Cobra girl he’s just shot who lies sprawled and bleeding on the street: “You look like you’re gonna die, beautiful.”

Jade Cobra girl: “Oh yeah? [blood gushing from her mouth] I’m proud of it.”

Rourke: “You are? You got anything you wanna tell me before you go, sweetheart?”

Jade Cobra girl: “Yeah. [pause] Fuck you.” (265)

Hagedorn comments, “My pleasure in the hard-edged power of the Chinatown gang girls...is my small revenge, the answer to all those Suzie Wong “I want to be your slave” female characters” (265). In isolating this moment from the rest of the film, Hagedorn participates in the take-it or leave-it viewing practice discussed earlier. Although I agree that the Jade Cobra girl’s response constitutes a powerful moment of redemption and pleasure for female Asian/American viewers, it remains only a brief moment in a narrative built around the exploitation of Asian/American bodies, particularly those of women.

Additionally, it would be fruitful to our discussion if we considered how the Asian male is

mediated in pornography because his sexual identity is very much connected to the Asian female's constructed identity. In his article, "The Resurrection of Brandon Lee," Nguyen Tan Hoang argues that Asian porn star Brandon Lee has found success within mainstream gay pornography because he has been coded in these texts as being an assimilated American (225). Lee's stardom in this genre is atypical for an Asian male performer because this group is generally read as effeminate and lacking the necessary physical attributes (i.e. a big dick) to succeed in this visually exploitative field. Hoang suggests that because of structural racism, Asian men are viewed as a kind of "third sex" or "a gender of imagined sexual possibility" (226). Hoang traces the roots of this classification to late nineteenth and early twentieth century racist American practices that forbid immigrant Chinese men from bringing their families to America while they worked on the transcontinental railroads. This encouraged the formation of "bachelor societies" that necessitated, among other things, that Chinese men perform so-called "women's work" themselves like cooking and cleaning. Of course, this view of Chinese men has spread to all "Asian" men and helps reinforce the reading of White masculinity as superior and compatible with female Asian sexuality. With the weight of this history in mind, the abnormality of Lee's case comes into sharper relief. So just how did an Asian man become a "named" star in the gay porn industry? The most obvious answer is Lee's penis. While the author points out that Lee's member (estimated to be 8 1/2-10 inches) is by no means the largest in the business, it still proves to be an impressive sight because it is attached to an Asian body; in other words, we find this Yellow man to be in possession of "a White dick" that makes him special (241). Lee's penis size, furthermore, helps him embody an "American masculinity" that allows him to be a "top"—and Hoang argues that to be a "named" star in this business, one *must* be a "top" (226).

Hoang also details the efforts of Asian writers and scholars in the 1970s that tried to

counter the feminized image of Asian men. However, this group did so according to White heteronormative standards, thereby putting forth an ideal image of the Asian man as middleclass, educated, born in America, and English-speaking. In other words, they prescribed to the standards of a model minority figure in their attempt to “re-masculinize” the Asian male. Here, we can again see the cyclical effect of relying on political modernism’s concern with “counter-images” as real solutions to minority representation; following the logic of the “counter-image,” we can only become locked into a set of standards that conform to dominant structures already in place.

In addition, Hoang takes us through a discussion of martial arts legend Bruce Lee’s filmic body as a way to make connections within the visual economies of the martial arts film and the gay porn film. The author points out that Bruce Lee’s films have an anti-colonial narrative that function as “fantasies of empowerment” for Chinese and minority audiences because his characters are seen fighting established corrupt powers (229). Although his character often begins his films as passive and soft-spoken, Bruce Lee’s explosive moment of transformation allows his character to inhabit a potent sexuality that is undeniable. These moments of transformation occur when his character can no longer take the peaceful path and is forced to fight and reveal his muscular body. Hoang draws a similarity between Bruce Lee’s transformative moment—when he shows his body, and when porn star Brandon Lee reveals his unique “asset”—his penis. These transformative moments disrupt our readings of their Yellow bodies as meek and impotent.

Hoang is rightly critical of the cost of Brandon Lee’s porn stardom. Since the author argues that Lee achieved this status because he has been mediated as an assimilated American in these texts, we cannot but see how his stardom reinforces White masculine ideals and continues to ensure his singularity as a “named” Asian performer in this visual economy. The author traces his

ability to assimilate not only to his usual [Asian] penis size, but also to his boyish face and excellent English. Hoang uncovers Lee's real heritage as Filipino and argues that because of this racial lineage, Lee is able to move within the racial hierarchy of gay porn. He explains that because Lee is Filipino, he is already "mongrelized" and his face reflects this (247). Lee's face is "open" and friendly, displaying hints of a Spanish and American ancestry that reflects the colonial presence in Filipino history. Hoang points out, "One can 'see' this 'mutt' mixture reflected on the face of Brandon Lee as a set of hybridized, Westernized facial features: most meaningfully, the double-eyelid, [and] the tall nose bridge" (249). Here, we must also point out that Lee's ability to inhabit the "top" position usually occupied by White performers is made possible through his contrast with "lesser" Asian male performers in his videos. For example, Lee can be seen in sexual encounters with other Asian men, but these men are coded as FOBs (Fresh Off the Boat) who speak little English and do not possess the same "equipment" as Lee (Hoang 249). These "lesser" Asian performers play "bottoms" in subservient roles, like destitute brothel workers who are dependent on their jobs for subsistence. The hierarchal structuring of these Asian actors, including Lee, points to the influence of economic factors in how racialized performers are positioned. While Lee gets to be a "top" embodying an American masculinity, it comes at the cost of reinforcing stereotypical roles for other Asian male performers that he stands in stark contrast to.

Hoang also makes an interesting connection between Brandon Lee the porn star and Brandon Lee the movie star. Here, the author again looks to the porn star's Filipino heritage to build this connection. He argues that the porn star's stage name inadvertently helps point out the other Brandon's own "racial ambiguity"; even though the two Brandons function in different visual economies, they mirror each other's unstable racial identities. While the real Brandon Lee is "mongrelized" because he's half White and half Chinese, Brandon the porn star is "mongrelized"

simply because he's Filipino, which the author argues is a special kind of identity that lies outside of the traditional "Asian" identity because of the Philippines' contact with Spanish and American colonizers (that Filipinos don't fit into the traditional "Asian" mold because they have such a diluted racial makeup due to a colonial history).

Here, we can use the case of the two Brandons to return to the idea of miscegenated imagery discussed earlier. Are the two on-screen Brandons examples of walking, talking miscegenated images because they reflect each other's unstable racial identities? To interrogate this question, we must clarify the status of our construction of the miscegenated image. We can do this by contrasting it with the ideological construction of the popular racial image. An example of this latter kind of image may be found in a commercial for the male erectile pill, Enzyte. In this commercial, we see Japanese businessmen negotiating a deal with an American businessman in a teahouse. The commercial reconstructs our typical impression of an awkward first meeting between two clashing cultures (i.e. the American smiles widely and dumbly nods at his Japanese counterparts as if unsure how to communicate with them). In this reconstruction of a cross-cultural business meeting, the negotiations between the two parties become a subtitled conversation about male potency and hinge on the popular construction of Asian men as impotent. Upon entering the teahouse, the Japanese businessmen look at the size of the American man's shoes placed by the entrance and remark, "They have sent the *big* one." During negotiations, the Japanese men say things like, "He [the American] is *wood* that will not bend," "He's remaining *firm*," and "He's a *stiff* negotiator." We can see how the Enzyte commercial provides the ideological construction of racial images of the Asian male as impotent and sexually inferior to the White male. Using this as a baseline, we can now understand the miscegenated image as a means to interrupt or explode such an ideological construction. In other words, the miscegenated image

is a self-consciously critical intervention by an artist to upset dominant power structures that oversee race. Returning now to Brandon Lee the porn star, perhaps our question is really, “To what extent does the ‘in-between’ status of the Filipino allow for the porn to do “double-duty”: allowing a certain amount of sexual prowess while at the same time ‘containing’ it within familiar ideological parameters?” The work being performed in Lee’s porn scenes is very different from the kind of aesthetic work that Robert Colescott and Robert Mapplethorpe’s images do. The latter are not trying to contain racial difference at all; unlike the framing of Brandon Lee the porn star, the subjects of these artists’ works interrupt our consumption of them and implicate our own positions within the racial and social hierarchy that we live in. While Brandon Lee’s porn scenes may be unintentionally miscegenated because of the mutability of his Filipino heritage and his connection to Brandon Lee the movie star and how this connection mirrors their shared racial ambiguity, he is still being framed in a way that helps him assimilate into a White masculinity at the cost of degrading other Asian male performers.

At this juncture, it would be beneficial to discuss yet another vein of viewership. In “The Joy Fuck Club,” Darrell Y. Hamamoto rightly discusses the effects of being bombarded with images of Asians with non-Asian partners in everything from Hollywood “romances” to interracial pornography, something that can lead to our “fundamental self-alienation” (60). Hamamoto makes the case that we are being influenced by a pervasive and dominate sense of White sexual ideals that cause a block in our attraction to other Asians—that “White racial imagery [becomes] embedded within Asian/American sexuality” (61). The author laments “the limited opportunities Asian/Americans have in their power to view on video other Yellow people reveling in the joy of their own sexuality, without White intervention” (75). Even when Asians are sexually depicted in texts with other Asians, such as in mythic “Yellow” sex manuals like the Kama Sutra, these

texts are positioned for the benefit of White practitioners who are eager to learn the “secrets” of an “ancient” and mysterious culture (Hamamoto 81). Hamamoto advocates for a “Yellow porno practice” that can help recuperate “a sexuality that has been distorted by the internalization of core racist values and beliefs that reach into the depths of individual psychology” (82). Here, we must distinguish that a “Yellow porno practice” showing Asian-on-Asian action would hopefully break free of the economic hierarchy present in Brandon Lee’s filmography—that Hoang rightly criticizes as merely allowing one superstar to rise from the ranks of Asian males, while continuing to lock-in the majority into old stereotypes of effeminacy. But just what would such a progressive text look like? The independent and experimental texts I discuss in the next chapter address different dimensions of this struggle of visibility and attempt to renegotiate static images of Asian women and their sexualities.

## 5 “TRANSFORMING THE CONDITIONS OF ENUNCIATION”

We have now examined two significant channels through which popular perceptions of “Asian-ness” are created and spread. These case studies have allowed us to uncover the “symptoms” of the struggle of visibility for the Asian/American woman. But where do we go from here? I suggest that my concluding look at the works of Asian/American feminist filmmakers be prefaced with a discussion of influential scholar Homi Bhabha’s understanding of the image sign. In his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha establishes a fundamental link between the formation of one’s sense of self and the problematic of modernity. First, we must understand his definition of modernity as it relates to our subject formation. He puts it best here:



“Modernity is about the historical construction of a specific position of historical enunciation and address...[and] comes from the colonial space” (348, 352). Our process of self-formation, or “ethics of self-construction” as Bhabha puts it, is directed by a “cultural temporality this isn’t universalist, but is ethnocentric in its moment of judgment” (344). He is saying that we are not free to self-determine; we are forming ourselves according to the rules of whatever dominant narrative oversees any given historical period. What is needed, Bhabha suggests, is a reinscription of the sign itself. He advises that we “seize the value-coding” of the sign to enable us to represent ourselves; in other words, we must change the conditions of our enunciation at the level of the sign (344). But just how do we do tackle this monumental task? The following discussion examining the works of Asian/American feminist filmmakers aims to offer some possible answers to this important question. Here, I must emphasize again that we’re not concerned with setting up new, “positive” images of Asian women that are supposed to somehow disqualify all of the problematic images of our bodies that are already out there; that approach completely misses the larger point that we are striving to understand *how* an image is working and exposing the mechanisms that drive this work. Another way to understand this mission is to frame things once again in Bhabha’s language. He proposes that once we seize the value-coding of the sign, a “time-lag” opens in the myth of modernity (351). This lag, or “non-place,” is from whence all constructed histories begin. If we can poke holes into this myth and reveal the gaps in our dominant narratives, we begin to take control of our self-formation.

Before we jump into our discussion of specific films made by Asian/American feminist filmmakers, we have an opportunity to return to Robert Colescott’s works and apply these lessons from Bhabha. We have already discussed how Colescott’s paintings may be understood as “miscegenated” in two significant ways. First, his paintings miscegenate the archive of “high” art

because they are re-workings of famous pieces by many of the revered Western European artists that make up this archive. As with his *Les Demoiselles d'Alabama vestidas* (1985), Colescott's piece reveals the original's impurity: by highlighting Picasso's original, we are reminded that even he was an exile to this tradition because of his Spanish roots. Thus, the archive is revealed to be already plural and "de-centered"—something that is repressed in the designation of the archive as an official tradition. Second, Colescott's paintings "miscegenate" on a more literal level by placing Black bodies within close proximity of White bodies and alluding to actual acts of [sexual] miscegenation. Now, we can use Bhabha's language to understand another dimension of the "miscegenation" at work in Colescott's pieces.

Looking again, for example, at Colescott's *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page From An American History Textbook* (1975), we can now use Bhabha's language to probe deeper into how this piece constructs a miscegenated image. We can argue that Colescott's painting explodes the White narrative of American history by introducing a "time-lag" that situates the action of the painting in a "non-place." In Leutze's original work, we see our nation's first president in a heroic pose while crossing the treacherous icy waters of the Delaware River. A soft halo of golden light illuminates his figure from behind, helping to draw our eye to his standing, forward-looking posture. Colescott's substitution of Black bodies in Blackface in his reworking of Leutze's painting jars our recognition of this famous historical "memory." Leutze's original piece constructs an almost fabled telling of this historical event that helps ground our nation's founding in a narrative of White heroics. We can say that Colescott's reworking of this shared historical [and official] "memory" occurs in a "non-place" outside of linear time. The artist imagines an alternative "memory" that highlights the relevancy of Black Americans in the forging of our nation. This alternative "memory" is an unofficial, illegitimate vision and thus ap-

pears in a “non-place” outside of accepted history. This echoes an old adage that is it the winners of history that get to construct it, not the losers (or, in our case, the oppressed minority population).

Colescott’s reworking not only upsets the constructed narrative of “official” [White] American history, but also helps reveal the artifice of Leutze’s original. The sense of misplacement in Colescott’s painting encourages us to consider the deliberateness of Leutze’s piece. We realize that this instantaneously recognizable painting—shown to us as children learning about American history—performs the work of constructing a specific narrative of our nation’s founding that privileges White heroics and a sense of justified manifest destiny.

Between Bhabha and Pasolini, furthermore, we can see the contours of a “problem” that has been animating the discussions of various cultural productions around difference. In many ways, the various cultural products we have been interrogating are all variations on ways of addressing this problem. Both Bhabha and Pasolini deepen my development of the miscegenated image. The miscegenated image, like the free indirect image, is a relatively rare phenomenon and therefore all the more important when an artist produces one because it brings us to the heart of a theoretical problem that remains unsolved. I propose that the miscegenated image and free indirect image are viable possibilities for re-coding the image sign because both are capable of introducing the “time-lag” and “non-place” that Bhabha proposes in his work on developing alternative cinemas. In this work, I have advanced my idea of what constitutes a miscegenated image and, more importantly, the various ways in which one works.

However, it’s difficult to understand just *how* a free indirect image works. This is compounded by the fact that so little work has been done regarding this phenomenon. If we quickly review Pasolini’s discussion of the free indirect image, we can see that his central concern, at the

most bare, deals with *how* the image can break away from the “language of narrative film prose” to become more poetic. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, Pasolini lays out the difficult process of crafting meaning from images—a process undoubtedly integral to the works of alternative filmmakers. He asserts that the writer’s job is an aesthetic one because her tools are the linguistic signs (lin-signs) that are already present and defined (169). The filmmaker’s job, however, is a double effort. First, her task is linguistic because she must draw from chaos to craft understanding and legibility (Pasolini 170). In other words, the objects that form an image are not tied to a long history of predetermined meaning in the way that words are. The filmmaker must thus build from the ground up; in a sense, she must come up with the raw materials herself—instead of simply moving them around to make new, aesthetically innovative compositions as the writer does. Bhabha’s work builds off of this first task because both scholars are concerned with a need to redefine and take control of the image sign. Once this first task is completed, the filmmaker’s job then becomes an aesthetic one.

So, how does an image become poetic—that is, free indirect? Pasolini discusses “free indirect point-of-view shots” as a possible genesis for this kind of image. It is here that our understanding of the free indirect image as a kind of contamination between director and subject comes from. Scholar Louis-Georges Schwartz offers a succinct explanation of the free indirect point-of-view shot:

In cinema, “[d]irect discourse reports the speech of a character, while the point-of-view shot presents a character’s auditory and visual perceptions. . . . In literature, a character’s speech or thought reported by direct discourse consists of words—linguistic signs—like the rest of the novel in which they appear, but the reader understands those words as enunciated by someone other than the author. In cinema, the point-of-view shot presents acoustic and visual images—cinematic signs—like the rest of the film in which they appear, but the audience understands those images as having been perceived by someone other than the ‘auteur’”. (119)

In essence, the audience forgets that the cinematic image is constructed—that it isn't "real" or represents reality as each of us experiences it. Here, Schwartz gets to the point that an image can be subjective. In the following films that we look at, can we see examples of free indirect images? I believe that using Bhabha's concepts of the "time-lag" and "non-place" can allow us to gain a handle not only on Pasolini's mystic conception of the free indirect image but also on the miscegenated image. Our earlier application of these concepts in Robert Colescott's works let us understand tangibly how one constructs such an image.

Additionally, scholar Jun Xing offers insight into how effective alterative cinema can be constructed. In Xing's article, "Hybrid Cinema by Asian American Women," the author explains that most minority filmmakers focus on personal history, families, and everyday lives as a way to counter Hollywood stereotypes and create alternative visions of themselves (186). Xing encourages "'hybrid films' that violate temporal and spatial conventions of commercial cinema and subvert the seductive power of 'realism'" (189). Already, we can see the relevancy of applying Bhabha's concepts of the "time-lag" and "non-place" in constructing the visual economy of alternative cinema. Xing takes issue with how mainstream films tend to represent minorities as if we were living outside of time, in a realm of spatialized stasis (189). Here, Xing speaks of the work to tether the minority's identity to a fixed, opaque point that, as Charles Johnson puts it, traps us in a "Black (or Yellow, etc.)-as-body situation."

Xing is also critical of the idea of time as linear and as a medium of a sacred, White history and argues instead that time is a subjective experience. The author posits the idea that, for a non-White person, many "layers" of time are experienced simultaneously as if she lives through a multitude of "histories" all at once. Of course, this experience is brought about through the minority person's framing by a White gaze that structures her being and consciousness. Effective

hybrid films use asynchronic editing to “displace the notion of fixed time and place” in order to reflect the experience of the non-White person (194). In other words, there is the need to create an “interstitial space” where established rules of boundaries never apply (Xing 197)—something that again recalls Bhabha’s development of the “non-place.” By using the construction of space as a tool, minority filmmakers can attempt to “re-function” common identities and narratives. In the discussion that follows, we will look for appearances of “miscegenated” and “free indirect” images as ways to take control of the image sign in the works of two Asian/American feminist filmmakers.

Discovering the works of Asian/American filmmakers like Celine Parreñas Shimizu and Helen Lee has lent my own experiences as a young Asian/American woman a sense of validation that I had previously not known. Their films acknowledge and interrogate the complexities of being female and Asian in America, a concept that felt simultaneously odd and wonderful after having grown up alongside popular Hollywood images of Asian women as malevolent dragon ladies, diminutive servant girls, or exotic war brides. Their films promise the possibility of the re-negotiation of the Asian American woman’s popular identity by providing a training ground for crafting her new legibility. These films, like the works of Robert Colescott and Robert Mapplethorpe, demand a certain engagement not required or encouraged by popular Hollywood films. In an autumn 2004 interview with *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, Shimizu and Lee offer their views on addressing the characterization of the Asian/American woman as a hypersexualized being. “As Asian American feminist filmmakers,” Shimizu begins, “we are caught in the traffic of power; industry images repress our experience but also compel our film practice and our speech” (1389). Shimizu and Lee discuss their frustrations with the caricatures of the Asian woman popularized through mainstream Hollywood cinema and pornography and

how they choose to confront and amend them. Shimizu comments, “My obsession in making sexual images is compelled by fantastic representations that I find infuriating and of utmost concern...My films are about immersing myself and my Asian female characters in the messy morass of power that is sexuality and film” (Shimizu, Lee 1389). Here, she asserts the significance of the sex act in understanding and renegotiating the Asian/American woman’s identity.

Shimizu’s films consciously pivot on sex acts and the Asian/American woman’s participation within them. Shimizu directs her characters to engage in the perversity of their hypersexualized identities in order to confront and hopefully help evolve them. She argues that the renegotiation of the Asian/American woman’s identity will necessarily include the perversity that is part of her hypersexualization, but will not stop with this. These images and their connotations are here and must be dealt with. Our renegotiation will involve these images and beliefs so that a more whole, more complex, and more human identity can be formed.

Shimizu’s 10-minute experimental film *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* (1993) depicts a young Filipino woman engaged in various acts of sex with a male partner. The film opens with the woman sitting on the floor of a dark, cramped apartment. The young woman appears anguished; she rocks back and forth very slowly and rubs her hands across her face as if distressed. She appears to be mentally tortured, with this anguish being attributed to her consciousness of the heavy legacy left by the exploitation and appropriation of the Asian/American female body by Western culture. Her character’s anguish sets the tone of Shimizu’s film, which works to bring forth an intense consciousness of the Asian/American woman’s relation to Western culture.

The woman’s character provides a voiceover accompanying the images in the film--a technique Shimizu employs to privilege the point-of-view of the young Filipina and to strengthen viewers’ identification with her. Her narration follows a stream-of-consciousness model that of-

fers her poetic reflections on the personal consequences of her inscription within Western culture as a hypersexualized being. “As a filmmaker,” Shimizu explains, “I try to turn [the] caricatures [of Asian/American women] around by imbuing the sexually available Asian female with emotion and situating her in a historical context marked by colonialism, racism, and sexism” (1388). Early on, we hear the woman seemingly address viewers: “When I invite you to where I sleep, you’ll see I sleep in Manila, California.” This sentiment brings attention to her unique subject position as a person juggling more than one cultural identification. At a later moment, she says, “Maybe I can come home in your loose, unbuttoned fly,” where coming home functions as a metaphor for finding some kind of lost, elusive identity. The idea of returning home also raises consciousness of colonization. She repeats, “My body is a map of my memory; my memory is a map of me,” a phrase betraying a consciousness of colonization that equates her body with colonized land.

*Mahal*’s protagonist also muses, “A hundred years of Hollywood in the screen sheets of my bed; a movie of colonized sex.” Her reflection reveals her consciousness of how popular Western culture has fused its ideas about her sexuality and race into a hypersexualized identity for her and how this affects her everyday experiences, including the sex acts she participates in as a private citizen. It also suggests her consciousness of being on-display as an Asian/American woman. She employs metaphors of the cinema and its accompanying voyeurism to convey her understanding of her sex life. It’s as if the images from popular Hollywood films and hard-core pornography depicting Asian American women have intruded into her private, everyday life and come to shape how she understands herself as an individual. This kind of understanding is exactly what Shimizu calls for in her narratives. The director’s protagonists must demonstrate their engagement with the hypersexualized identity assigned to them in order to spur its evolution.



Now, if we put *Mahal* into dialogue with some of the concepts we've been developing through Bhabha and Pasolini, we can unearth more planes of understanding. For example, Shimizu's film may be understood as a series of free indirect images because the protagonist's stream-of-consciousness voiceover reflects the filmmaker's political positioning. In addition, the space that the protagonist inhabits is dark, sparsely furnished and gives viewers a sense of claustrophobic intimacy. Shimizu shoots her from the front, almost like the protagonist is on a stage. I would argue that Shimizu builds a Bhabhaian "non-place" for her protagonist to inhabit that transcends the sense of a fixed time and place. This also echoes Xing's concept of "monumental time" with no beginning or ending—something that can effectively relate the burden of carrying a long history of oppression (192). The words that the protagonist says support this idea; she speaks in metaphors about both the physical colonization of her native land and sexual colonization of her body. She isn't just conveying the specifics of her own sexuality; she is also conveying the mediated narrative of the female Asian body.

Moving on, Shimizu's experimental documentary *The Fact of Asian Women* (2002) interrogates three dominant characterizations of Asian American women in popular cinema: the dragon lady, the lotus blossom, and the dominatrix. More specifically, Shimizu casts actresses to perform scenes as Anna May Wong, Nancy Kwan, and Lucy Liu. The scenes that are chosen come from films that arguably cemented the success and fame of these respective actresses: *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960), and *Charlie's Angels* (2000). First, Shimizu instructs each actress to reenact a chosen scene in the same manner as the original stars. Immediately afterward, each actress reinterprets the same scene by changing the original delivery of lines. For example, the actress portraying Lucy Liu in a scene from *Charlie's Angels* reinterprets the original scene by delivering Alex's lines with a new attitude. In the reinterpretation,

the actress' modified delivery brings a new interrogation of the sexual tension created by seeing Tim Curry's character receiving an a shiatsu massage from Alex. While the original scene exploits the sexual charge of seeing an interracial coupling on screen, Shimizu's reinterpretation has the new Alex highlight this taboo desiring of an Other to a new effect by having the actress display an exaggerated sense of boredom and indifference in this scene. Instead of using this coupling as a way to exploit the taboo of seeing a white male in an intimate situation with an Asian woman, the actress' new delivery compels us to consider why we would read this interracial coupling as inherently charged with sexual tension and desire. In effect, Shimizu's reinterpretations are self-reflexive and require an active engagement from viewers.

Shimizu pushes for further reflection on these tropes by having the actresses walk through downtown San Francisco assuming the persona and dress of their respective characters. Shimizu follows-up with each actress with a one-on-one interview detailing their experiences in-character. Each actress relates that they experienced an overwhelming sense of restriction and artificiality while walking downtown in-character. For example, the actress portraying Anna May Wong from *The Thief of Bagdad* describes how she had to modify her natural movement and sense of personal bodily space to conform to Wong's peculiar on-screen persona. Instead of being able to move freely and organically, the actress mimicked Wong's "controlled", "tight", and seemingly "calculating" movements that play into the malevolent persona of the dragon lady character trope. Similarly, the actress portraying Nancy Kwan from *The World of Suzy Wong* reports her sense of heightened self-awareness while in-character. She describes her awareness of how her performed persona plays into a dominant trope of Asian women. Dressed in a traditional cheongsam and wearing her hair straight and long, the actress describes her growing sense of discomfort while walking through the crowds of downtown San Francisco. The sense of discom-

fort that she relates speaks to her awareness of how her outward presentation of self becomes fetishized, overdetermined and coded as something other than her personal understanding of herself. The actress is uncomfortably aware of how her dress and manner while in character recall a popular characterization of the Asian woman—the lotus blossom—that overrides or supersedes her actual self. The actress portraying Lucy Liu’s dominatrix-inspired character also describes a similar discomfort and heightened self-awareness.

Like Shimizu, filmmaker Helen Lee strives to craft a new legibility for Asian women in her films. In *Sally’s Beauty Spot* (1990), Lee gives us an experimental film meditating on Asian femininity in the West. Lee juxtaposes clips from *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960) with shots of her real-life sister, Sally. Nancy Kwan’s interracial relationship with William Holden in *Suzy Wong* mirrors Sally’s forays into interracial couplings. A dark black mole above Sally’s breast becomes a physical manifestation—a tactile site—for the psychic baggage clouding popular perceptions of Asian American women. Sally is repeatedly shown trying to get rid of her mole, either by vigorously scrubbing it in the shower or unsuccessfully covering it with layers of makeup. Sally assigns an excessive value to her mole; she focuses on it as a site where certain fantasies, fears, and anxieties related to her race are located. Shots suggesting Sally’s interracial couplings pepper the film: Sally’s pale fingers intertwined with Black fingers, a close-up of Sally’s lips kissing the lips of a Black man... The emphasis placed on Sally’s mole—and the fact that she repeatedly tries to get rid of it—suggests Sally’s awareness of how her body is interpellated by others. It’s as if the mole becomes the sign of her “Asian-ness”—something that she desperately wants to be disconnected from or rid of.

Lee juxtaposes a scene from *Suzy Wong*—when William Holden angrily pushes Nancy Kwan onto his bed and unzips her Western-style dress—to provide a point of reference for

Sally's scenes that follow. What's more, Lee plays this clip from *Suzy Wong* in reverse, as if to say that the viewer should expect a contemplation, if not an attempted revision, of the dynamics between an interracial coupling with an Asian woman. Shown in reverse, Kwan's body appears to bounce back from the bed and curiously rise with an unnatural stiffness, with William Holden now zipping her dress up. Playing this clip backwards and upside-down introduces within Shimizu's film a sense of both temporal inversion and spatial dislocation analogous to Bhabha's concepts of "time-lag" and "non-place." Thus, this scene can be described as a kind of free indirect image.

Historically, the mythologies about Asian women assign to them identities shaped by submissiveness, an eagerness to please, and an exotic sexuality easily available to white men. This has resulted in a condensation of all characteristics into a general female archetype that transcends any specific historical situation but embodies all Asian women. We learn about ourselves through these distorted representations of our bodies and their relation to [often white] men. But Shimizu argues that we don't have to just learn and accept these images; we can converse with and challenge them in a dialectical process. Shimizu and Lee's work aims to do this by directing their female protagonists into acknowledging both the pain and pleasure of being hailed as a hypersexual being. The evolution of our identity in the popular imagination can only evolve if we confront the "bad" images and their ideological baggage. Asian American feminist filmmakers are challenged with the renegotiation of the hypersexualization of their bodies on-screen. "Race-positive sexuality emerges...[through the presentation of] pleasure, pain, and trauma simultaneously in ways that embrace the liberating possibilities of sexuality while also acknowledging the risks of reifying perversity and pathology traditionally ascribed to women of color in popular culture," Shimizu asserts. "Through this lens, racialized sexual scenes on screen are represented

as acts, events, and relationships where Asian women may shift into more viable subject positions within fantasy and ideology” (*Hypersexuality* 25).

The contemporary Asian/American woman may be seen as a “subject-in-struggle within circuits of power” (Shimizu, *Sex Acts* 57). But where is the site of her struggle and how does this affect the production of her identity? In this work, we’ve identified some of the channels through which racial identity is constructed and interrogated the symptoms of a constructed “Asian-ness.” The literature on the Black body experience helps us understand methods of racial containment applicable to the treatment of Asian/American bodies; Hollywood portrayals of interracial “romances” popularize and encourage the reading of Asian female bodies as available and “naturally” compatible to White men; interracial pornography allows us to see the sex act that simultaneously drives and terrorizes the previous genre and exploits it to gain erotic traction; and lastly, we’ve examined texts aimed at renegotiating the fixed identity of the Asian/American woman popularized through both Hollywood and porn. I have used these texts and concepts introduced by Bhabha, Pasolini, and others to develop and hypothesize the viability of the “miscegenated image” and “free indirect image” as a means to break free from political modernism’s tradition of creating counter-images—a tradition that only locks us into and perpetuates dominant ideals that structure our views of race.

I’d like to conclude by taking a page from scholar Nguyen Tan Hoang, who ends his work on Brandon Lee and the visual economy of gay porn by proposing a fantasy scenario that acknowledges the author’s subject position as a gay Asian/American man (253). In Hoang’s fantasy, martial arts superstar Bruce Lee meets his illegitimate “son”: Brandon Lee the porn star. The author’s imagined scene allows a reading of their juxtaposed bodies that brings into greater focus the mediated subject positions of both stars and challenges the visual economies that regu-

late them. Similarly, I'd like to propose my own [re]imagining of a "Yellow scene" that acknowledges my experience of negotiating my biracial Asian/American identity and subject position. The scene would begin like this: We see a young Asian/American woman enter a Korean grocery with her White partner. She pulls her hand out of his, aware that people are looking. They walk up and down the aisles scanning the shelves and weaving in-between disapproving ajummas pushing their carts. The sad, willowy voice of Skeeter Davis sings over the store's audio system: "Don't theeey knowww it's the ennnddd of the world? 'Cause yooooou don't love meeee anyyyymore." Davis' song amplifies the increasing disjunction of this experience. Growing weary from looking at packages with script the young woman can't read, she finally asks a teen-aged salesperson stocking shelves for help. She says, "Can you tell me where I can find the pa jun mix?" He looks confused. She presses him, "*You know*, the mix for pa jun?" She follows him to another aisle where he points to a picture on a package and asks her if *it* looks like *this*. No, that's not *it*. He shrugs. Like her, this young kid can't read the script on the packages of "Asian" foodstuffs. They are both living within and outside of their "secondary" Korean culture.

Asian/American viewers will know that their parents consciously withheld the learning of the Korean language in preference for their American-born children to learn English. The mundane experience of grocery shopping becomes a moment that reminds them of their mediated subject positions. As Americanized children of at least one "ethnic" parent, they find themselves haunting environments meant to give them a residue of their "dark" (i.e. non-White) heritage: Korean groceries and restaurants, etc. In my reimagining of this event, they both speak perfect Korean and move fluidly through these "ethnic" environments. I believe this fantasy speaks to my great desire to live a more balanced experience, to be able to weave in and out of both sides of my

heritage with equal dexterity; to be multifaceted—something that has eluded the popular image of Asian/American women and concerns our generation of revisionist image-makers.

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