

# RACIAL CARE



On  
Asian American  
Suffering  
and  
Survival

James McMaster

Racial Care



**BUY**

# Racial Care

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*On Asian American Suffering  
and Survival*

JAMES MCMASTER

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# Introduction

RACIAL CARE: MARCH 2020

“The only way to survive is by taking care of one another, by recreating our relationships to one another.” —GRACE LEE BOGGS

It was March 2020. The coronavirus pandemic was just beginning, and Asian people across the settler colonial United States—once again cast as alien invaders and vectors of contagion—were being spit on, punched in the face, kicked from behind, and refused service.<sup>1</sup> Anti-Asian slurs were everywhere. Broken bones were, too. And women and elders were especially vulnerable to both. I will never forget the video of the woman in Brooklyn who was doused in acid while taking out her trash. Neither will I forget the morning I woke to an email from a colleague telling me that two xenophobic messages had been chalked onto the ground at the edges of the campus where we both worked in Madison, Wisconsin: “IT’S FROM CHINA #CHINESEVIRUS” and “FUCK THE CHINESE

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GOVERNMENT.” The former statement’s hashtag was, of course, a direct quote from then-President Donald Trump, a cheap shot fired amid new Cold War tensions with China. According to the Stop AAPI Hate Project, more than 650 acts of anti-Asian violence were reported that month. This number would rise to over 2,800 by the end of that year.<sup>2</sup> And many months after that, a white man with a gun would steal eight lives near Atlanta, Georgia, six of them belonging to Asian women hypersexualized by their service work. None wholly escaped the violence of that long moment. Those who didn’t feel the blows of it directly, on their bodies, felt the winds of it in the air, as fear, anxiety, abjection, depression, or some other sort of affective suffering. To be made to anticipate violence is already to experience violence. Everyone in that moment needed so much care.

In April of 2020, as if to meet that need for care with the urgency it deserved, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center produced *Care Package: Poems, Meditations, Films, and Other Cultural Nutrients for Times Like This*. Curated “with love” by Adriel Luis, *Care Package* was an online exhibition that promised to aid its assumed Asian American audience with the management of “uncertainty, anxiety, and grief through vision, reflection, and healing.”<sup>3</sup> The exhibit sought to live up to its name by collecting and uplifting creative works crafted by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in an attempt to stem the psychosocial suffering caused by the pandemic and the COVID-era anti-Asian racism that came with it. A guided meditation by the Korean-Japanese artist Naoko Wowsugi invited its listeners to sip some mamaki tea and engage in “a healing ritual of crying,” an act of self-care. *Afterearth*, a short film by Jess X. Snow and Kit Yan, depicted women, queers, and trans people of Asian and Indigenous heritage attempting, through their individual art practices, to engage in responsible caring relations with the environment amid ongoing and impending climate disaster. A kitchen collective contributed some family recipes. An artist-theorist duo offered their zine. Some musicians put forth a sound bath. Some poets did what only poets can do, and on and on. Whereas the national atmosphere of so-called anti-Asian hate produced uncountable care need among Asians in the United States, the many aesthetic works assembled in and as *Care Package* aimed to tend to that need through the creative provision of cultural nourishment.

*Care Package* is exemplary of the strategies I seek to identify, describe, and analyze throughout the pages to come. The book you are reading takes up, as its primary work, an examination of the ways that twenty-first-century Asian American artists have used aesthetic means to survive, contest, and improve their neglected position within an unjust distribution of what I call *racial care*. The feminist theorists Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto teach us that care “includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can

live in it as well as possible.”<sup>4</sup> This definition has proven durable and influential within the scholarship on care, even as it has been criticized as overbroad. But it is precisely the capaciousness of Fisher and Tronto’s definition that makes it a useful model for my purposes here. As I define it, racial care includes everything we do to sustain racialized subjects through whatever suffering may converge on their particular location within the white supremacist, anti-Black, and settler colonial capitalist order of the United States. I privilege the aesthetic performance of racial care because, as I will show and as *Care Package* illustrates, the aesthetic is the realm within which minoritarian cultural production acts upon our senses in order to soothe racial suffering at the level of affect. It is the realm within which artists and other world-makers work to unsettle the widely held attachments and ideologies that preserve inequalities of racial care. And it is also the realm within which the ordinary performance of racial care, so often obscured in the course of everyday life, is made most widely available to sense perception.

Quotidian acts of racial care come in many forms. Racial care can be an outstretched hand, a pep talk, or a gesture of solidarity. It shows up when sentences and bodies are bent toward educated sensitivity. It happens when material needs are met through dedicated effort. Racial care can travel across lines of racial difference. It can even travel up and down the racial hierarchy, performable by people of every race and ethnicity. But it cannot, lost in a post-racial fantasy, disavow the fact of racial difference. And it also cannot, in every instance, be about feeling good. Like surgery, racial care can be both painful and lifesaving. It can be both reactive and proactive, preventive. And like any kind of care, it can also be exhausting. This is true for racial care passed diligently between loved ones. It is also true for people of color performing emotional labor for white fragility, caring for the racially advantaged by sparing them a shattering confrontation with their own racial culpability.<sup>5</sup> In these latter cases the “care” in “racial care” resembles the care one might take while tiptoeing atop creaky floorboards as others sleep lightly nearby. This sort of racial care shields minoritarian subjects from racial backlash, but it also exacerbates the need for other forms of racial care—the sort that sustain and enrich minoritarian life. And while the range of activity that I am calling racial care cannot be thought apart from the formal economy of paid care work, in what follows I aim to deepen our understanding of what Evelyn Nakano Glenn has called “the racialized division of reproductive labor” by placing my focus elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

My mission in this book is to illuminate the *informal* activities of racial care that are enacted, often under the radar of scholarly attention, in the registers of aesthetic encounter, social interaction, and affective exchange. My method is to close read performances of racial care in everyday life as well as in theater, poetry,

visual art, and film in order to lay bare the almost infrared, psychosocial field of racial caring relations as well as the position Asian Americans occupy within that field. I seek to expose the neglect and need for racial care experienced by Asian Americans under neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy. And I seek to do so while remaining attentive to the caring responsibilities Asian Americans must meet in relation to other minoritarian groups, responsibilities that are imposed on Asian American subjects by their unique location within the racial–colonial order of the United States. All this is to support a single argument, crystallized in the following thesis: while Asian Americans inhabit an unsustainably neglected situation on the field of racial care, they can and have altered that situation by seeking recourse, across scales of existence, to both minoritarian aesthetics and movement organizing. Ultimately, like *Care Package*, *Racial Care* is a study of what Asian American artists, organizers, and other world-makers do for one another when the going gets tough and the tough are tired of living life against the whipping winds of racism.

Racism: “the state sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”<sup>7</sup> This is Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition. We could also say, racism: that which produces a need for racial care. When racism detonates across a nation, or in a room, racial care is how we keep each other alive and well amid the fallout. It is the labor people of color must perform for one another when the shiv of racial violence gets under the skin and all that can be felt is the slow, serrated tearing of one’s soft interiority. The specific violences racial care redresses can be physical, a boot on the neck; but they need not be. “Affective violence,” to use Dorinne Kondo’s poignant term, hurts too.<sup>8</sup> Subtle harms add up and whisper out for racial care.<sup>9</sup> An incomplete list of salient slights:

a suspect glance; a Halloween costume; a telling scoff; an arcane turn of phrase; “where are you really from?”; yellowface; being undocumented; being underestimated; being overestimated; being desexualized; being hypersexualized; being deemed a terrorist; being hyperexploited; being shunned; being ignored; being unduly celebrated; being rejected for what you are; being mistaken for another othered person; being assaulted; being interned; being criminalized; being multiply marginalized and having one’s back used as a bridge; being burdened by all of the extra work; being exhausted because, miraculously, one has kept kind through all of it, or because one hasn’t.

Each of these items, to the extent that it bears the stench of racism, can quickly become a source of care need—cause for racial care in the psychosocial register,

by which I mean the zone of relationality and performativity, affect and attachment. Each also, insofar as it indexes a way of being that shouldn't be, provides a negative example against which to imagine a better ethics and politics of racial care, one rooted in the ontological interdependence of all life and made manifest in art, organizing, and ordinary existence.

None of this, however, is to romanticize racial care as the anti-racist antidote par excellence, because the imperative to perform racial care often becomes a burden that accelerates our dying. From 2006 to 2015, the performance artist Kristina Wong went on tour with her semi-autobiographical one-woman show, *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a meditation on the high rates of depression and suicide among Asian American women. The show finds Wong playing a character—in her words, “an overachieving martyr and people pleaser”—who shares her name.<sup>10</sup> Near the top of the performance, Wong makes a promise: all Asian American women will be saved from suicidal ideation by the end of the show. Though it is obvious that Wong the performer recognizes how ridiculous such a promise is, Wong the character seems to make the promise in earnest. And, with an eye toward fulfilling this promise, she spends the bulk of the show engaging in various performances of racial care.

One crucial moment of the piece finds Wong attempting, in accordance with her overachieving and audience-pleasing persona, to tell the story of every single Asian American woman who has ever experienced depression or suicidal ideation. Wong starts by inhabiting a thirty-three-year-old Korean American woman named Angie. She performs a monologue that evokes the specter of postpartum depression: “Stop crying! I should have never had this baby!” Then suddenly she drops that character and assumes another, a sixty-year-old Cambodian American woman dealing with the traumatic inheritances of war.<sup>11</sup> Then Wong becomes another woman, then another woman, then another, until she is finally overwhelmed by the number of stories she has promised to tell. She is crushed beneath the weight of them.

In this moment, as in others, the performance of racial care on display in *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, however well intentioned, is itself revealed to be debilitating, depressing, and life-draining. In a postmortem about her time on tour, Wong writes that she “marketed [*Wong Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*] as a ‘funny show about depression.’” She “touted the show’s ability to bring ‘healing’ and ‘conversation’ to a national crisis that wasn’t being addressed enough.”<sup>12</sup> If *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a show about the need Asian American women have for racial care, it is also a show that promised intraracial care to neglected Asian American audience members who might themselves have unmet racial care needs. After performances of the show, as Wong tells it, women would

approach her “in tears, speaking very candidly about their own frail emotional health,” and Wong could only “hold them and hug them and listen through [her] exhausted and jaded ears.”<sup>13</sup> “The world I had created onstage was so consuming, it followed me offstage,” Wong confesses. “I would never recommend, even to the world’s most self-hating masochist, touring any semi-autobiographical solo theater show for years.”<sup>14</sup> Especially not, she writes, if the subject matter so directly implicates the hardest parts of one’s own life. Wong’s experience with *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* exposes the costs and benefits of performing racial care. Racial care saps life at the same time as it saves lives. And the truth is: none of us is above this core contradiction.

None of us is exempt from navigating the space between the need for racial care and the responsibility to perform it. We are all entangled in relations of racial care, though not all of us move through the world with an awareness of this fact. The risk of inflicting racial harm, perhaps unconsciously, is a risk that all of us are running all of the time. But only some of us take sincere, competent, and socially conscious care around race as we interact with the world. Some others try, but only to avoid trouble, cancellation, consequences. And still others refuse even the thought of racial care outright—that is, if they have any conscious thought of racially marked sociality at all. This is all to say that most people move through the world creating more need for racial care than they labor to relieve. And if more racial care need is being created than is being relieved, it follows that more racial care is needed than is being received. This is a life-defining fact of material reality. My intention in naming it is not to lay blame at the feet of incompletely autonomous individuals but rather to give definition to the relational field within which the need for racial care among Asian Americans continues to accrue, often without acknowledgment. To this end, I work within and against established approaches to the study of care.

### Toward a Minoritarian Care Theory

Often when scholars make explicit reference to “care theory,” they are referring to the feminist school of thought known as the ethics of care. The origins of this field are typically traced to two important books. The first is Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982), and the second is Joan Tronto’s *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care* (1993). Gilligan’s book challenged a masculinist, justice-based morality valuing autonomy and rights in favor of an ethics of care rooted in the maintenance of human connection and forged from the stuff of femininity, motherhood, and emotion. Tronto’s book shifted the field away from reifying

the association between women and care in order to position care as a matter of concern in all areas of life. Tronto pushed the field past the intimate arrangements of the private sphere, positioning the allocation of care and care labor as a public matter to be addressed politically. As a result, care ethics has become a promising theoretical framework through which to study “everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world.” The *care* in care ethics refers capaciously to a feeling (affect/attachment) and a doing (labor/performance). The *ethics* in care ethics is relational, situated, and rooted in the ontological assumption that all living beings, precious and vulnerable, exist in interdependent relation with one another. Tied together, these terms assist us in considering how the responsibility to perform caring labor should be assigned, to whom, and to whose benefit. An ethic of care asks us to be attentive to the need for care, wherever and whenever it may emerge.

And yet, for all this promise, care ethics has a race problem. The language in which care ethics has historically been written has been a racially unmarked one. And this has resulted in an ethics of care that struggles to conceive of racial competence as an essential element of any caring relation.<sup>15</sup> Whereas gender has typically been assumed as the field’s a priori axis of analysis, race has emerged across the discourse most often as an additive or secondary concern.<sup>16</sup> A similar claim can be made in relation to another feminist outpost of care theory of importance to this project: social reproduction feminism, which has historically placed primary focus on the gendered divisions of labor that define the maintenance of life under capitalism—more on this in chapter 3. What would happen if race were assumed as the organizing category of care theory, and in a way that would bring gender and other genres of social difference along for the ride? *Racial Care* is written as one possible answer to this question. Some within care ethics and social reproduction theory have turned to intersectionality as a corrective to their fields’ implicit whiteness. This development is heartening in that it foregrounds the inextricability of oppressive systems.<sup>17</sup> But the analytic of intersectionality alone is not enough to enable these feminist discourses to account for the deeply embedded material realities and psychosocial patterns that produce an excess of need for racial care within disenfranchised and disregarded Asian diasporic worlds.<sup>18</sup>

To rise to these realities, *Racial Care* braids care ethics and social reproduction feminism with other strands of care theory. Queer and trans thinkers remind us to reject the heteronormative impulse to cast caring labor as a private performance essentially aligned with the family, femininity, or womanhood. They remind us, too, to cultivate what Hil Malatino has named “an infrapolitical ethics of care,” which calls attention to those minor “community practices” that attempt both

to support political movement and to alleviate trans and queer suffering, racial, affective, and otherwise.<sup>19</sup> The field of critical disability studies and the movements for disability justice shift care theory in a similar direction by bringing focus to racialized disablement and debilitation.<sup>20</sup> Disabled care theory casts disabled people not only as care receivers (objects of care) but also as care providers (subjects of care). In the former discussions, the provision of care is commonly cast as coercive, a potential site of confinement, abuse, and exhaustion. In the latter, care comes into view as a kind of work that circulates unevenly and differentially through communities crowded with multiply marginalized people of color, all of whom exist in an invisibilized web of interdependence. Notably Asian diasporic writers and cultural workers are well-represented within these care theoretical lineages: Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Mimi Khúc, and Mia Mingus to name only three.<sup>21</sup> And from the vantage point of the crip queer Asian diasporic feminism discernible in their work, any ethics of care worthy of the name would need to be anti-carceral, anti-colonial, anti-imperial, radically relational, and written in pursuit of what Akemi Nishida calls “care justice,” a political vision in which caring relations are arranged in a way that fosters the flourishing of all life on Earth, human and nonhuman.<sup>22</sup> This book follows in step with this tradition of care theorizing, forging a minoritarian approach to the study of Asian American racial care from the insights of feminist, queer, trans, and crip of color critique.<sup>23</sup>

In doing so, *Racial Care* aims to intervene upon a twenty-first-century critical scene in which care has become a key term with which to respond to the deepening crises of racial capitalism. The events of 2020 have only intensified a more general turn among artists, organizers, and scholars toward the practice of what Hi‘ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese have called “radical care,” those “vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds.”<sup>24</sup> Surging interest in mutual aid, reproductive justice, and trans care would all fall under the heading of radical care.<sup>25</sup> As would a range of abolitionist discourses: family abolition, with its emphasis on communizing care, as well as prison and police abolition, with their emphases on healing and transformative justice.<sup>26</sup> *Racial Care* draws from all these resources and more, including Black and Indigenous studies, posthumanism, the new materialisms, and psychoanalysis. While these many areas of care theory overlap, this fact is sparsely acknowledged, and critical conversations about care too often remain siloed. This keeps care theory from cohering into an intellectual tradition capable of rising to the political, economic, social, and psychic crises it aims to address. For this reason I set a table with this book at which these diverse dis-

courses might meaningfully break bread, get to know one another, and think together toward a radical ethics of racial care.

### The Asian American Case

What is the history of racial care in the Asian American case? This question is an essential one because racial care's appearance in the world changes in accordance with shifting material conditions. These conditions have, over time, included formal legal exclusions from citizenship and property ownership; US imperial warfare and its orientalist domestic impacts; dynamic regimes of border enforcement, policing, and incarceration; technological advancements around mobility, communication, and computation; alterations to the infrastructures of higher education; and the ever-evolving imperatives of capital accumulation, both nationally and globally. While this book does not promise a comprehensive account of racial caring relations amid these changing circumstances, it does invite us to reread familiar flashpoints of Asian American history for the insights they can offer around racial care's life in the *longue durée*.

Consider, for example, the racial disparities in care experienced by those who were held captive at the Angel Island Immigration Station during the era of Chinese exclusion (1882–1943).<sup>27</sup> The Chinese migrants detained at Angel Island, sometimes for years, received inferior food and accommodations compared to their European counterparts. They were also often subject to more extensive and invasive medical testing. Faced with such conditions of carceral care and neglect, detainees wrote poems on the walls of the detention center. These poems often acted as windows into the psychic suffering their authors experienced. They served as evidence of a widespread need for racial care. Detainees addressed this need in a variety of ways, many of which are imagined in Genny Lim's play *Paper Angels*. A work of historical fiction, *Paper Angels* follows a group of Chinese detainees who care for one another not only by meeting each other's need for emotional support in the face of border violence but also by running interference with guards, keeping one another's secrets, and securing coaching papers designed to guide other detainees through scrutinizing interrogations. All these microsocial acts express a radical ethics of racial care rooted by necessity in fugitivity, a historically specific ethics crafted in response to a macropolitical-economic context in which a national desire for white supremacist consolidation outweighed the ruling class demand for cheap Chinese labor.

The mid-twentieth century reality of Japanese internment also highlights how the logic of anti-Asian excludability central to the US racial-colonial order

has historically shaped racial care for Asian Americans. Over 120,000 people of Japanese descent left their homes, jobs, schools, and communities behind when the US government forced them into concentration camps during World War II. Livelihoods were lost. Families were separated. Homes were abandoned or hastily sold for less than they were worth. Racial care quickly became about ameliorating the inhumane conditions of camp life in diverse ways. Imagine, for example, the moral and emotional support passed tearfully between prisoners after word of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reached the camps. Think of Christmas celebrations, sporting events, and other activities made possible through the socially reproductive labors required to build and sustain community while incarcerated. Those held in Manzanar constructed community gardens to make everyday life more bearable. They built ironing rooms that they also used as hair salons, infrastructures of care and social exchange. Recall the legal effort launched in the name of Mitsuye Endo, which would eventually lead to the closure of the camps. All of this responded to the need for racial care, a need that would persist even after camp life ended. Newly freed, Japanese Americans found that the capacities available to them for reproducing their personal, familial, and collective lives had been devastated, though they worked to rebuild these capacities by establishing community-oriented employment agencies and by demanding racial care from the state in the form of reparations. Like the era of Chinese exclusion, Japanese wartime incarceration makes clear how the distribution of racial care in the United States has historically taken shape in response to the militarized machinations of a white supremacist carceral state at once antagonistic and indifferent to Asian diasporic needs.

But these oppressive tendencies would face a fundamental challenge from the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to radically restructure the way caring relations in the United States were arranged. Drawing energy from the feminist, civil rights, and anti-war movements, the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) student strikes of 1968 demanded that San Francisco State University transform itself to support minoritarian education. A Black-led interracial coalition, the TWLF took its name from the National Liberation Front of North Vietnam, a sign of the group's opposition to US imperial intervention in the region. As a result of the TWLF student strikes, the term *Asian American* emerged to allow Asians in the United States to consolidate political power across national and ethnic difference. Since then, Asian American studies has proliferated as a justice-oriented scholarly field; queer and trans Asian Americans have, over decades, cultivated infrastructures of social life and community care at regional and national scales;<sup>28</sup> and a decentralized Asian American left has crystallized across a range of political organizations and cultural institutions.<sup>29</sup>

Collectively, these histories and contemporary efforts constellate into a renewed outline for a radical ethics of racial care in the Asian American case, one that requires Asians in the United States to act in internationalist, interracial, and intersectional solidarity to meet their own and others' interconnected care needs.

This book builds on this framework to challenge the ways that neoliberalism and white supremacy have colluded to tame and domesticate both the liberation movements of the post–World War II period and the vision for racial care those movements advanced. From the perspective of care theory, neoliberalism is an economic, cultural, and moral formation premised on the disavowal of the ontological interdependence of all things. Care theory has long been critical of neoliberalism's ableist, individualist ethos of personal responsibility; its upward distribution of wealth; the privatization of childcare, eldercare, and health care; the shredding of the social safety net; and the generalization of precarity for all people.<sup>30</sup> But this care theoretical critique, while powerful, can be bolstered through critical engagement with another aspect of neoliberalism—one exposed by scholars such as Grace Kyungwon Hong, Roderick Ferguson, and Jodi Melamed<sup>31</sup>—namely, the way neoliberalism has historically sustained itself through the multiculturalist incorporation and affirmation of minority difference.

To minoritarian subjects deemed respectable, neoliberalism holds out the promise of privilege on the condition that they disavow their affirmative duty to enter ethically into racial caring relations with those most in need of racial care. Figures like Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Kamala Harris are paradigmatic of the way women and people of color have been recruited to serve neoliberal and nationalist interests, interests opposed to an emancipatory politics. We have also watched, in the early twenty-first century, as some gays, lesbians, and others identified with the queer community have abandoned what Cathy Cohen has called “the radical potential of queer politics” rooted in redistribution and liberation for an incrementalist and individualist political tendency compatible with capitalism that seeks little more than access to normative institutions like the family and the military.<sup>32</sup> And according to David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, the disabled, too, are welcomed by neoliberalism into the biopolitical fold “as long as [they do] not demand an excessive degree of change from relatively inflexible institutions, environments, and norms of belonging.”<sup>33</sup>

The Asian American model minority must also be regarded as a figure of neoliberal incorporation. As erin Khuê Ninh has argued, the model minority is best understood not through the orthodoxy of myth but as racialization and social role.<sup>34</sup> It is an identity defined by the aspirational pursuit of a neoliberal success frame that places a premium on excellent grades, elite education, and high-income-earning professions. It is an identity that pursues, above all—and

often at the expense of others—the individualist accumulation of human capital. Think here about the Asian American undergraduates who, under white guidance, delivered a death-blow to affirmative action. Think of all the white-collar Asian Americans seeking corporate solutions to problems better solved by social movements. The examples are myriad, and they gesture toward the neoliberal and racial knots we can begin to loosen by locating Asian Americanist care theory in the recent past.

Accounting for racial care's many lives across time will need to be a collective project, but *Racial Care* initiates that project with a specific focus on the racial crises and culture wars associated with the Obama-Trump years (2007–21). Common sense links the incorporative impulse of neoliberal multiculturalism with the post-racial fantasies that suffused the Obama era. The first Trump years, meanwhile, were most often understood as representing a rising white supremacist revanchism, a reactionary culture shift away from racial progress. In reality, the age of Obama-Trump is best apprehended as a flashpoint of what Dylan Rodriguez has called “multiculturalist white supremacy.”<sup>35</sup> This term asks us to understand white supremacy not as an exceptionally hateful right-wing ideology that has periodically receded with the rise of official state anti-racisms but as a very much unexceptional “violence of aspiration” and “logic of social organization” that has long operated in tandem with neoliberal multiculturalism to sustain racial capitalism and racial-colonial domination by recruiting a diverse range of minoritarian subjects as “living evidence” of social progress.<sup>36</sup>

Situating *Racial Care* in the Obama-Trump years forces care theory's critique of neoliberalism to engage more deeply with questions of race by bringing forward what neoliberalism and white supremacy share. And what they share is a multiculturalist mechanism of Faustian inclusion, one that lures Asian American model minorities and other assimilative minoritarian subjects toward performances of self that align with whiteness and US capitalist culture while providing cover for anti-Blackness and racial-colonial violence in the process. Care theory, in turn, offers to Asian American studies a clearer vantage on what model minoritism is and does. The pressure that model minoritism applies to Asian American subjects to perform and achieve at such a high level often induces in them intense experiences of stress, anxiety, depression, aggression, overall unwellness, even suicidal ideation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, model minoritism names an aspiration for uplift under racial capitalism and for inclusion under white nationalism that is ultimately antithetical to the project of racial care. This is core to model minoritism's violence: it simultaneously produces the need for sustaining relations of racial care and a disavowal of that need rooted in an imperative of individual advancement.

The other reason for situating this study in the early twenty-first century has to do with the overlapping crises that overwhelm this period. In addition to a global pandemic and elevated rates of depression among Asian American women, the age of Obama-Trump also witnessed an avalanche of femme suicides, mass shootings, concentration camps, climate catastrophe, and unending police killings. After Lauren Berlant, we can call this a time of “crisis ordinarieness.” It was a time during which the reproduction of life was hardly distinguishable from the attrition of life, and the need for racial care built up like carbon in the atmosphere.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Wong and the contributors to *Care Package*, the artists and writers I discuss across my chapters include the Tumblr-famous figure Mark Aguhar; the poet Kimberly Alidio; the playwright Julia Cho and the other theater artists behind her play *Office Hour*; an experimental theater troupe called the Generic Ensemble Company; Kit Yan and Jess X. Snow, each a poet and a filmmaker; and finally all the artists featured in Yan and Snow’s film *Afterearth*. The works put forth by this diverse collection of Asian diasporic cultural producers amount to an archive that is illustrative of racial care’s spatially and temporally situated forms but not at all exhaustive of them. Each of these works is in conversation with at least one of the ongoing crises I have listed above, and this is key to why I selected them for inclusion in this study. It is in proximity to crisis that the demand for racial care is most acute and the performance of racial care most available for critical analysis.

Moreover, against background conditions of crisis ordinarieness—with the psychosocial field so dense with vulnerability and precarity, depression and anxiety—so much of our small-scale social conflict has been made into fodder for a large-scale culture war waged over the arrangement of racial caring relations. This is due in large part to the emergence and dominance of social media throughout the period on which I focus. Debates over self-care and collective care, call out and cancel culture, emotional labor and white fragility, separatism and solidarity: all of these are taken up throughout this book as historically situated skirmishes over the racial distribution of psychosocial reproductive labor, by which I mean the work it takes to keep people of color well despite abjection under racial capitalism.<sup>39</sup> We tend to fight these culture wars when we cannot win structural alterations to formal caring relations through the official channels of settler governance—channels that are undeniably oligarchical and hardly able to work at all for working people. As Lisa Lowe argues, “It is through culture, rather than government, that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined.”<sup>40</sup> Some aspects of racial sociality might be bettered with changes to law or shifts in economic hierarchy, but others will only be altered through transformations of desire, reversals in currents of stigmatization,

and other shifts in social norms.<sup>41</sup> Culture names the site at which these alterations, through aesthetic means, might be made. And so, at stake in the racial care culture wars is nothing less than this: the terms according to which racial care needs will be met, racial care responsibilities allocated, racial care labor performed, and racial caring relations arranged.

Because Asian Americans have historically been cast as relatively privileged racial minorities, these issues are of special salience in their case. Buttressed by the actual existence of model minority subjects recruited under multiculturalist white supremacy, model minority racialization masks the inequality that exists within the unwieldy category of “Asian America” by running roughshod over what Lowe has famously called its “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity.”<sup>42</sup> Those Asian American groups that do meet the metrics of model minority status are deemed too fortunate to require racial care. Those that do not are left to shiver in the model minority’s shadow where they struggle for the disaggregation of demographic data to make their need for racial care legible as such. Some Asian Americans are kept or cast out of model minority status altogether by the anti-Black, Islamophobic, and xenophobic impulses of the carceral state and other people. They are left to wither with other names like “criminal,” “terrorist,” “illegal.” And this harm, too, is obscured by the thought-image of the model minority, as are other historical instances of carceral, imperial, colonial, capitalist, and white supremacist violence enacted against Asian peoples, structurally and interpersonally, both within the United States and outside it. While these insights are obvious within Asian American studies, when routed through care theory, they reveal the ways in which model minority racialization renders Asian Americans as subjects without struggle, subjects unworthy of racial care and solidarity in the present, subjects whose needs can be met after others’ needs are met first.

### Anti-Asian Neglect

In *Racial Care*, I use the language of *anti-Asian neglect* to account for the ways in which model minority racialization frames Asian Americans as racial subjects without care need, deemed to be doing just fine, or well enough, at least for now. This, to be sure, is precisely the narrative that *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* sought to combat. The very premise of that solo show is that the psychic strife facing Asian American women is neglected, obscured by a model minority fantasy upheld by Asians and non-Asians alike. It is this structural circumstance that leads Wong to write and perform the show and to be drained by it. *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is both about anti-Asian neglect and against it. What I am

suggesting is not that Asian Americans are more neglected than other racialized groups but that they are *uniquely* neglected as a function of the way they have been racialized under neoliberal multiculturalist white supremacy; that this neglect is compounded by gendered and sexual subordination; and that both these realities produce debilitating and sometimes deadly psychosocial outcomes for the subjects at the center of this study.

Neglect is irreducible to more familiar categories like invisibility and erasure. The answer to neglect is not visibility, representation, or state recognition. The answer to neglect, as this book's conclusion will make clear, is abolition, another world of just caring relations. Neglect is care's dialectical other. And, like care, it is also something one can feel. We might say that the affective outcome of anti-Asian neglect is Asian American loneliness, a feeling I discuss at greater length in my second chapter. To feel neglected is to feel lonely, uncared for; it is to feel that one's needs go ignored and unmet; that one is not worth enough, or pained enough, to magnetize to oneself the caring attention and attachments of others. Anti-Asian neglect is why the suffering produced by anti-Asian racism yields hardly any outcry for Asian Americans. It is why so few non-Asians feel responsible for literacy in Asian American histories and causes. Anti-Asian neglect operates passively and impersonally. It operates without malice or notice. It allows only for scattered expressions of sympathy and solidarity, measly rations of racial care.

It is true that there are abundant resources in the world, and if these resources were not as hoarded and withheld as they are under racial capitalism, working people might have an easier time reproducing their lives. But it is also true, on a microsocial scale, that each of us has only so much attention and labor-power to offer one another. And this means that racial care, at least the sort that operates in a psychosocial register, is a finite resource. Decisions must always be made about where racial care should be directed given limitations in capacity. We make these decisions, most often, based on an assessment of care need. Where is the need for care most urgent? Where can our care have the most meaningful, lasting impact? Whose needs must take priority and why?

This question of priority is central to theories of racial and colonial comparison and relation, which means we can read such theories to better understand the logic according to which racial care is distributed in the United States. Black-nonblack, Native-settler: these are widely held to be the structuring binaries of the US racial-colonial order. One outcome of this binary thinking is that Asian-ness enters the conversation only belatedly, after Blackness and Indigeneity, as a triangulated third category of subjects uniquely complicit with the violences of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism. Another outcome, as Iyko Day observes, is that this binary approach to racial and colonial analysis has sometimes yielded

a certain “exceptionalism” within afropessimist Black studies and settler colonial studies “whereby both the Native and the black body signify a genocidal limit concept.”<sup>43</sup> These claims to exceptional suffering then shape and sustain the logic of ontological and political priority according to which racial care is so often meted out.

Crucially, this logic of priority exists not only in critical theory but also in the left and liberal common sense of the Obama-Trump years. According to the *New York Times*, the acronym BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) first appeared on social media in 2013 and quickly became “ubiquitous” online among those invested in racial sensitivity and racial justice.<sup>44</sup> It emerged as a corrective to the phrase “people of color” and its acronym POC, which neglect to account either for the singularity of anti-Blackness or for the way that Indigeneity, though still a racializing category, is distinguished from other racialized modes of being in the world in part because of its relationship to land-based struggles for sovereignty. Many have argued that BIPOC is valuable insofar as it offers an inclusive way to refer to non-whiteness in the US context. Others have rejected the term, arguing that it flattens all manner of racial, colonial, and diasporic difference, often in a way that mistakes multicultural inclusion for liberation. But most important for this study is the observation that BIPOC reveals and reinforces the same logic of priority expressed by theorists of race and settler colonialism.

In BIPOC, those with exceptional claims to victimhood and suffering come first, and those pained subjects who supposedly lack such claims, namely non-white and non-Black (im)migrants and refugees, come last and lumped together. The acronym lends support to Summer Kim Lee’s suggestion that Asian Americans “occupy the time of the after, the polite accommodating phrase ‘after you.’”<sup>45</sup> As POC — and this is especially true on the minoritarian left — Asian American care needs are often considered only after the needs of those more impacted by the gratuitous violences of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism, which are framed as the conditions of possibility for the United States as such and for Asian America by extension. It may not be the case that theorists of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism are engaging in a heightened iteration of the oppression Olympics when advancing their exceptionalist claims, but it is nevertheless true that these theories help us to see why the impulse to play such games exists. For better and worse, it is through exceptional claims to suffering that finite social and material resources are so often secured, including the resource of racial care. Without this kind of claim and with its model minority reputation alive and well, the Asian American case amounts to little more than an afterthought in the US political imagination.<sup>46</sup>

This places Asian Americans in a double bind. A radical ethics of racial care in the Asian American case must contend with the claims to priority that theorists of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism have advanced. At a minimum, such claims communicate a profound and disproportionate experience of care need within Black and Indigenous worlds. The ontological assumption of interdependence on which care theory is based requires Asian Americans to be attentive and responsive to those needs in their situated, material manifestations. So does the relational ontology of Asian American racialization. And yet, while Asian Americans may, in individual cases and localized contexts, receive racial care in return, anti-Asian neglect means that such care is rarely motivated by a structurally determined ethical imperative. Asian Americans are unique in that the fantasy of their categorical privilege produces a certain ethico-political pressure for them to show up in solidarity with other oppressed racial groups.<sup>47</sup> But the same fantasy forecloses on an expectation of reciprocity when Asian Americans fall victim to racial violence. “Asians for X,” but rarely the reverse.<sup>48</sup> To speak these dynamics aloud is not to engage in “what aboutism” nor even to lodge a request for more attention from other minoritized groups. Rather, my aim is to establish that anti-Asian neglect, that constant and enduring mode of anti-Asian violence, is as much a side-effect of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism as it is an effect of model minority racialization. I expand upon this claim in the later sections of this book. While tracking the ways that Asian Americans have engaged in relations of care with Indigenous artists and Black organizers, I suggest in my final chapter and conclusion that Asian Americans will not know life without racial neglect until after settler colonialism and anti-Blackness have been brought to their respective ends.

By contrast and echoing the histories of racial care articulated above, the early portions of this book tend to the ways in which neglected Asian Americans have taken care of themselves when no one else would. My first chapter finds a Chicago-based Filipina American artist performing self-care on the internet as a way to survive racism, fatphobia, and anti-trans/queer vitriol in community with others. My second chapter observes a Korean American teacher in Virginia tasked with providing racial care during office hours to her Korean American student when he cannot find it anywhere else. My third chapter attends to a musical mounted by a Texas-based theater ensemble to study the care passed between its queer Asian American characters in the forms of song, dance, and silence. Location matters here, as most Asian Americans (55 percent) live in only five states.<sup>49</sup> The rest are scattered across the country, many in places where anti-Asian neglect is exacerbated by racial and ethnic isolation and an accompany-

ing inability to mount demographic arguments for material resources, cultural programming, and political recognition.

Additionally, even when there are other Asians around, there are no guarantees that racial proximity will lead to the provision of racial care. Whether as a concept or a coalition, Asian America is unstable and incoherent. The limits of the term are also limits on racial care in the Asian American case. In 2012, nearly two-thirds of Asians in the United States (62 percent) identified most strongly with their countries of familial origin, and only one-in-five identified strongly with Asian Americanness.<sup>50</sup> As Jay Caspian Kang writes, “[It is] hard to blame anyone for not caring enough about Asian Americans, because nobody—most of all Asian Americans—really believes that Asian America actually exists.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, issues related to language retention and linguistic diversity set Asian Americans apart from other minoritarian groups, which points to another reason why Asian Americans might struggle to receive racial care even from one another. In the Asian American case, racial care is often asked to traverse profound difference. It often requires certain cultural and linguistic proficiencies to achieve its desired effects. Then there are the many brutal histories of colonization and wars fought within Asia that continue to divide the Asian diaspora today, making it difficult for racial care to reach across ethnic and national differences. And all this impacts multiply marginalized Asian Americans the most. Such subjects experience compounded neglect, even as they are also exposed to misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism in addition to anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. All this is to say: Asian Americans, especially multiply marginalized Asian Americans, inhabit an unsustainable situation with respect to racial care. They are structurally neglected and at the same time burdened by that neglect with the labor of sustaining one another through psychosocial suffering. And still, such subjects have managed in specific cases to shift these circumstances by turning to performance and performative aesthetics.

### The Aesthetic Performance of Racial Care

Performance is privileged in *Racial Care* because, as Amanda Stuart Fisher argues, “It is impossible to conceive of caring practice outside the parameters of how it is performed.”<sup>52</sup> We cannot understand the doing of care, the labor of it, except by observing how it is embodied and enacted. We cannot understand the feeling of care, what it means to care about someone or something, unless we attend to how such affective attachments are made evident, or even anew, in quotidian and aesthetic performance. We need to be able to account for the performativity of care, the scripts of social reproduction within which mi-

noritarian subjects are constantly navigating international, racial, gendered, and (dis)abled divisions of labor as well as the social norms and roles that these divisions smuggle into everyday life.<sup>53</sup> If we cannot understand care in these terms, then we are left ill-equipped to discuss imbalances and injustices in the field of racial caring relations. And if we cannot have these discussions, then we are less able to strategize to sustain minoritarian life. Care theory, therefore, needs performance studies: its methodological protocols; the tools it offers for engaging with embodiment, situatedness, and social interaction; its tactics for attending to the ephemeral and the fleeting; and most of all its belief in the aesthetic's ability to secure "More Life" for minoritarian subjects by soothing their psychosocial suffering.<sup>54</sup>

In the Asian American case, the patterns and textures of such suffering have been the subject of more than two decades of Asian Americanist affect theory. Scholars have written entire books about "racial melancholia," "national abjection," "racist love," "model minority masochism," and other forms of racial feeling that emerge from Asian American contexts.<sup>55</sup> Crafted from the paradigms of psychoanalysis, its own kind of care theory, these categories cast Asian American affective life as something that must be survived and endured. According to this discourse, Asians in the United States are abject. They are hated and eminently excludable. They are admired and yet always at a loss for belonging, and always on some level grieving that loss and the other losses that follow from it. They are also isolated, lonely, and often proximate to suicidal ideation—at least they are in this book. And all this is why *Racial Care* turns its attention to cultural production. Asian American artists and writers are everywhere attempting to address these neglected forms of unspectacular suffering through all manner of aesthetic means.

Much of the art and writing considered in this book aims to provide direct aid to Asian American subjects in need of racial care. The aesthetic interventions included in *Care Package* operate in this way. Wowsugi's guided meditation, for instance, provides its potential listeners with self-care instructions to follow should they wish to feel otherwise amid an atmosphere of exacerbated anti-Asian violence. "Between You and You," a poem read and written by Shame-Ali Nayeem and set to music by Qais Essar, speaks in the second person to transform solitude into something sustaining: "You found your reflection in the mud. You honored the way you loved, the way your heart broke, how life became living, became generative, regenerative, magic." In many ways, the strategies used in *Care Package* to attend to Asian American needs seem inspired by strategies used years earlier in a similar project titled *Open in Emergency*, a multimedia special issue of the *Asian American Literary Review* guest-edited by Mimi Khúc.

Like *Care Package*, *Open in Emergency* employed a range of writing, visual art, and “interactive mini-projects” to explore the “structures of care” through which Asian Americans survive psychosocial unwellness.<sup>56</sup> It was a kind of first aid kit and, like *Care Package*, a convincing counterargument to Tronto’s assertion that “to create a work of art,” or to engage in “creative activity,” is not to engage in caring activity.<sup>57</sup>

The reality is that we often meet our psychosocial needs for racial care by engaging with aesthetic objects and creative works. We make songs into warm showers where we can cry in peace; we weave poems into handkerchiefs with which to wipe those tears; and we build plays into cradles where we might rest and feel held. These observations, in some ways, merely evoke the affinity for reparation within minoritarian performance studies, which can be traced back to Eve Sedgwick’s preoccupation with “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”<sup>58</sup> However, by formalizing reparative relations as caring relations, performance studies is better able to attend to the function of aesthetic work within the psychosocial field of need, responsibility, and obligation that I am here associating with racial care.

In this vein, the work of Kristina Wong is again instructive. On March 23, 2020, Wong created a Facebook group for friends and acquaintances who wanted to help fight the pandemic by constructing and distributing homemade masks. That Facebook group would give rise to a collective consisting mainly of Asian American women that would come to be known as the Auntie Sewing Squad. The name sought to honor aunties as caregiving figures whose contributions exceed the nuclear family even as they remain essential to all kinds of kinship formations.<sup>59</sup> The Auntie Sewing Squad’s task was simple: to provide what the state had failed to provide and to do so for those most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. The group was a model of mutual aid rooted in a crip queer Asian diasporic feminism—explicitly politicized, anti-capitalist, anti-heteropatriarchal, radically relational, and deeply devoted to the solidaristic performance of racial care.

The group was also the centerpiece of a solo performance that Wong would perform at the New York Theatre Workshop between October 25, 2021, and November 21, 2021. An eventual finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in drama, *Sweatshop Overlord* was something of a first draft of COVID-era history. The show, directed by Chay Yew, follows Wong and the Auntie Sewing Squad as they do the work of racial care not only amid pandemic conditions but amid the many crises of the long 2020: the murder of George Floyd, the uprisings that followed, the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the death of legendary Asian American photographer Corky Lee from COVID-19, the January 6 insurrection, and more. Through it all,

Wong is dressed as something like a sewing soldier armed with scissors, thread, pins, elastic, and the like. She performs on a set that feels makeshift, a visual representation of her personal sewing space made mostly of yarn, masks, and similar materials. Surrounded by these soft symbols of feminized labor, Wong frames the pandemic as a war and mask-making as an essential element of the war effort. And if Wong and the rest of the Auntie Sewing Squad waged war against COVID-19 transmission in anti-Asian times, *Sweatshop Overlord* extended that effort as a contribution to the ongoing culture wars being waged over racial care.

Like *Care Package*, *Sweatshop Overlord* offered its audiences an affective experience of direct psychosocial aid. For me and for many others, the show marked a first return to the theater after many months of isolation, avoidance, and COVID-anxiety. It mattered very much that the theater required masks and proof of vaccination, but it also mattered that the show was explicitly about masks and mask-making. The production participated in a then-waning ethos of care in pandemic times, and it did so while helping its audiences process together the many traumas they had all experienced separately. In this way, the solo performance became a collective occasion for healing. And because the show so centered Asian American feminism, it also transformed the New York Theatre Workshop into what in my second chapter I term a *racialized holding environment*, an affective architecture assembled from the stuff of racial care to combat the effects of anti-Asian neglect.

Moreover, by performing (showing doing) on stage the invisibilized labor performed (doing) by the Auntie Sewing Squad, *Sweatshop Overlord* was able both to make legible existing needs for racial care and to model the replicable relations of racial care the group engaged in to meet those needs. Over the course of their real-world mutual aid effort, the Auntie Sewing Squad sent masks to “asylum seekers, Indigenous communities on reservations, people newly released on parole, transgender immigrants, urban farming coop members, trafficking victims, and low-income BIPOC communities.”<sup>60</sup> And over the course of *Sweatshop Overlord*, Wong names many of these constituencies explicitly, raising her audiences’ awareness of structural disparities and the exacerbated need for care produced by them. Additionally, while spotlighting these outward-facing relations of racial care, the show also foregrounded the lateral and inward-facing relations of care that existed among the Auntie Sewing Squad’s members. Wong speaks, for instance, of a system of “Auntie Care,” which began as an internal pizza fund and grew into a community care effort. Shannon Jackson has argued that socially engaged performances like Wong’s are especially valuable because they lay bare the relations of care that are the conditions of possibility for their own existence. *Sweatshop Overlord* lends itself to this sort of “revelation of in-

terdependent support” precisely because it was born out of the lived reality of such support in pandemic times.<sup>61</sup> It is a one-woman show that defies the fantasy of individual accomplishment in favor of a radical rendering of mutual aid that both exposes unmet needs for racial care and offers relational models through which to meet those needs ethically. In this way, Wong makes use of the unique capacities of live performance to shift arrangements of racial care toward an anti-colonial, interracial, and intraracial impulse for solidarity.

The end of *Sweatshop Overlord* finds Wong at an outdoor celebration alongside many of the aunties she has been working with throughout the pandemic. At this point in the 2020 timeline, vaccine distribution has begun in the United States, and the supply of masks is finally able to meet demand. The aunties’ work is over, and Wong delivers a speech to mark the occasion. In the world of the play, she speaks to the aunties in attendance, but in the world of the theater, she speaks to the audience:

You are my family of would-be strangers. Alone in our homes we were not essential, but we became essential for each other’s survival. . . . We attempted to fight the odds for the love of people we will never know. Friends. We have survived until this moment. Who are the people who helped you survive this? What do you hope for as we move forward? Will you be generous in more than times of crisis?

These lines, which strategically speak in both the second person and the first-person plural, attempt to hail the audience as members of the Auntie Sewing Squad. They usher the audience into a care ethical imaginary by using the co-presence of the moment to implicate them in the web of solidaristic racial caring relations that constitute the very substance of the show.

In sum, the provision of direct affective aid; the exposure of unmet need; the representation of racial caring relations; the implication of audiences within those relations: each of these is a contribution that aesthetic performances and performative aesthetics can make to the struggle over racial care. They are evident to varying degrees not only in *Sweatshop Overlord* but also in *Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *Care Package*, and the range of work discussed across *Racial Care*. Each of the artists under examination in this book deploys the aesthetic as a material force with the capacity to bring about the ethical impulses of attentiveness and responsibility in potential providers of racial care. Aesthetic works are uniquely able to elicit our attention and point it toward unaddressed racial care needs. They also gain access to our psyches through our senses, and there they can stir up new feelings of investment in persons and communities once foreign to the imagination.

The poems and visual artwork I analyze in this book function in this way, in a register of queer performativity. They are queer because the work is created by queers for queers and because the work aims to redistribute attention and attachment toward neglected, nonnormative subjects. They are works that seek to intervene at the level of what Kandice Chuh calls “sensibility,” which refers to both “what is held to be reasonable and what is viscerally experienced.”<sup>62</sup> They attempt to induce a reader or viewer to care about and for subjects, objects, and issues they may not have previously.

The plays and films that I analyze in what follows function similarly. As collaborative and time-based media, they are also uniquely able, as *Sweatshop Overlord* demonstrates, to depict the provision and reception of quotidian racial care. Plays and films model embodied, durational relations that might then be studied and scrutinized in the light cast by a minoritarian care ethics. In this light we are tasked with determining which aspects of a given relation of racial care we might wish to adjust, which we would reject outright, and which we would like to adopt in our lived realities. This is all to say that aesthetic encounters can lead us to act differently. We might adjust our use of language, learn what not to say or do, and even develop the capacity to intervene in scenes or infrastructures of racial harm. We might learn to perform racial care otherwise and even better.

Additionally, while artists and organizers are care theorists in their own right, scholars of caring performance have their own roles to play in the struggle at hand. In addition to enacting and representing racial care through their writing, it is the scholar’s task to search social reality and the aesthetic realm for racial care’s incipient or invisibilized forms. To delineate a new form of care is to sketch the mental blueprint for a replicable arrangement of caring relation, or a pattern of caring performance, that has taken discrete shape in response to a specific need or set of needs.<sup>63</sup> Throughout this book, I will demonstrate that as-yet undescribed forms of racial care are modeled, transmitted, and proliferated through aesthetic forms. In this, I follow the example set by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s delineation of the social form she calls the “care web” in her book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*.<sup>64</sup> A care web, Piepzna-Samarasinha tells us, emerges when a group of people, often sick or disabled, comes together to provide one another with life-sustaining support without relying on the state, the family form, or paid attendants. Part of the reason the care web is such an exemplary form of care is in how it upholds the values of interdependence and coalition that lie at the heart of this book’s relational politics, even as it always entails the risk of backsliding into unfairness, resentments, and other vexed realities of everyday caring relation. The thing about care webs is that they can be studied and, ultimately, replicated by anyone who needs what they afford. Each

one offers a template or set of protocols, a form according to which we might arrange and enact more just caring relations.

Each of this book's chapters puts forth a form of racial care that has thus far eluded description, and I have ordered these chapters according to the relational scale at which their most central forms are performed. *Racial Care* begins with the study of the care of the self, and its final chapter focuses on care in the ecological context of global climate catastrophe. In between, I analyze the caring relation that emerges between a pair of individuals, a teacher and her student, and I follow that analysis with another about the collective care that can connect members of an ensemble cast. The arc of the book is organized in this way, according to a logic of ascending scale, because its chapters are meant to relate to one another as concentric circles. In order to speak about care at a planetary scale, one must first be able to think capaciously about self, interpersonal, and collective care. The problem of self-care persists inside the problem of care between two people, which persists inside the problem of collective care, which persists inside the problem of planetary care. This is partly because the crises that bring about the need for self-care remain relevant within the institutional and national crises that bring about the need for collective care, and so on. In other words, by organizing my chapters as I have, I am mounting a formal argument that winning a just arrangement of racial caring relations will require us to think and act nimbly across these scalar registers. The result is a complex and cumulative, rather than merely additive, approach to the study of racial care.

Chapter 1, "Revolting Self-Care," is at once a defense of self-care and an attempt to reimagine the concept so that it is no longer considered the antithesis to collective forms of racial care but rather an essential aspect of them. At the center of the chapter is a deep engagement with the trans/queer Filipina artist Mark Aguhar, specifically the aesthetic work she posted to the social media site Tumblr, where she blogged under the handle Call Out Queen. By framing Aguhar's online aesthetic performance as an act of what Michel Foucault calls "the care of the self," I seek in this chapter to outline a less individualizing performance of self-care for minoritarian subjects. Specifically, I use the term *revolting self-care* to give name to a process by which minoritarian subjects might obliterate their identification with and desire for those who are conventionally deemed worthy of care in order to reorient their capacities for racial care toward more oppressed others. And through a reading of Kimberly Alidio's poetic appraisal of Mark Aguhar's online aesthetics of existence, my first chapter argues further that the performance of revolting self-care, aided as it is by networked social media, also has the potential to generate collective online contexts in which isolated minoritarian subjects might find sustenance. Aguhar's multiply

marginalized position in the social allows me to show how issues of racial care are all tangled up in issues of gendered embodiment, sexual desire, and psychosocial debilitation. Thus, my minoritarian approach to Asian American racial care is most thoroughly established in this first chapter.

My middle two chapters shift the focus of *Racial Care* from the care of the self to performances of collective care conducted at two scales: the dyad and the ensemble. If chapter 1's study of revolting self-care reveals how Asian Americans might reorient their racial care away from the privileged to the oppressed, my second and third chapters reveal what happens when racial care is passed, both successfully and unsuccessfully, among Asian American subjects in more social circumstances. In chapter 2, "The Racialized Holding Environment," I offer a close reading of Julia Cho's *Office Hour*, a play based on the events that led up to the Virginia Tech massacre of 2007. *Office Hour* focuses on a Korean American adjunct instructor named Gina and the regular meetings she has in her office with a Korean American student named Dennis, the play's stand-in for the Virginia Tech shooter. By analyzing the racial care that Gina performs for her student alongside the institutional conditions that oblige her to do so, this second chapter outlines "the racialized holding environment" as a dyadic form of racial care calibrated for both the pedagogical context of academic office hours and the creative context of the theatrical encounter. I adapt this concept from the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's theory of the "holding environment"—that affective architecture actuated for the infant by the mother through a good-enough performance of care—so that it might be more attentive to race relations and the psychosocial suffering that they often induce for Asian Americans.

Chapter 3, "Racial Emotional Labor," expands my second chapter's consideration of collective racial care by scaling up in two ways. Whereas chapter 2 analyzed care between two people, chapter 3 analyzes care as it can occur among an ensemble of Asian American actors. And whereas chapter 2 remained within the institutional context of the neoliberal university, chapter 3 investigates how the state and national norms produce certain needs and obligations related to racial care for Asian American subjects. To do this, the chapter juxtaposes two Asian American afterlives of Gilbert and Sullivan's racist opera, *The Mikado*. Through an analysis of my own experience as an ensemble member in *The Mikado*, I develop a theory of racial emotional labor, an obligatory form of care performed by the Asian American subject for fragile white subjects in order to avoid the violence that often follows when whiteness is forced to confront its racial culpabilities. And through an analysis of the Austin-based Generic Ensemble Company's *The Mikado: Reclaimed*, a theatrical response to Gilbert and Sullivan's original opera devised by an entirely Asian American ensemble,

I suggest that the mandate to perform racial emotional labor is not just about maintaining the fantasy of white racial innocence on an interpersonal scale. Instead, I show that in certain cases it can be about maintaining the fantasy of national innocence as well. Whereas most forms of racial care described in this book are aimed primarily at sustaining Asian American life, racial emotional labor emerges as a form of care that functions, first and foremost, to constrain Asian American life—and to do so at multiple scales of relation. The solution on offer to this problem, the second form of care at the center of this chapter, is the minoritarian team, which is given in and as a collaborative effort to rehearse alternative social protocols better suited to multiply marginalized social actors.

Taken together, my second and third chapters reveal the unique capacities of Asian American theater to affect and effect relations of racial care. Both chapters are organized around plays whose primary action finds Asian Americans acting under duress to keep themselves alive. These productions are useful for my purposes not just because they model racial care but because in doing so they mount, in Diana Taylor's words, "vital acts of transfer" in live social space.<sup>65</sup> In this, theatrical performances both draw on and deepen the repertoire of racial care, allowing racial care's needed forms to proliferate and permeate the register of everyday activity where they might be repeated and, in this repetition, imperfectly preserved in perpetuity. Previous studies of care in performance have emphasized the unique capacities of social practice art and applied theater to both reveal and engender sustaining infrastructures of caring relation.<sup>66</sup> I extend this work to argue, in my second chapter, that Asian American theatrical productions and the theater spaces they claim can function as holding environments, as respites for Asian American spectators in need of social shelter. And with a nod toward the essentially collaborative nature of theater, my third chapter argues further that the collective context of theatrical rehearsal can be a vibrant site within which to imagine and practice relations of racial care anew. As Maurice Hamington argues, "Caring skills can be exercised and honed, just as actors improve their skills."<sup>67</sup> Asian American theater has a central place in this book because its social and aesthetic affordances are unique in their potential to aid in the project of sustaining minoritarian life.

And yet, each of my first three chapters ends in death. The forms of racial care covered in these chapters are all attempts to compensate for the attrition Asian Americans experience as the cost of living an abject life, and they all ultimately fail—that is, if one is wont to count premature death as a failure of psychosocial reproduction. The people who populate the first three chapters of this book are all killed: by the state, by negligent institutions, by one another, and by suicide.

My fourth and final chapter, “Dehumanist Care,” argues that in order to establish relations of racial care capable of sustaining Asian American life, we need to stretch the collective forms of care articulated in my first three chapters toward something that we might, following Julietta Singh, call “dehumanist” inasmuch as it opposes sovereign mastery in all its colonial and human exceptionalist forms. The chapter begins with a close reading of Snow and Yan’s film *Afterearth* in order to adapt Melanie Klein’s theory of “reparation” for an ethico-politics of care that decenters the human while prioritizing the decolonial. I assemble this dehumanist ethico-politics from the insights of Indigenous studies as well as from the work of scholars like Singh and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa. After my reading of *Afterearth*, the chapter continues by considering Snow’s work on the death of the honey bee. This reading contends that the aesthetic enactments of racial care advanced by Snow’s poetry and illustrations have the performative power to shift our senses toward a more just distribution of racial care, one that would require the human to give in to dehumanist grief, which is also to say decolonial coalition with nonhuman kin.

This final chapter is followed by a conclusion that shifts *Racial Care*’s focus from the aesthetic realm to the stuff of social movements. Specifically, the conclusion analyzes the caring solidarities that appear in the protest activity of Freedom Inc., a Southeast Asian, Black, and LGBTQIA+ organization fighting for abolition and gender justice in Madison, Wisconsin. Building on my final chapter’s consideration of the responsibilities related to care that Asian Americans bear in relation to Indigenous peoples and epistemologies, this last section of my book considers the difference anti-Blackness makes to an Asian Americanist approach to racial care. Thus, to close this book with a path toward Asian and Black caring coalition, this conclusion gestures toward an abolitionist horizon for racial caring relations.

Relations of racial care can often feel intractably structured to dim the light of minoritarian life, but my move in this book is to insist that they can be imagined and inhabited otherwise. In the end, there are no legal remedies that would solve the problem of racial care for good. And even if we were to wake up under “communist social reproduction” tomorrow, its survival would still depend on our ability to navigate relations of racial care as ethically as possible.<sup>68</sup> As Marx said, “From each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] need.”<sup>69</sup> So much about our current arrangement of racial caring relations is sustained almost ineffably in social and cultural life, in the registers of ideology, affect, attachment, and sensibility. So much is lived out, without scrutiny, as the inevitable unfolding of normative social competition and political disappointment. As long as white supremacy, anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and capitalism

continue to structure psychosocial life, as long as cisheteropatriarchal violence and systemic debilitation are unevenly distributed along racial lines, racial care will persist as a perennial problem both for those who need it and for those who have little choice but to provide it to others.

My claim is that Asian Americans can and have altered relations of racial care for the better by seeking recourse, across scales of existence, to both minoritarian aesthetics and to movement organizing. There is no guarantee that these strategies will save us, but we know that we will not make it to a concrete utopia—and many of us will not make it to tomorrow—unless we pursue them. As Grace Lee Boggs puts it in the epigraph that opened this introduction, “The only way to survive is by taking care of one another, by recreating our relationships to one another.”<sup>70</sup> The task before us is to take up the tools we have at our disposal and to cultivate infrastructures for racial care rooted in mutual aid and mutual defense. The aesthetic can assist us in this task if we wield it like a weapon in the racial care culture wars, mobilizing affect in order to mobilize more racial care and new forms of racial care for neglected Asian Americans and other minoritarian subjects. This work will not be easy, but it is our ethical and political obligation as interdependent beings trapped on a crisis-ridden planet. Racial care is what we must perform for one another when the world wears us down to hold itself up. And so, at the end of the world, we begin.

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## Notes

### INTRODUCTION

1. Cathy Park Hong, “The Slur I Never Expected to Hear in 2020,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2020.
2. Jeong, Russell, Aggie Yellow Horse, Tara Popovic, and Richard Lim, *Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://stopaapihate.org/reports/>.
3. *Care Package: Poems, Meditations, Films, and Other Cultural Nutrients for Times Like This*, Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://apa.si.edu/care/>.
4. B. Fisher and Tronto, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring.”
5. It may seem that white subjects, because they sit atop the US racial hierarchy, would have no need for racial care. However, my definition of racial care refers to “racialized subjects” and not to “subjects of color.” It refers to “suffering” rather than to “violence” or “racism.” I have made these choices to keep white subjects as players on the stage of racial care. White fragility demands from subjects of color the kind of care one might exercise while walking on thin ice—this point is central to my third chapter. The white insistence on remaining unmarked obliges non-white subjects as well as white subjects with racial consciousness to engage in a preservative labor of racial care. If at times it seems that I theorize racial care without regard for the white reception of racial care, it is because I believe in the following proposition: the white anti-racist project is diminished to the extent that the white subject is unable to relinquish its “need” for racial care.
6. Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work.” In making this move toward the social, I follow the methodological example set by Martin Manalansan in his article “Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm.”
7. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 28.
8. Kondo, *Worldmaking*, 11.
9. While the most visible assaults on Asian American life following the emergence of COVID-19 have taken the form of physical assault, it is notable that this sort of violence represents only 13.7 percent of the incident reports tracked by the Stop AAPI Hate Project through June 2021. The more frequently reported forms of violence took the less

spectacular forms of “verbal harassment” (63.7 percent) and “shunning” (16.7 percent). This data reflects my view that because anti-Asian violence is often inflicted almost immaterially, racial care must be imagined and enacted accordingly.

10. K. Wong, “Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Almost Dropped Dead,” 113.

11. I should mark what K. Wong’s decision, as a Chinese American woman, to take on in performance the character of a Cambodian American woman reveals about the risks of theorizing racial care in the Asian American case. On the one hand, the coalitional impulse of Asian American panethnicity might seem to some a license for Wong to shift between East and Southeast Asian identities in performance, intending to care for both. On the other, we should pause at Asian American panethnicity’s tendency to run roughshod over Asian histories of imperial warfare and, by extension, over the tensions that still exist among Asian (American) peoples because of those histories.

12. K. Wong, “Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Almost Dropped Dead,” 113.

13. K. Wong, “Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Almost Dropped Dead,” 113.

14. K. Wong, “Wong Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Almost Dropped Dead,” 112.

15. Raghuram, “Race and Feminist Care Ethics.”

16. Hankivsky, “Rethinking Care Ethics,” 256.

17. Hankivsky, “Rethinking Care Ethics,” 259.

18. Even as I ascribe to an intersectional approach in this book, I am weary of the unintended work that intersectionality does within two mainstream schools of care theory: care ethics and social reproduction theory. In the introduction to her book *Black Feminism Reimagined*, Jennifer Nash writes, “If there is nothing more damning than the accusation of ‘white feminism,’ intersectionality stands as the field’s primary corrective, its way of naming and labeling (even if not performing) a correct, ethical, and virtuous feminism” (15). The problem with this, Nash teaches us, is that “once the field has effectively reconfigured itself” by following the guidance of intersectionality “black feminism is imagined as no longer necessary or vital” (30)—as, I would argue, are other modes of minoritarian study. Intersectionality and the specific Black feminists associated with it (most frequently Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins), are now frequently positioned as a solution for care theory’s shortcomings. They are recruited by the discourse to mark the outer limits of care theory’s internal audit around minoritarian difference. Intersectionality becomes *the* methodology through which to analyze difference, while other analytics developed within minoritarian intellectual traditions such as Black studies, Asian American studies, and other critical ethnic studies and Indigenous studies formations remain under-cited, if not wholly untouched. It is true that some of this erasure might be explained by the observation that so much of care ethics thrives outside the US context, but this caveat alone cannot account for the deracinated sensibilities of the field at large. *Racial Care* aspires to a deeper engagement with minoritarian knowledges.

19. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 16.

20. Puar, *Right to Maim*.

21. For more relevant works on care at the intersection of Asian Americanist critique and disability thinking, see James Lee, *Pedagogies of Woundedness*; A. Wong, *Year of the Tiger*; Bolton, *Crip Colony*; Kim, *Care at the End of the World*; and M. Chen, *Animacies*.

22. Nishida, *Just Care*, 7.

23. On “minoritarian,” see Muñoz, *Disidentification*; and Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*. On women of color feminism, see G. K. Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital*. On queer of color critique, see Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*. On trans of color critique, see J. N. Chen, *Trans Exploits*. On crip of color critique, see Kim, “Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique”; and Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*.

24. Hobart and Kneese, “Radical Care,” 2. See also Nadasen, *Care*.

25. See Spade, *Mutual Aid*; Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*; and Malatino, *Trans Care*.

26. See Lewis, *Abolish the Family*; O’Brien, *Family Abolition*; Page and Woodland, *Healing Justice Lineages*; and Kapadia, “Downward Redistribution of Breath.”

27. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned Chinese laborers from entering the United States and kept Chinese immigrants already in the country from becoming US citizens. The Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco operated from January 21, 1910, until November 5, 1940. Known to some as “the Ellis Island of the West,” it became the most significant site at which immigration from China was processed during the era of Chinese exclusion. During the exclusion era, only existing US citizens and their immediate families were allowed entry into the country, as were those who fit the exempt categories of students, teachers, diplomats, merchants, and travelers.

28. The first march on Washington for gay and lesbian rights occurred in October 1979, on the same weekend as the National Conference of Third World Lesbians and Gays, which also took place in the nation’s capital. These were landmark events in queer Asian American history and some of the earliest instances when Asian American gays and lesbians from across the country could cultivate consciousness and community at a national scale. Since then, numerous organizations dedicated to sustaining queer Asian American life have emerged in cities across the United States, including TriKone (Chicago), founded in 1986; GAPIMNY (New York City), founded in 1990; AQUA (Washington, DC), founded in 1997; and Lavender Phoenix (the California Bay Area), founded in 2004. Each is or was dedicated in some way to meeting the psychosocial care needs of queer Asian Americans. Support groups and social events have mitigated undesirability in the face of sexual racisms, fundraisers have met members’ material needs, and collective advocacy efforts have worked to rescue people from incarceration. This queer and trans history should be seen as a legacy of 1968, for it could have come to pass only under the banner of “Asian American.”

29. Here I have in mind political organizations like AAPI Women Lead, the Asian American Resource Workshop in Boston, and 18 Million Rising, which has specialized in digital organizing around Asian American issues since 2012. Relevant cultural organizations include but are not limited to the Asian American Writer’s Workshop in New York City and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center in Washington, DC.

30. See Tronto, *Caring Democracy*; The Care Collective, *Care Manifesto*; and Hamington and Flowers, *Care Ethics in the Age of Precarity*.

31. See Ferguson, *Reorder of Things*; G. K. Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal*; and Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*.

32. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.”

33. Snyder and Mitchell, *Biopolitics of Disability*, 14.

34. Ninh, *Passing for Perfect*.

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35. Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction*, 17.
36. Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction*, 7, 17.
37. Here I follow the claim that Mimi Khúc makes about the state of Asian American mental health and about model minority mental health in particular: we are all “differentially unwell,” in need of differentiated kinds of care. See Khúc, *Dear Elia*, 5.
38. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.
39. Culture wars are often dismissed as abstract distractions from more concrete class wars, but the culture war over racial care must be understood as an essential element of class struggle insofar as it is ultimately a battle over the means and norms of (psycho)social reproduction.
40. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 22.
41. For more on reverse stigmatization see McMaster, “In Defense of Virtue Signaling.”
42. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 67.
43. Day, “Being or Nothingness,” 102.
44. Sandra E. Garcia, “Where Did BIPOC Come From?,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2020.
45. S. K. Lee, “Staying In,” 34.
46. For another example of the Asian American as afterthought, consider the frequency with which the shorthand “Black and brown” was used during the Obama and Trump years by activists, educators, journalists, politicians, and others to mean something like “those racial minorities who bear the brunt of racial oppression.” Where do Asian Americans fit within this phrase? To be sure, there are many Asians in the United States who are held within the category of Blackness, and many more are hailed by brownness: West, South, Southeast, and mixed-race Asians especially. These facts, no doubt, are part of what allows José Esteban Muñoz to assert that “Brownness” is “coexistent, affiliates, and intermeshes with” Asianness or “even a yellowness.” For Muñoz, brownness is not reducible to Latin Americanness; it is nonidentitarian. And yet, it is notable that even Muñoz’s conception of brownness does not (aspire to) include Asianness within its embrace in every instance. This is partially a sign of respect from Muñoz: recognition that Asianness and perhaps yellowness deserve their own treatment. But it also illustrates that “Black and brown,” even imagined as maximally capacious, leaves Asians who are neither held nor hailed by either Blackness or brownness out of frame. Thus, when used as shorthand to refer to the most oppressed of racial subjects, the phrase belies an assumption that non-brown Asians are so comparably unaffected by racism as to be unworthy even of mention in certain racial justice-oriented conversations. All the time, the term fails to account for all Asian Americans. It is as if East Asians and others tied to yellowness are imagined to be so educationally and economically advantaged as to supersede the need for racial care. See Muñoz, *Sense of Brown*, 138.
47. In his book *Model Minority Masochism*, Takeo Rivera argues that “within the anti-racist paradigm upon which Asian American studies and the Asian American movement were founded, we can characterize Blackness as occupying the position of racial superego, an Afro-Asian superego, the disciplinary apparatus of the Asian American psyche, counterposed to the id of assimilation and the fulfillment of the model minority.” I would extend this claim to argue that the discourse around Asian settler colonialism suggests that

Indigeneity inhabits a similarly superegoic position within the Asian American psyche. It is this psychosocial reality that produces the ethico-political pressure in Asian American subjects to do right by minoritarian coalition. This pressure gives way to an Asian American performance of “moral masochism that necessitates self-interrogation, while simultaneously making its subjects intently and uncomfortably aware of their socialities.” This moral masochism, in other words, returns Asian Americans to their always-present imperative of relationality. It opens onto an ethics of self and solidarity, an ethics of racial care that finds Asian Americans tending again to their own needs while also trying to stay in step with those who suffer more than they do. See Rivera, *Model Minority Masochism*, 49, 66.

48. This dynamic has lessened, to an extent, with the rise of Palestinian solidarity organizing after October 7, 2023. Although it is worth noting that at the time of this writing this solidarity movement is most often framed as an Asian American issue only by those already committed to the larger project of an Asian American left—despite the work Viet Thanh Nguyen and other Asian American political organizations have done to advance the observation that Palestine is in Asia.

49. Two points. First, my focus on areas in which Asian Americans are more likely to experience loneliness and isolation is not in any way meant to disregard Ninh’s focus on the need for care experienced by those raised in Asian America’s overachieving ethnic enclaves. And second, while Texas is among the five states most populated by Asian Americans, its size and political orientation render it a wholly different battleground than the other four, which are California, New York, New Jersey, and Washington. Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts About Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population,” *Pew Research Center*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

50. Russell Heimlich, “Most Asian Americans Describe Themselves by Country of Origin,” *Pew Research Center*, June 21, 2012, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2012/06/21/most-asian-americans-describe-themselves-by-country-of-origin/>.

51. Kang, *Loneliest Americans*, 15.

52. A. S. Fisher, “Introduction,” 7.

53. Here I am gesturing toward the work Rhacel Salazar Parreñas has done on migrant Filipinas caught up in an international division of reproductive labor. See Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*. I am also following Sami Schalk’s framing of (dis)ability as “the overarching social system of bodily and mental norms that includes ability and disability.” See Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined*.

54. For more on the call for More Life, a call derived from Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, see Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*.

55. On “racial melancholia,” see Eng and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation*; and Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*. On “national abjection,” see Shimakawa, *National Abjection*. On “racist love,” see Bow, *Racist Love*. On “model minority masochism,” see Rivera, *Model Minority Masochism*.

56. Mimi Khúc, *Open in Emergency*, accessed November 13, 2024, [mimikhuc.com/projects/open-in-emergency](http://mimikhuc.com/projects/open-in-emergency). For more on *Open in Emergency*, see Khúc, *Dear Elia*.

57. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 104. In her introduction to *Performing Care*, a volume

she coedited with James Thompson, Amanda Stuart Fisher takes up Tronto's claim that aesthetic work is not care work. Fisher notes that Tronto, in a footnote, has recently qualified her initial refusal to accept the act of making art as an act of taking care by citing dance therapy as a possible exception. Fisher's move is to suggest that socially engaged performance should also qualify as a mode of care. I agree with Fisher, but the forms of care I write about here exceed the bounds of both drama therapy and socially engaged performance to imagine how aesthetic forms not necessarily intended as works of care might nevertheless function as such. See A. S. Fisher, "Introduction," 7.

58. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 150–51. On the reparative impulse of minoritarian performance studies, see Chambers-Letson, "Reparative Feminisms"; Muñoz, *Sense of Brown*; Kondo, *Worldmaking*; Eng, "Colonial Object Relations"; and Nyong'o, "So Far Down."

59. For more on the queer figure of the aunty see Khubchandani, "Critical Aunty Studies."

60. Hong et al., "We Go Down Sewing," 11.

61. Jackson, *Social Works*, 34.

62. Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*, 15.

63. For more on form, please see Levine, *Forms*; and Fawaz, *Queer Forms*.

64. Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*, 32.

65. Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.

66. See Jackson, *Social Works*; and A. S. Fisher and Thompson, *Performing Care*.

67. Hamington, "Care Ethics and Engaging Intersectional Difference," 83.

68. O'Brien, *Family Abolition*, 181.

69. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 531.

70. Grace Lee Boggs, interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, September 17, 2009.

## CHAPTER ONE. REVOLTING SELF-CARE

1. Here, I am invoking Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival," in *Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*.

2. McCracken et al., "You Must Be New Here," 3.

3. See Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy."

4. See B. Loewe, "An End to Self Care," *Organizing Upgrade*, October 15, 2012, <http://archive.organizingupgrade.com/index.php/blogs/b-loewe/item/729-end-to-self-care>.

5. See Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*.

6. Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 130.

7. Kim and Schalk, "Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care," 339.

8. Foucault, "Ethics of the Concern," 282.

9. Foucault, "Ethics of the Concern," 285.

10. When Foucault speaks of freedom, he means something distinct from but related to liberation, or the general overcoming of a calcified system of domination. As an example of the liberatory, Foucault cites the struggles of colonized peoples to overthrow their colonizers. Practices of freedom, by contrast, are the performative modes by which one