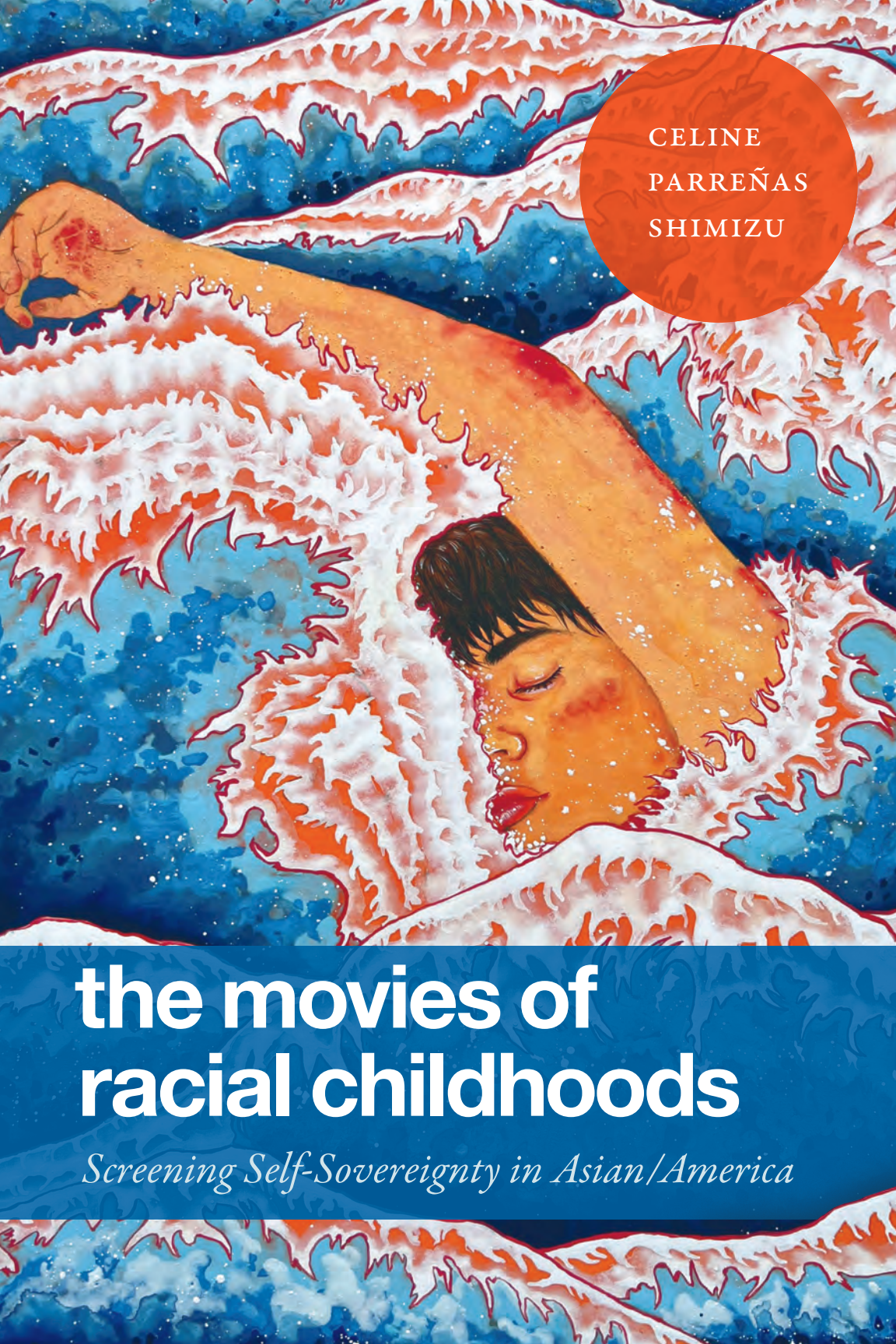




CELINE
PARREÑAS
SHIMIZU

the movies of racial childhoods

Screening Self-Sovereignty in Asian/America

the movies of racial childhoods

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the movies of racial childhoods

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*Screening Self-Sovereignty
in Asian/America*

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PARREÑAS
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Always with you, Lakas
For Bayan, with so much love

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preface

Devastated Creator: Theorizing as Grieving Mother-Author- Spectator

I must take space and time to share that I write this book about racial childhoods as a grieving mother. I live in a deep piercing pain from the sudden death of my younger son, Lakas, that may bring up for the reader a discomfort with the sadness fueling my motivation to study Asian/American childhoods in the movies—which is to connect to my child who is no longer developing.¹ It may be too dark to come into proximity to my impossible undertaking as mother-author-spectator where creativity coincides with devastation. Lakas will come up again and again because this book is a willing for him to live, for me to feel his precious life as I experience movies about children at the ages he could not live in the past ten years.

Grief births this book, and the act of creating it helps me crawl out of devastation. As the mom of an older son who's left home for college and a deceased child who would be a teenager today, I remember anticipating with fear their violent birthing. The simultaneity of life and death in the opening of my body to give birth, with the risk of death ever present, scared me. Sigmund Freud conceived how "Eros, the life drive to preserve living substance and join together individuals to create higher organisms, families, and nations, is itself inseparably joined to . . . the drive to disjoin and dissolve all aggregates psychic, social, or organic."² I recognize this conjoining in the act of giving birth as one that teeters at the border of life and death when the body takes on a force of expulsion. Freud goes further, however, to chart his understanding of human existence beyond this moment. He argues that together the life and death drives, Eros and Thanatos, precisely capture how he perceived "human life itself . . . governed by a process of creation and destruction."³ I recognize this phenomenon in

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the experience of the death of my child—as a mom who expected that in surviving childbirth, a particular natural order would ensue.

The physical disattachment in giving birth to my children—whom my husband, Dan, and I named Bayan (which means home, country, belonging in Filipino) and Lakas (meaning strength, both inner and of the people, also in Filipino)—came as a series of powerful oceanic tidal waves inside my body, teaching me about my physical and psychic capabilities. After almost two days of labor for our older child, my body was opened via emergency C-section, and my husband saw my insides before I was sewn up. Indeed, Eros and Thanatos, death and life, come together inexorably in giving birth.⁴

Almost three years later, after the delivery of our younger son, Lakas, the scar from my second C-section would not close, would not heal, so I was put on bed rest for six weeks. The scar ceaselessly oozed a substance that my doting husband would vigilantly pat dry to ward off infection. In those weeks, I could barely get up and could not walk. Holding our new baby, Lakas, and cradling our older son, Bayan, as a big brother nonetheless created this delicious joy I savor. We were alive even as we straddled the edge of death. Bed rest occurred at a time when our family saw no one else. I remember the warm, wonderful, purposeful, and focused feeling cradling our family. Still. I savor the experience of the complete four of us. We did not yet know what was ahead in our severing, our incompleteness in meeting death. I always thought I would die first. He did too. When he was alive, Lakas one time said, “When I am fifty, you’ll be dead.” I did not deny that would likely be the truth.

Lakas died on Christmas Day in 2013 at age eight, when I was forty-three. Today the memory of his body, character, and personality endures ever more in how I perceive mine. He remains undeniably part of my physical self-perception and my psychic self-understanding. Without him, I am not the me I recognize. It is not the me I intended or ever wanted. I stand at a crossroads onto a new self while a different self-understanding persists. My body knows his body. He was here, the scar under my belly his gateway into this world we share—where he lived and where he remains in us, of us, among us. In a child’s dying, that is the thing to remember for me, that this is the world where he remains. I cannot go elsewhere to be with him. This is the place to stay. This is where he is.

Ten years since his death, I also know there is no dimension of time or space that can keep us apart. The best is when I feel his presence now. Christmas Day on the eight-year anniversary of the day he died, I woke up

receiving five kisses from him on my face. Christmas was when he died, a confounding day I begin feeling on his September birthday, a three-month cloudy season of sensing a looming disaster is about to strike. To get through, I repeat our rituals, the things we did as the day of his death approaches soon after the day of his birth: communing with nature, baking his Halloween pies, baking the Christmas tree cookies he learned from his grandma, and our family hugging each other.

The physical awareness of my body that I experienced as a new mother, from the very physical encounters in the first days to the present, informs my reading of films as a grieving mother-author-spectator when I finally recognized in his death that I am a very attached mother as a conscious response to my own neglected childhood. Now I go through sorrow and mourning as a creative act of self-fortification (rebuilding the self) and flourishing (thriving, living anew) in making this work take place in the world that is his too. In this book, I am mother-author-spectator, devastated creator, asserting what I call an agentic attunement, a lingering and waiting awareness and anticipation of my children that started immediately when they were born. The anticipation of the children's needs awakens an alertness in me. It is a feeling I recognize in myself when a film begins: the senses alert and awake. This is the very way I pay attention to the movies of my study, for they help me to imagine Lakas at the ages he was and the ages he did not quite reach. Six-year-old David, a main character in the 2020 movie *Minari*, already evaluates others around him, assessing his parents' repeated fighting, judging his grandmother's rituals, and analyzing the white people around them as representatives of hostility or welcome. I remember Lakas, almost six, measuring the school playground on his first day of kindergarten before soon becoming so popular on it, in all his brown confident glory within his wealthy and predominantly white community. Observation, as psychoanalyst Fred Pine asserts, is the bedrock of psychoanalysis.⁵ And Lakas's actions as well as David's occur within historical and social contexts: the demographics of the spaces can determine what is aspired to and actualized there. Surely practicing observation during kindergarten, Lakas landed on this personal philosophy: "I want everyone to be treated the same," which he practiced in his way of always including others and making kindness fun. Lakas likely assessed the predominant whiteness of his environs and decided he would be brown and proud, painting dark self-portraits every year for class. Because brown kids historically get short shrift in educational institutions, this is unusual and strong. Psychoanalytic methods of observation enable us to practice

such agentic attunement to conceptualize relations on-screen or in a scene, interpreting how they shape our lived experiences.

Precarity and Inequality: Intimate Attachment

Precarity centrally informs this book about racialized childhood in the movies because racial and other inequities fundamentally shape childhood, as do privilege and security. We see it early, as pregnancy is itself a site of racialization, as Khiara Bridges argues in *Reproducing Race* (2011). Indeed, raising babies made me aware of the investments in different kinds of childhoods that, in turn, shape their experiences, as well as made me keenly attuned to my circumstances and surroundings. One example is the comfort of class privilege in having space for my children to cry (and I could attend to why) without worrying about shared walls. Indeed, access to advantages and resources is the terrain where unequal childhoods form. In giving my children heritage names as people of color in the United States, I placed value on their cultural inheritance, even if nonwhite ethnic names themselves have real consequences in the job market or in navigating the social sphere. I trusted in the strength they would gain from the affirmation of their cultural background as a source of pride to fuel and buoy them, even catapult them to wherever they wished to land with their history and heritage in tow. Lakas would tell new friends on the playground who would fumble his name, “It’s easy. Just say it,” as he patiently and confidently expected them to do it right then and there. While he may not have known it, the act of teaching claimed his belonging and his right to be addressed correctly. As a mother, I intended for my children’s names to act as assertions of self-definition, cultural wealth, and strength in a world of racial and class discrimination. Their names helped to expand boundaries of knowledge and acceptance for themselves and for others who learned to say them.

For me, mothering is about shaping the present, the inheritance of the past, and actively forging the future without fear, so we chose those names to clear a path for them to claim their legacy. It is a form of “mothering as social change,” as best-selling author Angela Garbes argues in *Essential Labor* (2022), where the work of caregiving contains within it not only the needed labor to enable other labor but the goal of creating a more just world. Indeed, the structural contexts of nurturing in the present involve concrete advantages and disadvantages. Still, I assert participation in the

long arc of ancestors and descendants bound together in my expanded understanding of the diaspora, opportunity penalty from racialized names of color be damned.

The death of a child distorts that arc, makes life feel disordered and unnatural, leading me to accept there are things certain and uncertain, out of my control. Things happen for no reason at all. Theoretical psychoanalyst, philosopher, and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis theorizes the death drive as “the last avatar of sexuality, that agent of unbinding, negativity, unconsciousness, and resistance to the coherence of the ego that was the cornerstone and the discovery of psychoanalysis.”⁶ This does not quite feel like the opposite of Eros—going toward life. Grief is actional in the sense that living with an awareness of the force of the death drive is, for a living person, a creative act of making sense of the nearness and facticity of death.

Grief illuminates the position one holds to enact powerfully what it means to be born and what it means to mother and parent within these circumstances and conditions. That is, death leads to a grief that reveals the need I have for my child—not just his for me. The need I have to care for Lakas is a source of joy, a purposeful opportunity, and a relished responsibility. Encouraging curiosity and whatever his interest—baseball, diving, Legos, cooking, Scrabble—is a form of agentic attunement between me and him, and our family: to care for him generatively so he may launch well. Others feel its life-giving and life-defining power too. The amputation of the sensuousness of the physical relationship between caregiver and child, between me and Lakas? The elimination of physicality in hugging as an expression of care and love? That disappearance hurts, aggravated by the appearance of the casual cruelty that grievers face.

Things people have said to me in the aftermath of his death: *You will lose your life. You will die while alive. You will become a shell of yourself. Things happen for a reason. He is in a better place. He wanted to die. He was meant to die.* What I know above and through this noise is that he loved life. We loved life together. We did things. He would say, “I’m bored. Let’s do something.” It would inevitably be something easy and fun. A walk. Climbing the highest bars of the play structure. The beach. Digging deep in the sand and the waves he would inevitably dive into. Playdates with friends. Making dirt cake—crushed Oreos, gummy worms, and unlimited sprinkles. A pumpkin pie from a recipe he learned at the school library story time—of which he brought half (the first pie he ever baked) to the librarian (we continue to deliver them to her today). And he would always sit on my lap after a meal. Satisfied. He gave the best hugs. Satisfying.

Childhood and mothering involve acts of intimate attachment that describe the sensuous physicality of the relationship. I remember the peaceful connection when both my children strongly latched on to my lactating breasts, which released the milk through several holes in each nipple. In the descent of the milk, the process of its draining, and by the force of my children's suckling, I felt our energetic exchange in the entirety of my body. While milk from my body sustained life, psychoanalysts like D. W. Winnicott, who was also a pediatrician, say there is no interchange between mother and child at that moment: the breast is a part of the child, and the breast is a part of the mother.⁷ They each experience and perceive the process as part of their own selves. It is fascinating to think about how the child perceives that act, which for me as a mother was indeed a giving of my body for the baby's sustenance, as I felt it physically affecting me. It is a very particular act of purposeful redirection of that body part for another who is apart from me yet is part of me. The attachment changed me in capturing my body not only in service of my offspring but also in how this relation of giving continues throughout the demands of the baby's new life (through the rest of mine even in his death, actually).

Mothering, for me, combines awareness along with the action that arises to sustain another toward their independence. And in the case of the mother-spectator-author there is the recognition of how film can help map the path toward healthy selves, which encourages my formulation of agentic attunement—*paying attention to the child's development with their future sovereignty in heart and mind*. The interchange from mother/parent/caregiver to child is felt then and throughout life as mutual, in the trust that my child learned and that I demonstrated as trustworthy in that experience. People would comment on Lakas's attachment to me and mine to him—joking that he was my appendage. I know it ultimately gave him confident independence to feel my attunement to his needs, helping launch him on a path toward better chances for successful self-sovereignty.

Parental attention to the child's demands—that everyday interchange—shapes children now and in their future. Meeting their needs strengthens our bond, and the self-satisfaction results from their dependency being met by others—even if they are unaware that it exists outside of themselves. The ability to meet their needs becomes part of how they understand themselves and the ease with which they move in the world. This does not mean that every need is met but that the broader parenting style—the repetition or dependability of receiving care—contextualizes child development in terms of the drives and instincts that exist in children and the

role of the external (structures and relations) in shaping them. That refers not only to their desires, and whether they are being met, but also to their resulting self-esteem and self-confidence from the expression and meeting of those needs. Comfort in a changed diaper and being acknowledged by having their needs attended to matter in shaping the baby's confidence and achievement of peace. Persistent neglect and repeated disregard can build feelings of insecurity and undervaluation. A child's need for care is immediate, urgent, and impactful—and it makes them intensely and breathtakingly vulnerable. If a child is neglected and does not feel attended to as part of an overall caregiving approach, where they cannot achieve ease, what happens to their sense of themselves as valued?

Psychoanalyst and pediatrician D. W. Winnicott coined the phrase “going on being,” which can refer to the peace an infant achieves in being able to trust that their caregiver is meeting their needs. If there are deficits in the care they receive, then this state is hard to come by. In the earliest stages of life, babies possess the drive to live, to eat, to defecate, to breathe. These drives, however, are relational as the baby experiences whether their needs are being met by a caregiver. Needs are shaped by relations and cannot be understood outside of them.

A central tenet in the four psychologies—drive, ego, object relations, and self psychology—is indeed “the patient's contemporary and remembered relations with significant others.”⁸ This begins early in life and continues. Not only does psychoanalysis show how the development of the self relies on interactions with the external world from the very beginning of development, but the four psychologies work together to determine how urges, drives, and ego find themselves intertwined with objects and self-formation. That is, psychoanalysts listen to patients describe their relationships and help them interpret them in order to shape their self-understanding and life experiences. Winnicott identifies the self as always in relation to the other, and he works squarely within the dyad or dialectics between mother/caregiver and child—focusing on the relationship as significantly constituting both. In my analyses I incorporate object relations theory and self psychology without forsaking drives and ego psychology. I want to make room for what of life's choices can be of “our own making” in interpreting the inventory of our experiences through both psychoanalysis and filmmaking.⁹ Agentic attunement captures the power of paying attention to experiences—as spectators, film scholars, and filmmakers—and how we can interpret them to establish helpful narratives in child and adult development.

Indeed, conditions and circumstances in capitalism—such as the lack of universal childcare and an inadequate minimum wage—may violently prevent parents from caring for their child adequately by requiring their separation early in parenting and childhood. Political and social factors shape object relations. Nevertheless, an agentic attunement between parent/caregiver and child can still be cultivated. Constant presence is not required; being away does not preclude an agentic attunement that leads to security. As a working mom, I wanted my infants to receive care that followed my own philosophy, which not every working parent can afford or have the privilege to contract or choose. My boys' caregivers and I worked to build their confidence and independence.

For me, the carnality of wiping feces off the babies, how the smear at times went up their backs, and how the urine would occasionally fountain into my eye demonstrated the physical attunement that occurs between child and caregiver. I recall these experiences as the tethered dynamic between me and my infant children, where I learned how to detect when they wanted to stop eating, or became aware of when the poop came, or the burp, or the cry. We communicate and develop a forceful attachment. Yet, I recognize that the experiences children undergo are their own; as a parent or caregiver, I am merely attempting to decipher their needs as separate entities from my body.

As the mother of a teen who just left home, I was never forewarned about how painful releasing him would be and how it is all worthwhile—simultaneously. I want to hold on as I let go. Everything we do to raise him results in this confident self-sufficiency and readiness to contribute to the world through talents, skills, sense of responsivity to self and others, and more. The dreams of my older son, Bayan, entail a departure from our home and a physical detachment that gives us light in this life, a feeling of helping to shape the future, and his independence is a physical manifestation of the love we gave and continue to give. His departure is not a death, for it coexists with the joy of his autonomy and the launching of his self-sovereignty. He now makes his own way at a developmental stage that feels right. It is an affirmation of our family continuity as he pursues his own goals. In contrast, I could have died when my younger son, Lakas, died. The stopping of his life threatened my own continuity, my own very living. In counting how old he would be today, imagining his needs and his desires, and in honoring his life through writing this book, I still mother him.

My film *80 Years Later* (2022) focuses on racial inheritance and what gets passed on within a family. A key collaborator on the film, who did not know me before Lakas died, said he did not know how I was as a mother—whether I was a good mother. I do not know how he defines good mothering—to me it is about agentic attunement while maintaining awareness of our separate yet bound selves. That is, a devoted mother remains nearby, making sure not to smother the child with intense infantilization or premature adultification so that they can achieve independence with their full selves—heritage and history included. The child is not her/ them, nor a mere extension of her/ them, and is at a specific developmental stage that any parental expectations should recognize. For me, the goal of motherhood is to raise a child with an independent self. Agentic attunement recognizes that separation.

I write this book, then, from the perspective, practice, and position of an attentive mother-author-spectator to the child on-screen as I long and yearn for one child who no longer lives at home and for another who is no longer alive. Devastated creator. I write this book as a way to imagine how Lakas would have grown up and how he would be growing today. To be clear, I write to affirm the preciousness of those years—that I know uniquely from profound loss—so that it is not simply a projection or displacement of grief onto the characters in the films.

The ages of the children and young people in the movie are the ages Lakas would have been in the decade after he had died. He would be eighteen years old now. As viewers, we are situated subjects, and I view films as the mother of a dead child for whom art can provide life-affirming connection, about how to live without his physical presence, especially in helping to imagine what could be, in the face of what cannot be, for a child no longer progressing into his own life except through what he left behind—his own friendships and his family in the way he imprinted us and in continuing the impact he made on us.

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From the despair of the early times as a grieving mom to now, my therapist has helped me every week since the third day after Lakas died. My family keeps me, including my father-in-law, Tadashi Robert Shimizu, who stayed with us and cared for us in the months after Lakas died. Our siblings cared for us: Rolf and Sharon Parreñas, Rhacel Parreñas and Ben Rosenberg, Rhanee and Claudio Palma, Cerissa and Ian Piamonte, Juno Parreñas and Noah Tamarkin, Aari Parreñas, Mahal and Nick MacNeill, Jenny and Gerald Risk, and Susie Shimizu McCobb. My *pamangkin* and *inaanak* Ciara, Isabella, Javi, Brady, Mica, Caleb, Malaya, Mayari, Sebastian, Ronin, Nolan, Matthew, and Daniel know and share the loss of Lakas while so young themselves and love and remember him now; even the youngest ones who did not meet him yet know him and love him too. Our community's feeding and loving us include my grieving mom's book club—where friends courageously read with me to better understand the loss of a child whom they loved too. I am grateful for the love of the

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For helping our family care for our boys, I am most grateful to Patty Barnwell, David Wanderman, Albert Kasuga, Terrence Lau, Silvia Argenal, Ster Vogel, Paula Foscari, Mahealani Furukawa Lee, Monica Salmay, Genna Joseph, Noura Bou Zeid, and Joy Lockhart. Robyn Chamness, Tessa Rosa, Marcia Ginsburg, Sally James, Carol Welte, and all the boys' teachers, parent volunteers, classmates, and administrators at South, Crocker, and Nueva Schools who really helped our family. An Huang Chen, Christina McCleary, Leslie Ragsdale, Kristen Patel, Alice Chang, Emily Kenner, Renee Fitzpatrick, Dounya Matar, Laurel Miranda, Mina Morita, and more ensured my ongoing work as a parent volunteer in ways that helped me honor Lakas all over the Bay Area. KARA-Grief in Palo Alto, especially Jim Santucci, Kathleen Weed, Donovan Ysrael, and April Espaniola and Children's House in Sydney, provided much-needed help and community that centered children and the ongoing memory of Lakas.

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Our family lives every day in the ebb and flow of the pain from the death of Lakas and our wish for him and us to experience the joy of his life. My older son, Bayan, remains the light of my life and the love of my world. And as he writes, creates, and thinks through the world's pressing issues, with his overflowing talent, brilliance, courage, and immense determination, my admiration for him soars. He is the one who gives me hope for the future overall. Undoing trauma from my own childhood into the fold of our loving marriage, in our delicious and juicy creative collaborations, in our communing with nature's forests and beaches, and in our growing stronger together as grieving parents, Dan Shimizu reveals the immense beauty and boundlessness of life together. Dan, I love and need you even more deeply.

Lakas lives on infinitely. Gives us happiness abundantly. We love you forever.

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Introduction

AGENTS OF OUR OWN LIVES, CENTERS
OF OUR OWN STORIES

On Korean American Day, January 13, 2021, two prominent Hollywood production companies presented Korean American filmmaker Lee Isaac Chung's *Minari*, winner of the 2020 Sundance Grand Jury Prize and Dramatic Audience Award. Tickets for the Wednesday night online presentation disappeared fast as people shut in during the COVID-19 pandemic jumped at the chance to watch the buzzed-about independent film at home. The screening was followed by a Zoom panel with the director and cast, moderated by Sandra Oh. The award-winning film and television actor cried as she spoke from the perspective of a spectator about how much she did not know she had needed to see on-screen the particular gestures of her own embodied experience as a Korean American: "I never knew I needed that gift until I opened it."¹ Her visceral identification with the actors' performances—particularly the way they ate Korean food, their facial expressions, or even the way their skin made her recall that of

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her grandmother—was healing for Oh: “It’s like a salve. The entire film is like a salve.” She attested that in being “Korean American, seeing this film, you just did not realize you are sitting in so much grief. And watching this film lets it go a little bit. For us, it is really something to celebrate.”

The conversation with Sandra Oh, the director Lee Isaac Chung, and actors Steven Yeun, Han Ye-ri, and Youn Yuh-jung was punctuated by choked-up silences as the participants struggled with words, which led to different kinds of crying in the Zoom gallery. Lead actor Steven Yeun talked about his personal work reconnecting to the trauma of moving to the United States as a four-year-old and of being severed from homeland, culture, language, and family. In recollecting this time from his childhood, he could barely speak, stopping to gather himself by closing his eyes, lowering his head, and pursing his lips to keep them from quivering. He described the powerful emotions that intimately informed his performance decades after that traumatic time, particularly in terms of an immigrant childhood steeped in “deep isolation.” As an adult in the filming process, the most difficult part for him was having to “let go” of his own “will and desire to be deeply seen.” But once he submitted to that extremely painful process, “the beauty of doing that” led to a “deep reconnection” to his childhood and a “recontextualization of understanding” the trauma of having his life “turned upside down.” Playing the role of the father allowed Yeun to, as he thoughtfully and emotionally articulated, “overcome the gaze of my own internalized understanding of my parents and . . . overcome even the infantilization of them. . . . Oftentimes, because we’re in some way severed from them through communication and through cultural boundaries . . . we remember them either through their suffering or in the ways that we miscommunicate love to each other.” The most difficult part of making the film for him was going through that pain of, in his words, “servicing something larger than you . . . and just opening it up to everybody.” His voice quivered as he admitted, “It actually allowed us to see ourselves a little clearer.”²

I begin by describing this discussion between some of the most prominent Korean American and Korean creators to dissect where these deep, and perhaps surprising, expressions of emotion came from, especially as they relate to childhood trauma, race, and representation. These creators’ jubilation in presenting a film that finally brought Asian American narrative cinema to the greatest prominence cannot be separated from the grief and isolation of their childhood and now adult experiences. *Minari* was nominated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for

Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Original Score—the highest categories in one of the most important film awards in the world. Its lead actor, Steven Yeun, was nominated for Best Actor (a historic first for an Asian American male lead), and Youn Yuh-jung actually won for Best Supporting Actress—the first Korean in history and only the second Asian, following Miyoshi Umeki in 1958. The film's accolades included recognition not only at the Oscars but also at the Golden Globes, where its nomination was mired in controversy when the sponsoring organization, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, placed it in the Best Foreign Film category. The organization claimed this was because English was spoken in less than 50 percent of the film's dialogue, essentially rendering the immigrant experience unfathomable as American. But this misrepresentation is exactly what this film challenges, especially because it is based on writer/director Chung's own Korean American immigrant childhood.

The *Minari* director explained how the film originated from his memories of what it was like to grow up in the rural American South. One afternoon, as an adult, he decided to write down everything he could remember about being six years old, the age of his own daughter at the time. The first memory that came to him was of being afraid that a tornado was going to hit his family's trailer, which, as in the film, his father moved them to without telling his mother. Even so, his memories were just a starting point, and the story continued to evolve throughout the filmmaking process, with input from the Korean and Korean American actors. Chung said the act of making film is to "create something completely new; we're not trying to capture something . . . we're trying to create something." When memory becomes film, then, it comes to life through collaboration, and the incorporation of others. Yet, by the time they reached the end of the process, he said, "I felt like it still retained so much of the spirit of what I remember from growing up."

Beginning this book on racial childhoods with a discussion of this lauded Asian American film is fitting because Chung puts the perspective of children at the center of the American family melodrama—particularly in the loss of home as a place of security, familiarity, and safety and in the threat of looming death for the six-year-old main character, David, portrayed by Alan Kim, an important narrator of the story. Critical to the film's narrative, David and his older sister, Anne (Noel Kate Cho), are central protagonists who actively make sense of their experience in the desolation of the rural South. In centering their agency as children, Chung

recognizes how childhood can help the viewer understand the power of the film's premise. Moving from Korea to Los Angeles and then relocating to Arkansas impacts these young people's formation in ways worth distinguishing from the impact on their parents and grandparent. And we witness the critical events in their lives unfold in ways that we know will matter to them as adults. This was even reflected in the filmmaking process, as the writer/director and the actors themselves reached into the archive of their own childhood memories and personal struggles to tell this Korean American immigrant story.

Racialization works differently across generations, and the experiences of young people are critical to completing our understanding of it. The grandparent, the parents, and the children in the film each have their own subjective experiences. And the writer/director makes sure to include how kids themselves sort out and analyze their perceptions. What is fascinating here is how we do not learn about the early events, experiences, and relations in the grandparent's and parents' lives. Instead, we see the children's experiences and imagine what of these will be repeated and revisited as they get older. Indeed, the children's continuity organizes the film. David's heart murmur becomes the family's central concern, especially his mother's, in determining their viability in this new home. Prioritizing his health also becomes the basis for the parents' conflict and the reason their marriage may fall apart. In the film, and beyond, children's experiences and well-being are crucial; we must listen to them so we can more fully access Asian American immigrant stories.

Choosing Our Inventory: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Asian/American Childhoods in the Movies

As for the filmmakers and actors involved in *Minari*, as spectators our minds are never blank. Films enter our lives within the context of our entire lived experience, from our childhoods with our families to our histories, desires, and relationships now. We analyze film as we experience it: How does this make sense, what of this world do I recognize, what does the film hail in my world? We witness our own lives when making sense of a movie. We study characters as the agents of their lives, *asking ourselves if we too are agents in our own*. Films relay subjective experiences of events that we can analyze and relate to as we evaluate and measure our own autonomy then and now. Choices and actions are building blocks of film

directing and film acting in ways that are paralleled in spectatorship and psychoanalysis. Both entail interpretive acts of forming oneself and others through an evaluation of our representations and our relations.

Lee Isaac Chung used the psychoanalytic approach of free association, a method Sigmund Freud established over one hundred years ago, to create his film about racial childhood. In taking inventory of his childhood memories, intently listening to and evaluating himself to generate the narrative arc of the film, Chung shows the link between psychoanalysis and (film) fiction. Both interpret and prioritize the power of childhood experience and early childhood memory. In creating a narrative arc, we then make sense of these events as not only of the past, but also what is currently real and actual, to hopefully improve our lives today.

I evaluate Asian American films that represent childhood by using the philosophy of psychoanalysis. I came to psychoanalysis for the centrality of sexuality and aggression in its philosophy for my first three books, which contend with power relations across race in sexual representations. I return to psychoanalysis for different reasons now. Here I expand my approach to racialized sexuality by moving away from racialized sex acts and power relations toward the sensuous experience of mothering/parenting and how that experience of becoming a mother/parent changed the way I moved in the world as I cared for others more than myself. My inner world—and what was important to me—changed too.

The inventory of events Chung constructed reveals how the child's relationships to significant others such as parents, grandparents, other adults, and peers shape self-perception. *Minari's* mother and father fighting about whether they should stay, grandma's fun-filled exploration of their environs, white adults highlighting the family's racial difference in a homogeneous town, and white children questioning or accepting their presence across difference: these experiences narrate well what we may feel as constitutive. Social forces act on characters, and characters act and react, showing how they navigate others' narrations as they form themselves. We see David asserting belonging by enthusiastically joining other children socially, or defining his grandmother's foreignness to emphasize his own Americanness. Both acts—self-assertion and self-definition—are creative and teach us the importance of children as social agents.

They also show us the similarities of psychoanalysis and film: both interpret reality and work with historical events to assess what things mean and how people fashion themselves. The filmmaker analyzes the subjective experiences of the child in constructing the film, and film psychoanalysis

renders them analyzable through our interpretations. It is in the act of the film's symbolizing and our interpretation that we can feel the child grappling with themselves as they enter and interact in the world not as separate from it but dependent on it in an ongoing way. That is, as children experience their emotions in conflict, which the film aims to dramatize, we see how they act, cope, and create, and how they may risk rehearsing these same dramas into adulthood, for Freudian reasons of reenacting pleasure or mastering trauma. Through their experiences and their subsequent interpretive choices, children shape the world as they feel it and occupy it. When we watch the experiences of children, we also see how they establish their autonomy through their subjective relationship to the objects around them, including place, space, and people.

Minari thus enables me to clarify the kind of psychoanalysis that informs this book, one that departs from the centrality of drive, ego, and instinct that is most associated with Sigmund Freud, to approaches that have developed since his philosophy and practice were established in the early twentieth century. Freud's clinical practice of attuned neutral listening to the patient on the couch was expanded to methods of child and infant observation by Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott (with object relations) and Heinz Kohut (with self psychology), who worked in the early-middle to later-middle twentieth century. Object relations and self psychology address the optimal conditions for well-child development. The central difference in these later psychoanalytic approaches that stem from Freud is in the focus on the independent role of others in relation to the formation of the self. Indeed, as psychoanalyst Fred Pine argues, Freud "had his object relations theory," but "the formal status he gave to the object was drive based—that is, the object was that person, part of a person, part of the self, or the thing through which gratification of drive was attained."³ Rather than center drives as urges, and the gratification of those drives as the end point, object relations and self psychology evaluate the intrapsychic and interpersonal role of the other in developing oneself. And self psychology prioritizes self-formation as different, separate, and with one's own agency and self-esteem.⁴

Fred Pine identifies four psychologies in psychoanalysis: drive, ego, object relations, and self psychology. All are related, overlapping, and different, yet they all are useful because complex humanity requires the multiple angles they present.⁵ The central concern that distinguishes the four approaches is in how we account for what is born instinct or developed in relations with others, such as caregivers or loved ones. The differ-

ence, however, between various psychoanalytic approaches is not a matter of biological versus relational. According to feminist psychoanalytic film theorist Teresa de Lauretis, even Freud would find that “not acceptable,” since his “foremost intuition and lifelong effort was to define a new conceptual category, the psychic, and a theoretical domain, metapsychology or psychoanalytic theory.”⁶

I am interested in how we have a hand in the forces that shape us. I answer this question through the act of interpretation that this book centers on, which I call *agentive attunement*—the act of attending to a child with their sovereignty, at that moment and in the future, in mind. I am interested in how “the view you get depends on when you are looking.”⁷ For me, the development of children is particularly important to emphasize because film dramatizes so much of our adulthood through our experiences as children. So much happens in childhood, which we remember as core events and memories in adulthood, that shapes our decisions and choices today. What would it mean to recall the feelings we possess as children and our own subjective experience to understand how we actualize ourselves as adults, and to interpret them not only in a film but also in how we talk about the film experience?

All psychoanalysis is relational by virtue of the analyst-patient relationship. However, even more relational models emerged due to the limits of Freudian drive and ego psychology, which considered the other as derivative to the goals of self-gratification. For Freud, the other is an object “defined as the end point in the search for gratification.”⁸ I move toward a less self-focused and more relational approach that emphasizes the other as a continual force in one’s self-development, especially those relations and events instantiated in the early lives of children that resonate in adulthood. In my study, the later psychologies of object relations and self psychology add to, rather than supplant, drive and ego psychologies. The connection to the other can remain an attachment in itself, a comforting or grating memory throughout life, rather than in the instance of establishing the self. One of my main contributions with this book is to foreground these underutilized theories, especially in the analysis of film childhoods overall.

The development of object relations and self psychology is also grounded in changes with methods in a clinical practice that lends itself to film. Psychoanalysis developed from the “hovering” kind of listening Freud did, where the analyst listens attentively to the patient on the couch to better understand them and their inner world. Winnicott’s and

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Kohut's child and infant observation expanded that approach to new patients and methods. My approach thus utilizes Winnicott's object relations and Kohut's self psychology to make sense of the development of self-sovereignty in childhood films through the keen observation of child development. Others, like Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and W. R. D. Fairbairn, also attend to questions about the impact of childhood events. Thus, in this book I do not ignore Freud's and Lacan's drive, instincts, and ego psychology, which we in the field of psychoanalysis and film usually emphasize, but I do put a stronger focus on object relations and self psychology due to the different ways these psychoanalytic theories approach childhoods.

To be clear, it is not that the social environment does not matter in drive, instinct, and ego psychology. Fred Pine argues that Melanie Klein's conception of object relations uses drive psychology to discuss how the child incorporates or expulses the object, which is thus tied to drives. D. W. Winnicott furthers Klein's object relations to anchor this relationship in actual parent-child relations and the specific dyad there.⁹ Thus, Winnicott and Klein illustrate how the combination of the child's wishes and the parent's attunement and attachment remains formative in their lives. Because I am concerned with the self-formation of the child and how object relations with parents haunt and shape adulthood, this focus is necessary.

The Power of Representation and Emotions in Asian/American Cinema

In the Zoom session with the actors and director of *Minari*, Sandra Oh began the conversation by linking the power of the film's images to her perpetual yet unanswered need to experience on-screen her particular culture, manifested in the Korean language, hand gestures, bodily positions, and facial expressions. Her own face aghast at the shock of her need, she identified a long-standing hunger that found expression in tears, intermittently streaming from her eyes as she moderated. Steven Yeun's crying was different, for it referred to and emerged from the trauma of loss. It took him aback, sharing the quality of surprise in Oh's experience, but it disabled him into a long silence that compelled him to turn away from our view and bow his head.

I welcome all this crying as a kind of return to childhood need, made especially acute during the pandemic. I recognize the feelings emanating

from their sounds, both the slow cry of hunger and the disabling cry of pain. And as we are all immersed in the pandemic, to cry together in the face of our loneliness, our losses, and our suffering from the deaths and deprivations we continue to endure feels right in nonlinguistic form. Yet, the panel's crying on-screen is about ongoing feelings Asian Americans hold in relation to representation, as a loss and sorrow, and as a vehicle of collective trauma that has lasted more than many lifetimes: we who have not experienced ourselves as the center of our cinematic stories. Sandra Oh highlights this when she asks the Korean actors on the panel, who have not experienced the trauma of a lack of representation in their home country, if they understand why the Korean Americans are crying. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall identifies the work of representation, or the depiction of people and events, as providing cognitive maps of who we are in relation to others.¹⁰ Meanings produced in movies shape how we perceive and behave in the world. Since the inception of moving images, Asian Americans have occupied screens as fraught terrains of invisibility, distortion, and simplification, commingling in what Teresa de Lauretis calls the public and private fantasies of our popular culture.¹¹ Movies are technologies of harm for Asian Americans in our systematic exclusion from their authorship.

Thus, the reactions that the *Minari* conversation revealed are not new. Asian American moviegoers and moviemakers have expressed an unrelenting hunger for recognition on-screen since the beginning of cinema. Dating back to the birth of film itself, similar to when African Americans created content and engaged the technology of the new medium of cinema, Asian Americans like Anna May Wong deployed their emotions on-screen, presenting them as cultural practices worth celluloid, for they, to follow Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), “produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects.”¹² We have a right to the screen as a place for expressing emotion. As I explore in my experimental documentary *The Fact of Asian Women* (2004), which dissected the structure and grammar of her performances as well as her commentary, along with the stars Nancy Kwan and Lucy Liu, Wong knew that her acting on-screen registers Asian American women out of marginalization into new terrains of meaning. And she recognized the power of film to secure her critical intervention in the historical record.

A long and deep archive of Asian American actors have challenged, since its beginnings, the industry's commitment to racial stereotypes—or

the repetition of what Homi Bhabha defines as “arrested representations.”¹³ Lauded Japanese American immigrant actor Sessue Hayakawa, who played a Hollywood villain from the 1910s to the 1960s known for violent misogynistic acts, such as branding a woman’s back in the film *The Cheat* (1915), began his own film production company in Los Angeles. According to film scholar Daisuke Miyao, Hayakawa produced numerous films focused on Asian American and other racialized experiences.¹⁴ In his own films, Hayakawa’s characters bypassed his Japanese American ethnicity to play more fully realized characters of Arab, Indian, Latinx, and Native American backgrounds. He rewrote his villainous violence against women, too, by giving up his own future for their safety, even if it meant his own character’s death. Through film, he aimed to generate a new narrative to distill trauma.

We need stories unique and specific to Asian American experiences and racializations, like the ones Anna May Wong, Sessue Hayakawa, and *Minari* project, so that the medium of film can do its work more effectively. That work, I insist, is to make us feel, especially for children who are at the cusp not only of accessing their autonomy but of navigating conflict, feeling emotion, and forging their self-regard. These feelings include grief, mourning, and alienation in ways both social and psychic, as identified in works on racial melancholia by Asian Americanist psychoanalytic literary scholars Anne Anlin Cheng, David Eng, and Shinhee Han and on Asian American affect in popular culture by writers like Cathy Park Hong.¹⁵

I cannot imagine Hayakawa crying, though, about the roles he had to take. What I sense from his own films is a *rallying* cry, one filled with anger that reveals a binding relationship to images that defined his legacy. In his lifetime, he wished to unshackle himself from his ill-famed roles, illustrating what documentary filmmakers Loni Ding and Renee Tajima Peña make with their *self-defining* images as a counter to what African Americanist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images.”¹⁶ Following Collins, Asian Americanist media scholar Darrell Hamamoto extends her term to refer to Asian Americans as well.¹⁷ In identifying how structural racism is manifested in industry images, Collins argues that dominant groups determine our cultural understanding of marginalized groups that, in turn, shape intergroup and cross-individual perception. To apprehend relations through media communication, however, we must take into account how images deploy emotions, encourage mutuality, and contain the possibility of empathy—including what I have argued

in my previous books as the simplification of the complex process of representation where the identification with one's own subjugation occurs. That is, spectators of color read films critically and contextually as well as being deeply formative in our subjectivities, as scholars like Jacqueline Stewart and J. Reid Miller well argue. Images are relational, and power dynamics at the sites of production and spectatorship are analyzable, especially in terms of our complex cognitive and affective responses and relations to our objectifications.

Because the Asian American story is so broad and wide-ranging, this collective call to be seen within structures of representation resonates with contemporary Asian American creators working with a productive and creative anger online today. They literally claim rage through self-naming, like Phil Yu's *Angry Asian Man* blog and its companion podcast branded as a service for "the media-savvy, socially conscious, pop-cultured Asian American," and Lela Lee's *Angry Little Asian Girl*, a comic and cartoon series focused on Kim, a Korean American female child who rails against racial and gendered injustices, replete with rude hand gestures and curses.¹⁸ Both of these examples deploy anger—claiming it as an emotion proper to Asian Americans who are constructed as the quiet minority who lack the capability and capacity for it. If Asian Americans do not have access to anger, how can they have other emotions, especially in conflict—the basis of psychoanalysis and movies both?

The Movies of Racial Childhoods harnesses the power of emotion, not only in the demands of Asian Americans for representation but also in how three fields—psychoanalysis and sexuality, Asian American and ethnic studies, and film and media studies—have the special ability to contend with and deploy emotions. The book's focus on Asian American childhoods addresses the lack of representation both in film and also in cultural studies approaches to childhood. It also identifies a field of study within Asian American cinema from which film, race, sexuality, and psychoanalytic studies may benefit by coming together, extending their lessons and expanding their purviews. While Asian American studies' engagement with childhood has largely focused on literature, ethnic and diaspora studies have begun to talk about the role of the child in narrative cinema in ways that I am further advancing.¹⁹ For example, in talking about childhood sexuality—which is a focus of psychoanalysis but a topic that film studies shies away from, while it also remains an understudied field within Asian American studies and ethnic studies—I engage critical questions about

desire and orientation, autonomy and overdetermination, and I identify how self-sovereignty and power dynamics appear early in one's formation as a citizen and subject.

Agentic Attunement and Other Key Concepts

In addition to applying the key concepts of object relations and self psychology in my film analysis, I also incorporate D. W. Winnicott's notions of the "good enough mother" and "true and false selves." The good enough mother figure focuses on the needs of her infant attentively until she begins to fail the child in small ways in order to prepare them for self-sovereignty. The true self is present and able to be in the moment, whereas the false self can only engage in superficial relations in defense against the world. Like Winnicott's concepts, Heinz Kohut's notion of selfobjects also emerges from child observation. Selfobjects capture the role of others in giving a child confidence and self-esteem through reliable care. Selfobjects are representations of the parent and caregiver on whom the infant and child depend; the child develops an attachment to that parental relationship, thereby forming the self. Kohut also gives us the concepts of the grandiose self and healthy narcissism to describe how children learn to preserve what is good and reject what is not for their own well-being. The subsumption of the grandiose self leads to a kind of healthy narcissism that helps regulate unrelenting attacks on an individual's self-esteem. In my study, these come from racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination as they relate to children and young people of color's senses of self, in a world where they are perpetually and systematically managed as subjects.

I utilize these concepts from object relations and self psychology with the goal of showing how youth forge autonomy in the face of grief, especially over the loss of parents and homespace, as the loss of familiarity, safety, and love provides opportunities to rebuild the self. The goal of the book is to show how films are analyzable in ways that growing up can be. In our development, we choose which memories to repeat and revisit, either to confirm and elaborate on our pleasure or to learn to master our pain by rehearsing the same scenes and relationships. It is the act of evaluating and understanding our experiences through interpretation that I hope to gift the reader through a process I call *agentic attunement*. This concept incorporates a generative understanding of agency as acting for

the sake of self and others in the face of obstacles. Here I am building on the ideas of anthropologist Saba Mahmood, for whom agency is the ability to act within constraints. Mahmood defines agency counterintuitively in how the unfree may find freedom and independence in the performance of the very roles they are subjected to and constrained by, such as when Islamic women “treat socially authorized forms of performance as the potentialities—the ground if you will—through which the self is realized.”²⁰ As I argue in my previous books, self-cultivation cannot be removed from the formative power of the social, including how images intervene in one’s most intimate desires. Similarly, Mahmood asks how “submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject’s potentiality.”²¹ I interpret her definition of agency to be generative in the sense of finding freedom within the engagement of and resistance to one’s subjugation.

In terms of my concept of agentic attunement, I define attunement as the attentive practice of observation that spawns from the position of a watchful mother-author-spectator. From this role, I diagnose how movies help us mold and further develop ourselves through the process of interpreting key events, moments, and relations. Agentic attunement teaches us to take stock of and thoughtfully identify our formative experiences so we may transform and actualize ourselves to be who we wish to be: agents in our own lives, starring in our own movies. Agentic attunement relies on the keen observation of children’s development now toward the goal of their self-sovereignty, autonomy, independence, and healthy adult futures.

I extend agentic attunement’s purview beyond the interior world of the film. I am interested not only in diegetic relationships between parents and children but also in our affective relationship to the images on-screen for their potential to calm suffering. Films capture embodied feelings that words may not solely express. Psychoanalyst John Bowlby, founder of attachment theory, who studied relations between children and their parents, says there is no stronger feeling than the behavior of attachment or how children know to depend on their parents or caregivers in achieving security and confidence. One way to measure the child’s attachment is through assessing the different kinds of crying and the response of the mother or parental caregiver. For Bowlby, “crying is elicited by a number of quite different conditions,” including hunger and pain. Which of these is more powerful is hard to tell: pain stimulates hurry; hunger, a more “leisurely” response, the sources of which indeed are anxiety that can also lead to anger.²² I write about Asian American cinema and the traumas

addressed in childhood representations to make sense of these feelings as racial ones, where images hold and contain trauma as well as address it. Agentic attunement asks us to dissect images within their social context—noting family roles and dynamics as a site where emotion in performance can produce emotion in the spectator—as I do with *Minari* now.

Minari opens with a close-up on David, a six-year-old Korean American boy, in the back seat of his family's station wagon as his youthful mom, Monica, and sister, Anne, drive on desolate country roads in the middle-of-nowhere Arkansas. They follow a moving truck just ahead of them, which we find out is driven by the husband and father, Jacob. The mother is anxious as she absorbs where they are. She looks at her children in an attempt to gauge their well-being. She glances at the daughter, who reads alongside her in the front passenger seat, and in the rearview mirror, where she notes her son falling asleep in the back. When they arrive at their destination, Monica asks, "What is this place?" with worry and concern, looking at the nowhere-ness of their surroundings. The husband announces, "This is our new home," with confidence and even a smile. The kids run toward the trailer home parked on stilts. We soon discover, when the parents and sister dote over David, that he has a heart murmur, and his parents are trying to find a home where they can establish economic security. After moving from Seattle to Los Angeles, where there were other Korean Americans nearby but also a lack of opportunity, they have ended up in a place without an ethnic community or a good hospital. But what we see of their parenting depicts dimensions of agentic attunement.

The parents are attentive; they listen to their children's wishes and create opportunities for fun, even amid their own fear. They explain life lessons, including what they are doing in this unknown area with no malls and no schools nearby, and they ask questions about how the children feel. The mother worries about the hospital being an hour away as the father dreams about farming fifty acres of land. "Think about the kids," she says to him, to which he replies, "They need to see me succeed for once." The conflict between the parents is about the children's future and their role in providing safety versus the prospect of prosperity. Nonetheless, the fighting is frequent, and the kids cope by coloring and making airplanes that send messages that read "don't fight" to their parents in the other room, or by reading the encyclopedia while their parents work at their jobs in a chicken hatchery. The move is both an aspirational act for their children and a risk to their health. The film captures the stakes of the story by rendering the children's future legible in the parents' choices.

The children's experiences and active process of making sense of their lives are central to the immigrant family's narrative—in David's hiding his soiled underwear after he wets the bed so he won't add stress to his family, or in the kids' curiosity about why their father insists on growing Korean vegetables. The father, Jacob, tells his son they will cater to the "thirty thousand Koreans who immigrate to America every year." David also makes sense of how generations relate; he reacts to the news that his grandma Soonja is coming to live with them by observing, "Grandma is why you fight." His mother attempts to explain family and the bond between generations. When the grandma arrives, they attempt to overcome the language barrier along with the grandchild's perceptions of who grandparents are or should be. The way she looks and behaves puzzles him—she "does not look like a grandma. . . . Grandmas don't wear men's underwear." He is repulsed when she gives him a snack from her own mouth. He is baffled by her gift of Korean playing cards and the spirited way she plays, as if among adults rather than her grandchildren. While the film does not explain how he measures her strangeness, the focus and attention on the Korean immigrant family expand our definition of grandmotherhood on-screen. This is especially vivid when Soonja teaches her grandkids to play cards, yelling at them, "Sucks for you! Damn it. . . . A plague on you!" In an interview, Youn Yuh-jung said she identified with how the grandma character takes to the new location, finding in its soil a healthy place where minari, a Korean plant, could grow, "and that's obviously how she sees her grandson. And that's something his parents can't really see."²³

What I find powerful and promising in the Asian American cinematic childhood representations in *Minari* and the other films I analyze in this book is how they regard racialization as foundational to growing up. Steven Yeun, in an interview at Lincoln Center on December 21, 2020, said that *Minari* is "an inside view of the family from our perspective as we lived it . . . liberated from the mainland home gaze . . . and the majority American gaze . . . the immigrant experience is its own thing."²⁴ I underscore this assertion that motivates Asian American filmmakers and film scholars then and now. The dramatization of racialization, the particular experience of being subjugated as a confrontation in this historical moment, highlights how so much emotion still needs to be expressed and explored on-screen. We have not yet felt all that we can feel in movies, especially if we don't undo cinematic harm with pleasure, affirmation, and relief. And these feelings are grounded in childhood, as Yeun reached all the way back to his own four-year-old immigrant experience to inform

his acting and Lee Isaac Chung dug deep into his six-year-old experiences relocating to Arkansas to write the film.

Films are vehicles to help us feel collective trauma, pain, and representations of childhood explicitly so we can unflinchingly address them as both formative and changeable. This is why we must tune in to them to act and become agents. In experiencing these images that hold and contain both deep distress and joy, agentic attunement—especially toward the young—can make lived inequities known so we can address our woundings, seek justice, mobilize action, and encourage healthy paths toward adulthood. Asian American representations on-screen have been sites of harm, but they are the very same sites where we can address those injuries, to help us live happier, healthier, and fuller lives.

Indeed, Chung described how he showed *Minari* to his family over Thanksgiving. Through viewing it, he said, “we recognized our struggle with each other and how we made it to the other side. We have a better relationship because we now see each other.”²⁵ Lacking the capacity to verbalize their experiences of immigrant struggle over decades, he had to go to moving images to represent his family’s trauma and grief. The stories of Asian American children and youth, silenced subjects, deserve our fearless attention to help us toward similar goals of coherence and reconstitution. We must see their lives as worthy of the power of the movies and through the feelings and actions they ignite and inspire.

As a filmmaker and film scholar who practices agentic attunement in creating narratives that undo the harms cinema has wrought upon communities of color, I also show how films help us examine childhood attachment and how children can forge self-sovereignty as a rehearsal for adulthood. As Bowlby argues in his foundational work on attachment, to be able to relate to and depend on our caregivers is critical for success in future relations and overall life experience.²⁶ And while there are no guarantees, within the context of capitalism, that secure attachment will lead to successful well-being, films help to show us paths where we can undo trauma and redirect pain to find what Mary Main, Nancy Kaplan, and Jude Cassidy called “earned secure attachment”—that is, to produce at least one secure attachment relationship that moves consciously and deliberately away from the insecurity that the trauma of childhood inflicts.²⁷ While there are no absolute assurances that secure attachment results in well-being, it poises the child to launch on a healthy beginning with self-esteem and confidence. Psychologist Mary Ainsworth, a colleague of Bowlby, pioneered the Strange Situation, a laboratory procedure for

assessing attachment security between infants and their mothers to identify patterns of attachment, including insecure and secure attachment styles.²⁸ A student of Ainsworth's, Mary Main advanced this work to identify how secure attachment led to more confident behavior, exploration, and play for infants.²⁹ Out of the traumas from one's childhood, earned secure attachment emerges when one explicitly creates new relations and new narratives in adulthood. In a sense, throughout this book I study precisely the ways in which attachment succeeds and fails as characters relate to their childhood traumas in the formation of their future selves.

And in agentic attunement, I extend this inquiry to what race and representation inflict, to continually look at and make images that let us imagine something different. Especially in confronting power relations among marginalized voices within marginalized communities, we may experience what the imagistic can do beyond the linguistic. Trauma demands representation so as to create new realities.

Race and Childhoods in the Movies

The Movies of Racial Childhoods studies early twenty-first-century televisual and cinematic narrative representations of racialization and its impacts on the sovereignty of children, particularly Asian American and Asian children in independent global cinemas. Devastation and exploitation are not the dominant themes in the stories of Asian/American childhoods and young adulthoods that we read about in this book; instead, we see a richer and wider range of childhood experiences.³⁰ Thus, my conceptualization of agentic attunement makes an extremely hopeful intervention, in identifying how the child and young adult embark on the process of raising themselves. They do this by taking seriously the project of tending to their own emotions and centering the self, both empowering and enabling actions.

Across each chapter, we witness how growing up as Asian/American entails grief and mourning, as children and young adults contend with the bonds of attachment, feeling the racialized forces that construct Asian Americans as model minorities (including premature adultification in breeding overachieving children who don't play, with parents already seeing them as doctors and lawyers in their childhoods), the contestation of their sexual autonomy in the face of premature sexualization, and the literal loss of a parent or a home. While the parent or place appears as

the object in key moments of one's life—events that have ramifications for confidence, self-assurance, and more—their death and loss mean a realignment of the world. There is a loss of confidence, loss of certainty, loss of the sense of omnipotence and autonomy that can come from secure attachments to person and place. Throughout this book, a parent's death may be a turning point in the film, or a child leaves home just as they hit a critical crossroads of development. Beyond interpersonal and intrapsychic loss, children's autonomy and self-mastery in these films are fraught with the structural forces of racialization and sexualization and the particular structural circumstances of their families that shape and form individual subjectivity. However, the children emerge as agents of their own lives, starring in their own narrative stories due to the agentic attunement their caregivers practice (or don't) or that they take on for themselves as young people.

Bringing together psychoanalytic methods with an agentic attunement to the body and psyche via race, gender, and sexuality studies, I study cinematic childhood as a set of experiences impacted by others—relationships, objects, and structures of inequality—to show the importance of forging oneself through the conscious act of interpreting one's own experiences. This means not simply accepting them but laundering them through a process of evaluation and interpretation, including of the social forces that shape and limit experience.

The bond between mother and child is not only racialized but also dependent on the structural conditions and historical circumstances where this relationship resides. The bodily and psychic connection between me and my sons, and any other mothering or caregiving, does not exist outside race and racism. The precarity of the mother's life, for example, is informed by the assumption that women of color have a higher tolerance for pain, by a history of forced sterilization in medical practices, or by the determination that they should not have ownership over their reproductive capacities or their own children.³¹ For Asian/American women, as I present in my first book, the sacrifice of children to white men who forsake them in the opera *Madame Butterfly* (1904) and the musical *Miss Saigon* (1989) is also a form of perverse sexualization—that they are partners for fornication but not motherhood (reproducing bloodline) or wifehood (acceptable partnership). There is also the reality of the fear Black mothers face regarding the racial targeting of their children—from Trayvon Martin to Tamir Rice—that most white mothers do not experience; this is what visual studies scholar Nicole Fleetwood refers to as

the “casual violence of whiteness” in her article “Raising a Black Boy Not to Be Afraid.”³² For me as a woman of color raising brown boys, and as a Filipinx American immigrant, the experiences of racialization and the work I do to prepare them for it start early as well. Racial identity impacts mothering not only in terms of social and cultural perception but also in self-perception and practice. Similarly, deaths of people of color are racialized, as we see from the disproportionate number of COVID-19 fatalities for Filipinx American, Latinx, and African American people.³³ As with the pandemic, we experience childhood and parenting unequally.

In our family, my first son takes after my husband’s mixed-race Japanese and white heritage in his features and color, while my younger son takes after me—Filipinx and deeply brown, though his hair, eyes, and mouth are just like his dad’s. Our varying appearances in terms of racial identity are differences that matter as much as my racialized experience of birthing, breastfeeding, and letting go as a parent. Mothering is also not equal across difference, nor is the experience of childhood when infantilization and adultification happen simultaneously as a child grows up. Thus, my attention to racialized sexuality in representations continues in my approach to motherhood and childhood, and in my refusal to universalize white experiences of innocence when addressing the experiences of childhoods of color.

Beyond Sex Acts: Sexual and Racial Innocence in Childhoods

While my first book engages the mythic representations of Asian/American women as hypersexual beings, my second book addresses the Hollywood images of Asian/American men as tethered to a straitjacketed definition of sexuality, and the third looks at transnational intimacies between radically unequal subjects across race and sexuality, this book looks at the narrative of growing up within precarity and grief for different kinds of racialized Asian/American sexual identities and capacities.³⁴ A different form of sexuality emerges in this book as well.

One of Freud’s most controversial theories is that from the very beginning, children not only possess sexuality but also invest in their own sexuality. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he argues that during the latency period children have a polymorphously perverse sexuality that manifests in sucking and touching themselves as forms of self-pleasure.³⁵

As we develop and grow, our ability to take pleasure channels, concentrates, and focuses on specific desires that are most often focused on genital sexuality. What happens to the possibility of our polymorphously perverse sexual past in this narrowing? The adultification of these pleasures renders them beyond an innocence that all children possess. When I speak about childhood innocence, I am not referring to children starting out asexually and then becoming sexual or getting pulled into sexuality by adults. I am talking about the social imposition of adult sexuality onto this model of polymorphous perversity. For Freud, there is never a moment when children are not sexual for their own pleasure. For Freud, adults should and can get pleasure from more actions and kinds of people beyond the limits on gender identities and sex acts. When does the narrowing or closing of sexual infinity happen? When kids are forced into heteronormative ways of being and imagining their future sexual selves?

As they grow up, children possess themselves, including their sexuality—which I define as an inkling, a feeling, and an expression of their own desires, wants, and preferences—including a lack of interest in others. However, this does not occur in a vacuum; their racialized and sexualized character informs the meaning of their expression and reception by others. I think of the fourteen-year-old Laotian boy Konerak Sinthasomphone, who, bleeding, distraught, and with a hole drilled into his head, essentially lobotomizing him, fled the apartment building of now infamous serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. To the horror of Glenda Cleveland and her daughter, among the Black women neighbors standing by attempting to protect the boy, the police believed Konerak to be a consenting adult lover based on the explanation of the white male serial killer, who soon after strangled the boy to death. The policeman later explained, in defending his action, that to his trained eye, he did not see anything improper in handing over the incapacitated brown child to the white, adult man.³⁶ In this situation, the Southeast Asian boy is overdetermined by fantasies about him, as Eng Beng Lim theorizes in *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performances in the Asias* (2013), in a kind of pornographic adultification. Indeed, there is a long transnational history of brown Asian children facing interpellations of, not only interruptions in and disruptions to, their sexualities as they grow into adulthood.³⁷ The policeman, egregiously uncaring, refused agentic attunement to the child in the face of a calm, white-skinned, blond-haired, and blue-eyed psychopath narrating a different story about the adult status of the Laotian American immigrant child who was clearly suffering, distraught, and in physical

pain right there in front of him. An abject subject's pain remained invisible and his future did not matter. Of these differently valued subjectivities, the white male serial killer's prevailed.

What would happen if children of color were granted agentic attunement, the same nurturing and protection typically accorded to white children, so they may fashion their own adulthoods without undue constriction? In her book *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011), historian Robin Bernstein studies popular-culture representations of childhood according to how racial hierarchies impact them. Innocence is afforded to white children, which manifests as an incompatibility with labor and a rightful access to protection from the responsibilities of adulthood. Black children's purported lack of innocence is naturalized as "insensateness," or an inability to feel pain, which justifies their exploitation as adultified forced laborers.³⁸ In "A Lesson in Moral Spectatorship," philosopher of race and ethics Reid Miller describes how a high school class of predominantly Black children participated in a field trip to see the movie *Schindler's List*. Their responses to the film—laughter, jostling—were rendered inappropriate and used to support the notion that they cannot understand, empathize with, and experience cinematic historical trauma. The ensuing media spectacle following the incident racially constructed the young Black high school children as insensitive to representations of trauma due to their circumstances of poverty and living in what is perceived as the urban slums. Miller writes, "Such ascribed detachment, rather than being unique to this occasion, belongs to a larger depiction of black people as disconnected from the ethical implications of their historical subjugation."³⁹ Beyond their purported distance from empathizing with their own historical lot or analyzing their own subjugation, they are also presumed to be far from concerned for or analytic about their own freedom. The racialized claim that Black children cannot feel for themselves or for others is constructed in the media as insensitivity, or a lack of a critical perspective regarding their own history of enslavement or aspiration for their own freedom.⁴⁰

Children's pain, according to Bernstein, is directly related to the innate identity their racial subjection affords them. That identity is composed of characterizations of not only their physical abilities and emotional capacities but also their compatibility with freedom itself or morality, in the case of Miller's study. This access to freedom, then, is determined as early as childhood. The process of racialization is the process of justifying whether one can access freedom. Bernstein argues, "To combat the libel of

black insensateness, abolitionists showcased the physical, emotional and spiritual suffering of enslaved people. . . . [T]hey based an argument for human rights on the ability to suffer.”⁴¹ Extending Bernstein’s argument to film studies and the racialization of Asian/American children and young people, *The Movies of Racial Childhoods* investigates contemporary films in the new century that feature childhood as a site where their sovereignty is seized by others, enforcing a lack of freedom evident in their sexualization as adults that I discuss in my previous books. Children’s own actions are inflected and impinged upon by structures and forces of not only adult power but also the race, class, and gender that support them—so much so it is not only within representations but also in popular culture and everyday life itself that suffering and pain are not seen and not sensed. They are sidelined for the benefit of others—whether the adults in their lives or children with more racial, gender, and class privilege and cultural citizenship. The well-being of brown children is sacrificed for the comfort of more privileged and heard others.

Racialized childhood is an aggravated site of struggle for self-sovereignty, which I define as confident independence, self-possession, autonomy, and the ability to access self-determination within the context of specific Asian and Asian American narratives. My previous books, like this one, attend to the local, global, and diasporic; the rural and urban; the historic and present as all infusing each other in a vision of a global Asian and Asian American world, reflecting the migrations and movements of people, as well as the relentless questioning of their citizenship in the United States, where they have been for multiple generations.

In this book, I look at the lives of individuals as shaped by historic, political, social, and economic structures, which they also resist and critique even as children. I center their perspective as children in dealing with the imposition of adults on their self-perceptions, including their desires and how they wish to grow up. I am interested in viewing these perspectives as if they were the children’s memoirs in the films, or what Diana Taylor calls a “repertoire” of embodied memory, in relation to the “archive” of recorded history, which represents the adult version of the same childhood.⁴² I show the entanglement with the young people’s interior desires and the external forces that define them in films made by adults that represent racialized and sexualized childhoods. Films that focus on Asian/American children can help us identify the ways in which they do or do not experience nurturing and protection in agentic attunement. And if they experience ambiguous and open-ended narratives that enable

them to have freedom and an infinity of possibility, the better for achieving future freedom.

Practicing Agentic Attunement as Filmmakers and Spectators

This book continues my scholarly goal of amplifying the voices of filmmakers of color, characters of color, and performances by actors of color. What is delicate about this new step and new direction is that movies are mostly made by adults, and the representations of children's experiences are limited by recollections or projections over what can be vast amounts of time for the adult authors representing younger people. Thus, our cinematic understanding of childhood and infancy can only be made through inference and assumption, as Kathryn Bond Stockton also theorizes. We are limited in what we can know due to the complexities of representations. For the past twenty years, my books, articles, and films have addressed the complexities of moving images in relation to the problems and politics of sexuality and gender in Asian American and diasporic contexts. The intervention in my work is threefold: I address the power of representation in shaping our social institutions, our interpersonal and group relations, and our intimate self-understandings. Simultaneously, I expose the dangerous lack of diversity in film and media production and in the critical voices that frame our discussions. I look directly and unflinchingly at challenging relations on-screen in order to offer new ways of thinking about and imagining anew our relationships off-screen. Finally, I am invested in the ambiguity of cinematic language to enable an infinity of meanings for subjects of color who have been colonized on film as knowable, secured by the tradition of limited images where people of color are antagonists in relation to white protagonists. As spectators and filmmakers of color, we need access to the inexpressibility of complex experiences that cinema aims to represent (this is what it means to access representation) not simply for visibility, but for how cinema can represent inexpressible things—verbal, aural, or any singular version of the senses.

Representations of childhood are inherently speculative and partial, reflecting an unknowability that should be maintained.⁴³ Childhood is rendered within the limits of memory not by the people living this important age but by those who may still be affected by their origin stories and seminal memories as adults. What is crucial, too, is whether they have

contended with the meanings of their experiences consciously, through agentic attunement, or if these experiences remain unprocessed and confusing, with continuing ramifications for themselves that then appear and continue in their work. This is the dilemma that my book addresses in advocating for conscious engagement, analysis, and interpretation in agentic attunement, to encourage filmmakers and spectators to become agents in their own lives.

From the filmmaker's perspective: in the sense of inference regarding one's own childhood, filmmakers are like the parents of the children they represent on-screen, even if they are making stories about their own childhoods as adults. They parent themselves with agentic attunement in how they study that former self, that earlier self, to make a work that helps our understanding of child subjectivity. I am also referring to the particular directorial process wherein the adult works with an actual child (or an adult who looks like a child) to create motivation, to mobilize meaning through the actor's emotion, and in the screenwriting process of creating scenarios to communicate a child's perspective. As a recuperative act from the perspective of adult authorship, it is a sensitive space wherein exploitation of the child can occur while the adult works to make sense of one's development, as an act of looking back and making sense of memory. This act is complicated; without the work of undoing power, harm can be reenacted. And without the acknowledgment of power in this directorial relationship, abuse can too easily take place and traumas be revived. My task is to distinguish what the filmmakers are able to capture in their representations of children—not only how they define childhood as both always already racialized and sexualized but especially in relation to adultification, or their premature assignation as “grown up,” in the sense of responsibility and desire. I am interested in how the filmmaker, in practicing agentic attunement, can help viewers consciously unlearn lessons from childhood that form adults who are unable to thrive and lead healthy lives.

From the spectator's perspective: too many times we see those who have lived through brutality in their childhood justifying it—I am fine, I survived—versus engaging with it through agentic attunement, whereby they identify and confront it in order to undo or redirect it. In avoiding the potentiality of redefining the suffering, it gets reenacted and repeated as natural and inevitable. Rather than listen to the disciplining adult, we should center the experience of that discipline from the child's perspective. What did it feel like to be punished? Then, through agentic attunement, we see that unfairness as changeable.

A child's racial, sexual, and other senses of their individuality are psychic and physical realities that they own, even when they are imposed on them by others in our shared social worlds—filmmakers, viewers, and adults alike—in specific historical and political contexts. As a person grows, they experience in their childhood the development of desires that meet a transformative series of impositions, including rules of the home, intimate relations not immune to structural power dynamics, or external forces of social life that often disregard children's understandings of their own bodies and identities. When adults take over, they can interrupt and impose, then reshape, redirect, and even traumatize. I pay attention to this process as part of a larger vision that understands how childhood experiences can curtail development in damaging ways that can extend far into adulthood. The coming-of-age that occurs in childhood and adolescence is crucial to the development of an adult self who aspires high, dreams big, encounters disappointments, experiences punishments, and forges ways of coping and living. Agentic attunement to movies, from the spectator's perspective, can show us better ways of understanding our racialized and sexualized childhoods and our adult selves.

When movies represent children, the phenomenological response of caring spectators concerned for the welfare of children and our spectatorial relationship to childhood itself are powerfully exposed. Reflecting on one's own childhood involves, according to Freud, "the distortion and refurbishing to which a person's own past is subjected when it is looked back upon from a later period."⁴⁴ Utilizing that construction of childhood, even one's own, serves as a way to narrate differently one's past experiences depending on one's priorities now. While I do not conduct childhood biographies of filmmakers, I do consider how they construct childhood as adults—privileging the child's perspective—and acknowledge how we as adults perceive that experience, both as makers and spectators, in limited ways. What we know of or learn about children in movies is already so narrow.

There is an immense filmography that renders white childhoods visible, from François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) to Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* (2014). The lives of the filmmakers—white men—do figure in a mythical way in the making of these films. Truffaut's film is somewhat autobiographical, and his direction of the young actor Jean-Pierre L  aud spans several years and several films. Wes Anderson exemplifies a white boy-wonder filmmaker whose unmarked whiteness—where white racialization is unacknowledged, in

the sense of Ruth Frankenberg's notion of whiteness as default Americanness—of filmmaking and film subjects has warranted critique.⁴⁵ Similarly, Richard Linklater spent twelve years making a film in Texas about a young boy, located in a place that is not and never has been so white or, as *Los Angeles Times* columnist Amy Kaufman argues, lacking in Latinx people, and where the single one who speaks is rendered as one in need of saving. This book won't continue that universalizing of childhood as white, as it never was in the first place. Like Frankenberg, I approach race as a "process" rather than a "thing" that is involved in parenting and other acts, identities, and behaviors in film and culture.⁴⁶

Filmmakers do figure in their film authorships, but not as much as they should in the conversation about their films and their filmmaking—especially in terms of the assumption of whiteness they propagate. I have discussed the importance of acknowledging whiteness in my previous scholarship and ask filmmakers to imagine spectators encountering their work for the first time.⁴⁷ How does their work rebut, reshape, and reimagine the spectatorial relationship to children as well as the psychic tie between the filmmaker and the children they represent, without an acknowledgment of whiteness or the racial context in which one grows up as white? Why does whiteness remain unmarked, and what are the consequences, not just for how nonwhites are spoken for but in exposing the factual privileges of whiteness? In this cinematic act of recollecting childhood with agentic attunement, we can read and analyze the formation of identity then and now as undeniably raced—and in ways that shape sex, sexuality, and other aspects of growing up.

Film and Psychoanalysis: Externalizing the Internal

The creative writing focused on Asian American childhood sexualities is robust and unafraid to confront the impositions that impede self-sovereignty, sexual self-definition, and autonomy, such as in the award-winning work of Jessica Hagedorn in *Pet Food and Tropical Apparitions* (1981), which embraces fantastic practices deemed perverse for her immigrant Filipinx teen protagonist; Evelyn Lau in *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989), which includes the relentless policing of the Chinese Canadian female body, childhood rape, and men's continual assumption of racialized sexual availability even if there is none; R. Zamora Linmark in *Rolling the R's* (1997), which presents a bullied adolescent who exerts

control over his own body, accompanied by his friends, who also contend with sexual forces and social structures as they forge their own self-understandings in their Filipinx Hawaiian community; Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* (2003), which chronicles an Indian American immigrant community's investment in individual sexual desire from childhood to adulthood; and Ocean Vuong in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2021) and Anthony Veasna So in *Afterparties* (2021), in which scenes of sexual exploration and exploitation abound in Vietnamese and Cambodian American refugee communities in Hartford, Connecticut, and Stockton, California, respectively. These works include exploring one's bodies and psyches for carnal and drug-induced pleasures, pursuing pleasure from disapproved bodies and desires, confusion about the intersection of race and sex in terms of interracial desire, and abuse by elders that leads to a persistently vexing understanding of adults and even family.

Unlike fiction and nonfiction on paper, the fictional moving-image representations of Asian and Asian American childhoods that I study physically enact these scenes through the visual language composed by many components—cinematography and production design, including costume and sets; the sonic language of the musical score; sound design; rerecording and mixing; and the performances of the cast—rather than through description in the written form by a single author. The direction of intimate scenes requires not only the choreography of bodies and expressions but also an engagement of real people's histories of sexuality as they physically entangle on-screen—for actors, indeed, and for the screenwriters, directors, and others involved in the storytelling. Harm can occur if we do not acknowledge the power of sexuality when performing. Part of film's power is its ability to conjure our own sexual histories in our performance, interpretation, and consumption of the sexual acts and sexual lives depicted on-screen. Psychoanalysis lends itself well to the medium due to the way it externalizes the internal life.

In my use of psychoanalytic concepts, race is intrinsic to and inseparable from sexual identity and experience. Race—along with its visual manifestation and marking—acts as a social force that structures sexuality and grief in representation, too. I delve into how filmmakers represent racialized childhood within contexts and structures that shape various experiences, including mourning, loss, and connection, specifically in terms of the child's sovereignty and self-governance. I examine the development of the self by reading the emotional and sensational conflagration captured in psychoanalytic vocabulary. As I begin to develop these ideas, all four

investigatory sites of psychoanalysis—instincts and drives; ego, id, and super ego; object relations; and self-experience or self psychology—are useful.

Expanding from Freudian instinct and drive, other schools of psychoanalysis formed to explain the variety of human functions—how individual psychologies work in terms of seeking gratification, repeating particular relationships or patterns of the self squarely and undeniably within a larger relational field. Because I am interested in childhoods, I am thus employing the psychoanalytic areas that develop out of infant and child observation to show us how the self is socially and historically situated, such as in object relations theory and self psychology. I am particularly interested in how they illuminate the medium of film, as it is invested in conveying the inner life of its subjects but through a language of world-making that involves social structures and historical realities—not as part of the self’s drives and urges toward the goal of gratification but as an ongoing relationality in the world as one constantly works to determine the parameters of the self in seeking empowerment.

Object relations theory, formed by psychoanalysts including Ronald Fairbairn and Melanie Klein, aimed to bring together, through studies of the mother-child relationship, the primacy of the object as the goal of satisfaction, or the role of internalized objects in the making of oneself or “internal mental representations of self and other.”⁴⁸ Object relations theory, then, is about how the individual develops an internal representation of oneself through objects, which then shapes how one relates to the world, in a pattern of repetition based on the internalization of objects, whether good or bad. Psychoanalyst and pediatrician D. W. Winnicott, in the 1920s through the 1960s, and psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, in the 1960s and 1970s, working through the mother-infant relationship, formed influential ideas about the self in relation to other psyches and other objects in self-experience and self psychology. They were both invested in the formation of healthy selves into adulthood through their studies of the psychoanalysis of childhoods.

Winnicott develops the notion of the true self and the false self. He says that when the child’s needs are not met as an infant, their authentic self is compromised toward a more destructive and defensive false self, versus a more creative, present, and responsive true self, which both matter in adult development. Their original expression of need is “replaced by actions of the child that are meant to accommodate to the world, at the expense of inner expression—the beginnings of a ‘false self.’”⁴⁹ At this early

stage, the environment clearly influences the expression of one's innate urges and disciplines or enables them to blossom. Heinz Kohut's self psychology emphasizes how the development of the self is very dependent on experiences with others and within the context of how the "environment we choose and create for ourselves altogether, [is] very much influenced by who we are, by our central motives and mechanisms."⁵⁰ I appreciate all of these psychoanalytic contributions from Freud to Kohut because they are interrelated and depend on each other while emphasizing different functions within an individual's complex self-formation, from narcissism to attachment. I emphasize the importance of object relations and self psychology for two reasons: the relational aspects that determine personality outside of drives (bigger than drives in that the attachment to the object is a thing throughout life) and the focus on the development and maintenance of the self and narcissism that were not so prominent in Freud.

We are not independent of each other or the objects we rely on. This was made so undeniably clear to me during the COVID-19 global pandemic, when we had to be alone with ourselves so much more. The relations with others that we could not have as intensely during shelter-in-place restrictions were revealed to be so truly satisfying and so necessary. And this to me affirms why I make films and read, analyze, and write about films like an addict. I make nonfiction films based on family and historical archives, while I teach narrative film. In both fiction and nonfiction forms, films aim to express emotions and the internal life, the psychic life, which, as we know when we storyboard or dissect films, require relationships, actions, objects, and settings. Thus, object relations illuminate the unique power of cinema to externalize physically the internal psychic life in order to reach others. What is fascinating about the focus on the self, or narcissism, in relation to objects is how one undergoes a process of self-centering in growing up: what does one keep and take away, what does one focus on and what does one let go in forging the adult self? This is my interpretation-of-inventory method that agentic attunement recommends.

In object relations and self psychology, Fairbairn, Klein, Winnicott, and Kohut theorize childhood, but not the role of race in it. In this book, I fill that gap by paying attention to the psychic and physical realities of children's racialized sexuality and grief, and I use close readings of Asian American childhood representations in film to interrogate how they work together. I build further from the theorists of psychoanalysis to better understand how film can advance their work—and do what only film can do—in the relationships that can be seen, felt, and experienced by

spectators who then absorb and learn from the movies.⁵¹ My close readings aim to detect, reflect on, and receive instinct, drives, ego, objects, and self in the lives of racialized childhoods and mourning presented in the movies. Race and racial experience provide the ground for my analysis of these internal forces of identity that are shaped by historical and cultural context.

My work as a feminist Asian Americanist scholar and filmmaker aligns with other theorists of color in dialogue with Freud and other principal thinkers of psychoanalysis. Contending with the imbrication of race and sexuality in subjectivity, race and psychoanalysis scholars include David Eng and Shinhee Han in *Racial Melancholia*, *Racial Disassociation*, who theorize loss for Asian Americans in the experience of immigration and assimilation. The engagement with race and psychoanalysis substantially arose with the publication of Hortense Spillers's classic essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," along with works that helped to establish the field, such as Christopher Lane's *The Psychoanalysis of Race: An Introduction*, Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*, and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks's *Desiring Whiteness*. Through their examination of psychoanalysis and postcoloniality, the pioneering works of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*; Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*; Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*; and Dina Al-Kassim in *On Pain of Speech* help us to understand the deep imprint of colonialism in the psychic life of the subjugator and the subjugated and the persistent framings of the dark interior as colonized by whiteness. White feminist scholars Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman in several field-defining books;⁵² Jean Walton in *Fair Sex, Savage Dreams*; Jessica Benjamin in *The Bonds of Love*; Jane Gallop in *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*; Elisabeth Young-Breuhl in *Mind and the Body Politic*; and Ann Pellegrini in *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* have interrogated whiteness and the problematic rendering of race in psychoanalysis through their study of various objects in popular culture. I stand on their shoulders in expanding psychoanalytic inquiry to the sites of Asian American sexualized and bereaved childhoods.

Methodologically, I understand representations of childhood sexualities and grieving as cases, where subjects have histories and memories that inform their actions, which may be repetitive over time, in relation to the self and in its relations to others and to objects. I practice agentic attunement on films that contain arguments their authors make about how to interpret the protagonists' actions, whether they are informed by

consciousness, unconsciousness, fantasy, and/or desire—within a life, a context, and a story. Spectators practicing agentic attunement, too, bring these to bear on their own experiences of childhood that inform their comprehension of and engagement with films. People relate to others and to objects shaping their self-perception and their attendant feelings. What happens to children whose ownership of their own bodies is undermined and organized by adults and authority should be a concern for all of us, as should the specificity of their racialized experiences.

As with my other work, here I maintain a consistent focus on the imbrication of Asia and America in Asian/American objects and subjects. With this book, I intend to make the wide range of subjectivities living under the label Asian American more visible and much more accounted for in critical inquiry, while identifying the continuing tensions between Asia and America that impact the subjects in these films. Finally, I turn to psychoanalysis not only for sexuality studies but also because trauma from death organizes the lives of most of the children in these films. The grief infusing all of these stories also necessitates it.

Trauma and Care: Race and Sexuality in Bereaved Childhoods

The body experiences and retains childhood trauma in ways that the adult may not know and in ways others are unable to see. Yet trauma is a compendium of what is both seen and unseen. Movies have shown us that trauma is visible on the body. Bessel van der Kolk tells us that in 1941, “The new technology of motion pictures made it possible to film . . . the physical, embodied expression of trauma,” which he defines as “a memory that is inscribed simultaneously in the mind as interior images, and words, and on the body.”⁵³ We must address the sight of trauma for the good of the person and for the good of society, he argues.⁵⁴ Individually, disassociation or dissociation with suffering and neglect or other abuses can lead adults to disconnect from their bodies, resulting in lives that are still perpetually alert to the danger and the damage of what they experienced. Dissociation is more commonly named as a response following trauma. Disassociation here would mean that the individual separates themselves/severs the association from suffering, neglect, and abuse, and that leads to disconnection. Dissociation is when one experiences suffering, neglect, and abuse that leads to disconnection. More recently, in *What My Bones*

Know, journalist Stephanie Foo explores how to emerge healthily from complex post-traumatic stress disorder by confronting one's experiences.

My concept of agentic attunement makes visible this disconnection of adult problems from childhood trauma so that we see how films can offer lessons on how to live, and live more healthily, with a stronger sense of self emerging from experiences of damage and abuse. For depleted and disparaged subjects, asserting a kind of grandiose self can be a step in the process of developing a lifesaving, healthy narcissism. Narcissism is not pathological, as discussed in earlier psychoanalysis, but can be critical to survival, according to psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut. Disconnected from oneself, the adult is fragmented and unable to feel and achieve happiness or peace unless the psyche and the body are addressed. Dissociating—a defense rendering one unable to remember traumas—can be harmful to self and society, too, because inequality cannot be addressed or changed if it is not acknowledged. When filmmakers take us to these sites, they can help us sense and approach trauma so that we, as viewers, practice agentic attunement to acknowledge, feel, and bear what we see and detect when someone is traumatized; in turn, we use film to attend to and understand our own questions about trauma.

The embodiment of grief and trauma lives in an ongoing manner. I birthed my younger son, whose life was extinguished: I recall his body as his life left him—that is what the monitors showed in the emergency room. Upon our arrival at the emergency room, there was a 10 percent chance of survival, said the doctor, then suddenly there was none. He was not sick; a common virus attacked his heart, and within twenty-four hours he died suddenly; the last twenty minutes were catastrophic. I can still hear his voice, telling me everything in his body hurts. It is the same voice I recall asking me about his double front teeth being rare; or having to wear a retainer; or to use crutches after an injury: it gave him pleasure to be special, like how he loved having solos in school musical performances. When his extra row of front teeth was found in X-rays, I was supposed to pay attention to it every day and alert the dentist if I noticed any coming in. We checked together every night before bed. No longer. Suddenly, I hear his voice now asking me if his death was rare, too. *A rare catastrophe*, I mouth. I recall his mole to the left of his left eye. The very muscular weight of his body when he sat on my lap after dinner every night. How he loved brown lentils and also egg whites, noting that when his dad cooked them, however, they were yellow. The way he controlled his body hanging upside down from the monkey bars in any playground to the concern of the

caregivers all around. The robust, inventive dancing that inspired others to watch or join. The creative piano and drum playing that compelled his teacher to come up with new methods. The way he would challenge her with composition contests on either instrument. His last words in that sweet voice: “Everything hurts.” How could it be? The body missing from mine is tied to my grief in a way that I feel as a severance of my own body from me, or of me. This is why we must address trauma through bodily experience, to surrender to the pain of his missing and to acknowledge the pain of his undergoing death. Trauma is embodied!

While such scenarios of trauma and sexuality—for both adults and children—are easily assumed to be private, quiet, and closed, they are still social and essentially open, public moments because they are intensely gendered, raced, and classed. I unify my life as a working woman of color who leads and serves at a high level in a prominent position and as a grieving mother, each life informing the other. Each identity is very present in the other, determines the other. The suffering I feel enables my empathy. These situations of mothering and of children growing up—thriving, and in the rare case of my younger child, the sudden death—make us conscious of being intensely alive in the world. Whether it is class or other social forces that organize the experience of life and the aftermath of death, in the grief too, the unconscious becomes aware of itself through the object of love in both the lost and living child. In agentic attunement, I aim for my attention to grief, sexuality, race, and class to make these experiences come to the fore to understand how childhood is situated in the social world. In this way, I write this book as a mother-author-spectator with the view of caring for children’s lives through the movies.

From my perspective, spectatorship and critique are intertwined as a caring vision of agentic attunement; this includes feeling the impact of seeing harm and identifying how particular acts and interactions on-screen shape lives in the aftermath of the moment. In my reading and writing for the reader, I am a mother, not in the censorial and moralistic sense of policing responses, but in caring for the well-being of the filmmaker, the character, and the spectator. They are embodiments of how to live. Similarly, entanglements between individual desire and social context arise beyond infantile relations with the mother. Representations of adolescent sexuality—as a blooming and burgeoning awareness of desire in growing up, including all aspects of the psychic, social, and physical—make clear that it is an encounter between drives, instincts, and feelings as both individual and social. Thus, coming-of-age sexuality and racial identity in the

movies show how individual experiences help us understand the power of the structural in whatever the sites may be. And the presence of death, whether of the parent or fear of one's own in the child, reveals the abundance of the social forces that determine lives every day.

The Cinematic Case Histories

The films I study span US and Asian cities and suburbs, rural and urban areas, including an unnamed rural town in Arkansas, San Diego, the Bay Area, Minneapolis, Chicago, Miami, and the provinces of the Philippines; Koreatown in Los Angeles and a town in upstate New York; the city of Manila in the Philippines; an unnamed town in rural Texas; Sherman Oaks, California; Portland, Oregon; the Hamptons in New York; Orlando, Florida; and a fictionalized rural area in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. This global set of movies representing the intimacies of childhood shows the centrality of context to the focus I place on intimate encounters in my book. These films also include a wide range of sexualities and grief as the subjects on-screen encounter social discipline and death. I employ Freud's case histories approach, in which he treats sexuality with an unflinching precision, whether in naming sex acts or exploring questions about desire. This is another method that I uniquely deploy in addressing childhood sexuality beyond sex acts—I do so to illuminate the wide range of their cinematic lives as we encounter them as spectators.

In chapter 1, "A Deluge of Delusions and Lies: Race, Sex, and Class in *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace*," I begin with the coming-of-age story of a young, mixed-race, Filipino-Italian American man who grew up to become the notorious "gay serial killer," as depicted in *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018). The popular episodic miniseries on Netflix by Ryan Murphy presents the life of Andrew Cunanan, one of very few Filipino Americans to be represented on American screens. He became infamous for a criminal killing spree that culminated in his murder of a famous gay icon, Italian American fashion designer Gianni Versace. In this opening chapter, I focus on the creative drive of lying that structures Andrew Cunanan's life—one that is tied to the experience of his disparagement by social forces judging race and sexuality. I explore the racial narrative of the miniseries that is primarily organized by sexual identity and the gay life, pressures, and problems gay men face due to the heteronormativity driving their lives.

This force is inseparable from Cunanan's mixed-race interpellation that shapes him. The film presents how we cannot ignore heritage, history, and racialization in the development of identity, aspirations, and delusions.

Cunanan's was a life of lying rooted in childhood sexual trauma deeply imbricated with race and class. I use these lenses to understand the representations of childhood sexuality in the film and the way these experiences haunt his brown mixed body, precarious adulthood, and gay sexuality. The theorizations of the false self by psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott help me unpack the trauma of Cunanan's racialized life and the carnage he left in his wake. I use object relations theory to make sense of the relations and spaces in all the films I study in this book, especially the role of selfobjects from self psychology. I focus on selfobjects as part of my approach to emphasize psychological interdependence on others in the affirmation of self, and I practice agentic attunement in parsing out the life he could have led. In particular, the parent as caregiver is critical to the formation of self-esteem. Cunanan's experience of distrust and the distortion of that parental relation contributed to his exceedingly fragmented self, which ultimately killed others unwilling to cooperate with his lies.

Chapter 2, "The Inner Life of Cinema and Selfobjects: Queer Asian American Youth in *Spa Night* and *Driveways*," studies Korean American director Andrew Ahn's two feature films, both focused on queer Asian American youth and the dependence on others—peers and parents both—in defining and understanding a healthy self. Growing up in Koreatown in Los Angeles, a young Korean American man is disenfranchised from the narrative of the Asian American model-minority path of going to a selective college and pursuing upward mobility. In veering off this path, he experiences fragmentation with his body that he addresses by running in the neighborhood, endlessly working on his fitness, and tirelessly working for his family in the ethnic enclave of Koreatown. To resolve the disconnection that results from psychic fragmentation, he connects with his body anew in the sweaty physical release that he experiences in the streets and ultimately at the gay spa where he works. He explores his sexuality in an iconic site of queer representation, the gay bathhouse, which is owned and run by Koreans. This sexual search for the self is tied to his Korean heritage, showing the entanglement of race and queer sexuality.

I study Andrew Ahn's work as a rare and prominent queer Asian American author who focuses his first two feature films precisely on the parent-child relationship and the social world of the child in forming the young self. In both, loss and mourning inform their growing up,

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whether through the loss of a recognizable path of the model minority in class demise and the failure of the father due to alcoholism in *Spa Night* or mourning the fragmented family in *Driveways*. While *Spa Night* features a young adult, *Driveways*, Ahn's sophomore film, tells the story of an eight-year-old child, the same age as Lakas when he died. The young boy is nurtured by the various experiences with the self, the boy's mother, and the boy's new friend, an older Korean War veteran next door. Their unconditional love encourages an agentic attunement to the self and an achievement of equanimity for the queer child.

In chapter 3, "Adolescent Curiosity and Mourning: *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*," a young genderqueer Filipinx youth named Maximo or Maxie may be a boy, a girl, or in between the polarities of the gender binary. Their father and brothers, known criminals in their neighborhood slum, love and protect Maxie, who takes on the feminized role of cooking and cleaning their home after their mother dies. But after aligning with a policeman who seeks to arrest their family, Maxie experiences the threat of fragmenting their family in pursuing their feelings and concretizing them through action. This film is extraordinary for privileging the child's perspective and their desire, and it avoids the way in which certain bodies are treated in American cinema—where violence befalls those who present as genderqueer. The film exposes what we can learn from global cinema in terms of children's sexual self-sovereignty.

Because this is not a film about coming out, sexuality is not the primary social category of queer experience in Maxie's development. What this allows me to do, then, is to situate sexuality as part of a larger set of formative feelings and experiences, specifically mourning and grief. Poverty is also part of the larger context, as the development of the child occurs on a path toward criminality, not as something to which they are intrinsically prone but as the direction available to them, as encouraged by the adults in their life. This limited choice is contextualized by the family's extreme lack of resources as poor people in the Global South. Maxie's pursuit of a different life may be seen as a sexual one, due to the primacy of sex in defining queerness. In this film, however, we see different kinds of queer desires. And while erotic attachment is not denied, it is the broader life path that includes sexual desire, mourning, and poverty in childhood development that influences our agentic attunement.

In looking at the film through the lens of object relations, particularly in the work of Melanie Klein, we can see how the child's feelings exceed sexual instincts and aim to include romance, loyalty, envy, and

grief. Thus, the interpersonal relationships must be examined for how they construct the protagonist and how we construct them as spectators. Object relations theory helps us to understand the stakes and vulnerabilities Maxie faces. Even more stunning is how this rich film about the intersection of youth, sexuality, grief, and poverty has not yet received significant attention in academic scholarship. The film explodes the genre of the coming-out film, and it deserves more consideration.

Chapter 4, “The Courage to Compose Oneself: Healthy Narcissism and Self-Sovereignty in *Yellow Rose*,” studies first-time feature filmmaker and Filipina American immigrant Diane Paragas’s focus on the life of Rose, an undocumented Filipina American teen who dreams of pursuing a country music career while growing up in rural Texas. Her dreams are interrupted when her mother is arrested and deported by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The film was produced and released while former president Donald J. Trump was in office, a time when discourses and occurrences of anti-Asian hate were on the rise, as were raids and deportations. Featuring a stellar multigenerational cast of Filipina and Filipina American actors, including Broadway star Eva Noblezada as Rose, award-winning Philippine film and television actress Princess Punzalan, and iconic transnational film and theater star Lea Salonga, the film captures the trauma of being undocumented and the precarity of youth when parents are unable to care for them. We trace how the family—parents, extended relatives, and children—make their way within institutions such as the immigration system, undocumented work, poverty, and in the encounter with others—Chicanx and white people in Texas—across the racial divide. I dissect the relationship between Rose and her mom, who attempts to mother across the carceral divide; Rose and her mother’s sister—who won’t give her niece a safe place to stay out of loyalty to her white husband; Rose and her relationship with adults/strangers who attempt to help prevent her from being deported; and, finally, her relationship to music as an allegory for the wish to be free from constraint. The film’s director, Diane Paragas, grew up in Lubbock, Texas, a town about five hours from a major airport, as the only Filipina American girl for miles around, after immigrating there from the Philippines at age four. She asks, how will country music enable the freedom of this Filipina American immigrant girl?

Self psychology situates my exploration of Rose’s psychic life within social and structural relations. Through not only music but also the self-confidence that it requires, Rose is able to forge and maintain a healthy

self in light of the powerful structural forces that situate and shape her life and her mother's. They live undocumented in a hostile state, within a nation that separates mother and child. Music functions as a selfobject for Rose and is pivotal in helping her form positive self-regard. We see that she may have no path to citizenship, but through music, she makes an argument about cultural citizenship and the importance of developing healthy narcissism and a powerful, individual self who asserts not only belonging but also authorship and creativity in an unwelcome place of potential incarceration and deportation.

The final chapter, "The Unexpected and the Unforeseen: Cultural Complexes in *The Half of It*," filmmaker Alice Wu's story about Ellie Chu, a young immigrant Chinese American girl and the sole Asian American in her school, is located in present-day rural Washington State. Living in an apartment above a train depot, she remains stuck at home with her non-English-speaking and grieving immigrant Chinese father, whom she must help navigate adult pressures such as paying the bills and with his job as a station master. She is grieving, too, the loss of her fun mother. Her world, however, is largely determined by her relationships with her peers. A classmate, Paul Munsky, a gentle, white jock, pays her to write love letters to a gorgeous though poor Latinx classmate, Aster Flores, with whom Ellie Chu is also in love. Letters and texts convey the psychic power of love, intimacy, and desire, while they also become a way to navigate the various cultural complexes of their worlds. When Ellie and Aster meet in person, the act of listening to music and feeling the sensations of sound while immersed in water depict the cerebral dimensions of intimacy and interconnectedness, expanding our definition of adolescent sexuality beyond the act of touching bodies, in a direct challenge to hookup culture that defines young people today. In this chapter, I conclude the book by engaging the psychoanalytic concept of cultural complexes to identify the cultural, social, and collective constraints in fashioning self-sovereignty in the life of youth. I also show how film in particular can intervene through agentic attunement and provide instructions for how to use culture to explode archetypes that bind.

How may we learn from movies to nurture Asian American young people who seek and deserve care? As filmmakers and spectators, how may we care for our inner child through our engagement with movies? *The Movies of Racial Childhoods: Screening Self-Sovereignty in Asian/America* asserts the importance of representations of childhood development in Asian/American independent film with particular attention to grief and

loss within the contexts of race, gender, sexuality, and poverty. The films I study dramatize Asian/American children and young people's struggles in growing up within times and spaces of precarity and even impecuniness. Within this context, the films focus on the child's achievement of self-sovereignty—their freedom, self-determination, self-ownership, and autonomy are nothing less than empowering.

I utilize psychoanalysis, in particular object relations and self psychology, to survey the vulnerabilities and alienations haunting the lives of children and young people in ways that exceed melancholia, devastation, and pessimism. Instead, I seek the ways independent filmmakers present traumatized subjects achieving peace in learnings, community-building, and even healthy narcissisms that serve as balms, salves, and inspirations for spectators. The films I study capture a world no longer hidden in plain sight in their focus on young subjects of color. We already live in a world where more than half the young people under age eighteen in the United States are people of color. These films project that future of a people of color majority in the United States. In this book, I hope for empathetic understanding of Asian/American childhoods that we too rarely experience in the movies and especially to feel them achieve self-cohesion and confidence in a world still committed to their perpetual management as racialized, sexualized, and classed subjects. Films harm us. They can also free us.

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notes

Preface

- 1 I use both *Asian/American* and *Asian American* many times throughout the manuscript. In the case of *Asian/American*, I refer to films, characters, identities, and locations inclusive of Asian films that I interpret in my American context. And in the case of *Asian American*, I refer to the Asian American identities born from the struggle of 1960s civil rights movements to capture particular experiences of Americans with Asian ancestry and racializations as people of color in the United States. David Palumbo-Liu, in his book *Asian/American* (1999), encourages us to use the slash so as to draw attention to the fraught space between Asian and American identities and identifications, while David L. Eng, in the epilogue to his book *Racial Castration* (2001), explores the psychic life of the space between, including their linkages and dependencies.
- 2 Quoted in de Lauretis, "Becoming Inorganic," 548.
- 3 Quoted in de Lauretis, "Becoming Inorganic," 548.
- 4 De Lauretis notes how Sabrina Spielrein's essay "Destruction as Cause of Becoming" "argued that the instinctual drive for the preservation of the species, the wish to procreate or give birth [*das Werden*, becoming or coming into being], contains a destructive impulse: 'As certain biological facts show, the reproductive instinct, from the psychological standpoint as well, is made up of two antagonistic components and is therefore equally an instinct of birth and one of destruction' (qtd. in *SS*, p. 142)" (de Lauretis, "Becoming Inorganic," 551).
- 5 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 18.
- 6 De Lauretis, "Becoming Inorganic," 555.
- 7 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 16.
- 8 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 28.
- 9 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 29.

Introduction

- 1 A24 and Plan B, special panel on *Minari*.
- 2 A24 and Plan B, special panel on *Minari*.
- 3 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 35.
- 4 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 3.
- 5 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 5.

- 6 De Lauretis, "Becoming Inorganic," 554.
- 7 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 4.
- 8 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 31.
- 9 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 29.
- 10 Hall, *Representation*.
- 11 De Lauretis, "Popular Culture, Public and Private Fantasies."
- 12 Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*; Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 10.
- 13 Bhabha, "The Other Question," 107.
- 14 Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa*.
- 15 Eng and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation*; Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*; Hong, *Minor Feelings*.
- 16 Ding, "Strategies of an Asian American Filmmaker"; Peña, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed"; Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 69.
- 17 Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*.
- 18 Vargas, "Incensed and Empowered."
- 19 Ho, *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels*; Shankar, *Desi Land*; Martin, *The Child in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*; Shary, *Cinemas of Boyhood*.
- 20 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 31.
- 21 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 31.
- 22 Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 245.
- 23 Ulaby, "Youn Yuh-jung Is First Korean to Win Oscar for Best Supporting Actress."
- 24 "Minari Q&A."
- 25 "Minari Q&A."
- 26 Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*.
- 27 Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy, "Security in Infancy, Childhood, and Adulthood."
- 28 Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment*.
- 29 Main and Weston, "Quality of the Toddler's Relationship to Mother and to Father"; Main, "Ultimate Causation of Some Infant Attachment Phenomena."
- 30 See preface note 1 on the use of *Asian/American*. In this case *Asian/American* is a shorthand for "Asian" and "Asian American," which are distinct spaces, yet in both, devastation and exploitation as well as a wider range of experiences including joy and resistance are common themes.
- 31 Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*.
- 32 Fleetwood, "Raising a Black Boy Not to Be Afraid."
- 33 Wong, "Little Noticed."
- 34 Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race*; Shimizu, *Straitjacket Sexualities*; Shimizu, *Proximity of Other Skins*.
- 35 Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality."

- 36 Associated Press, "Officer Defends Giving Boy Back to Dahmer."
- 37 Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*.
- 38 Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*.
- 39 Miller, "Lesson in Moral Spectatorship," 710.
- 40 Miller, "Lesson in Moral Spectatorship."
- 41 Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 50–51.
- 42 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.
- 43 Deborah Martin studies the representation of children in various Latin American countries to assess their status and significance in national politics and history. She is interested in how narrative representations aim to present the perspective of the child, or whether they present only adult concerns. Martin, *The Child in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*.
- 44 Freud, *Three Case Histories*, 164.
- 45 Frankenberg, "Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," 72.
- 46 Frankenberg, "Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," 72.
- 47 Miller, Rodríguez, and Shimizu, "Unwatchability of Whiteness"; Shimizu, "Gnawing at the Whiteness of Cinema Studies."
- 48 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 31.
- 49 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 67.
- 50 Pine, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self*, 61.
- 51 Psychoanalysts Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, and Sigmund Freud have commented on the power of film, as discussed in Heath, "Cinema and Psychoanalysis." Klein preferred other cultural practices to the cinema, while Freud was "dimly amused" and "disinterest[ed]." Lacan, however, was "astounded by the 'female eroticism' in the 1976 film by Nagisa Oshima, *Empire of the Senses*," according to Heath, who quotes Lacan as saying, "I began to understand the power of Japanese women" (25), referring to a seminal film about sexuality. In Heath's interpretation, psychoanalysis expressed "intellectual and class disdain for the upstart popular entertainment" (26). Yet we cannot deny that unlike other art forms, cinema best mimics the processes of the mind, whether these early psychoanalysts wish it to or not. Heath captures how the cinema can visualize the work of psychoanalysis: "Indeed, the ready appeal of cinema as an analogy for mental processes—cinema regarded from the start as a good way of imaging the workings of the mind . . . —brings exactly by its readiness the danger of the loss of the specificity of psychoanalytic understanding" (26). Conversely, I argue that psychoanalysis and its focus on sexuality help us understand real-life phenomena represented in cinema, whose scenes permeate the everyday and that patients themselves use to understand life itself.
- 52 Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*; Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*; Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World*.

- 53 Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 186.
- 54 Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 188.

1. A Deluge of Delusions and Lies

- 1 Foo, *What My Bones Know*, 69.
- 2 Sánchez-Eppler, "Playing at Class," 40, 42.
- 3 Winnicott, *Maturational Processes*, 148.
- 4 Winnicott, *Maturational Processes*, 143.
- 5 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 66.
- 6 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 22.
- 7 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.
- 8 Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, 165.
- 9 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 136.
- 10 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 139.
- 11 Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, 162.
- 12 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, xv.
- 13 Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*.
- 14 While we do not know the facticity of pedophilic incest, the makers of the film seem to be following the example of the author Gary Indiana, who imagines what could have happened to lead Andrew Cunanan to the life of pathological lying and more. Indiana, *Three Month Fever*.
- 15 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 22.
- 16 Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, 165.
- 17 Orth, "Assassination of Gianni Versace, Revisited."
- 18 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 40.
- 19 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 33.
- 20 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 40; Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 39.
- 21 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 39, 40.
- 22 Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 15.
- 23 Winnicott, *Maturational Processes*, 143.

2. The Inner Life of Cinema and Selfobjects

- 1 Lee, *Koreatown, Los Angeles*.
- 2 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 9–10.
- 3 Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*; Lee, *Orientalis*; and Chow, "How the Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory."
- 4 Xiang, *Tonal Intelligence*, 10.
- 5 Erbland, "'Spa Night' Review."