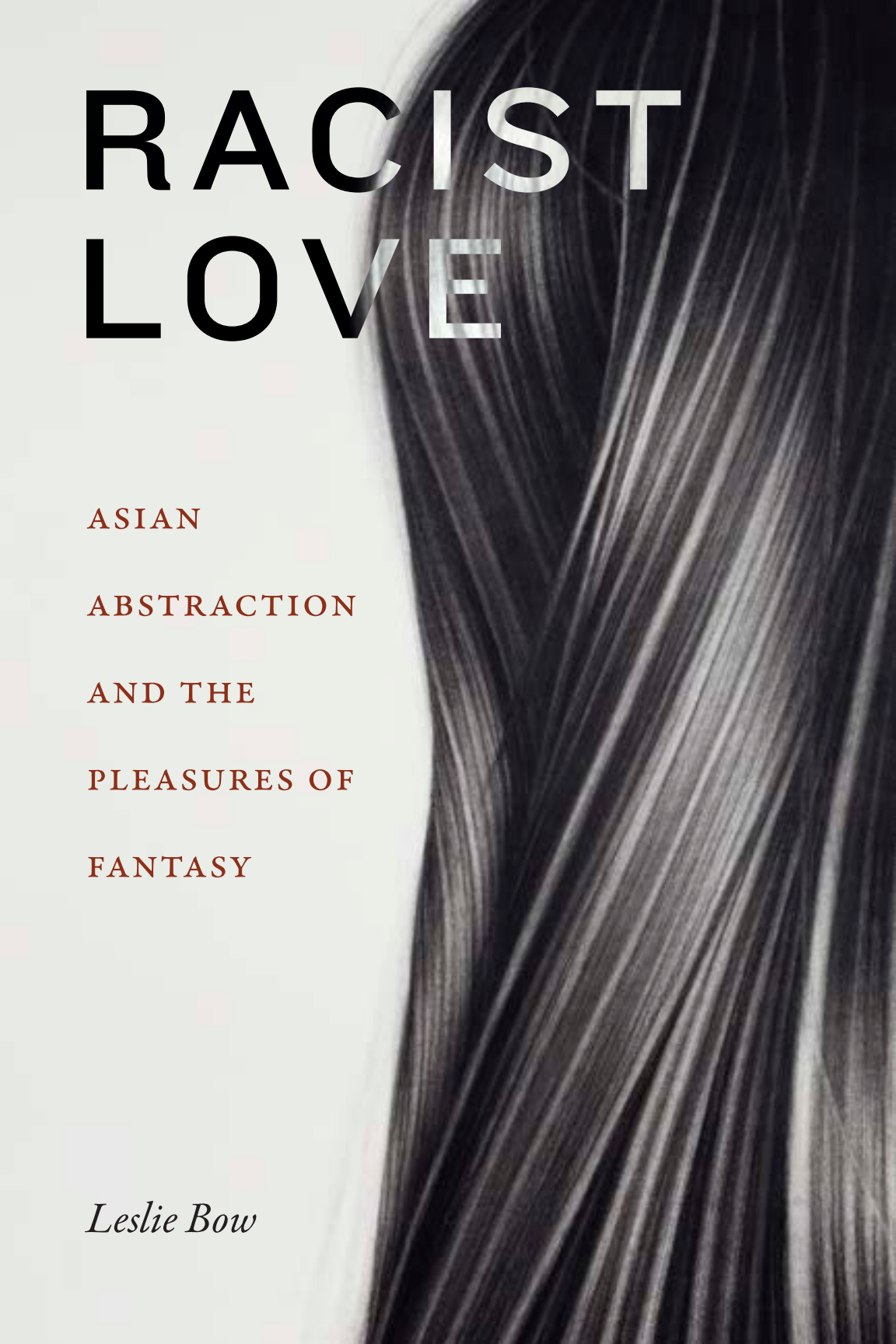


# RACIST LOVE



ASIAN

ABSTRACTION

AND THE

PLEASURES OF

FANTASY

*Leslie Bow*

# RACIST LOVE

BUY





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IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
WILLIE BOW  
1931-2017  
AND  
SUE MAE BOW  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Racist Love

How am I supposed to explain to a child the superimposition of cultural generalizations onto toy cars and monsters and space aliens? I can barely explain them to myself.

—Stephen Marche, “How to Read a Racist Book to Your Kids”

The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself.

—Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*

How is race a source of pleasure in the twenty-first century? This book explores the overt and at times subtle ways in which social hierarchy becomes reinforced by positive feeling, particularly positive feeling surrounding Asian Americans.

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At the millennium, race has been persistently framed in terms of negativity—xenophobia, fear, anxiety. The political rhetoric of racial hatred in the United States is easily recognizable: calls for wall building, claims about restricted free speech, contestations about whose lives matter, assigning ethnicity to a virus.

And yet, paradoxically, we profess to love diversity. The imperative to *represent* feeds racial scopophilia, a visual pleasure animated by the erotic, but also extending to other forms of emotional attachment: affection, empathy, amusement. What bell hooks (1992, 21) famously deemed “getting a bit of the Other” extends the idea of the erotic encounter with difference to cultural appropriation, to conceptual “theft” of desired traits, attributes, style, and association.<sup>1</sup> Yet it also speaks to tensions surrounding fetishistic love: imbuing objects with desire forestalls an underlying anxiety. In naming a structure of split feeling that attaches to Asians in the contemporary United States, *Racist Love: Asian Abstraction and the Pleasures of Fantasy* takes that process of fetishistic reduction literally to analyze the visual representation not of Asian people but of their object substitutes.

Exploring the ways in which the fantasy of animated things underwrites contemporary understanding of racial difference in the United States, this book engages sites of a racial imaginary infused with desire, longing, and apprehension surrounding Asian Americans at the millennium—or more specifically, their nonhuman proxies. How does our relationship with objects animated through our regard speak to fantasies of racialization? Asianized anthropomorphic kitchen timers, cartoon pandas, feminized robots, and lifelike dolls testify to the simultaneous saturation and displacement of racial meaning, its ability to be abstracted from human embodiment. Here, racial abstraction performs as a metaphoric substitution based on affective resemblance. As repositories of seemingly positive feeling and intimate connection, imagined beings are yet conduits of political desires. If fantasy functions not as the “object of desire, but its setting” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986, 26), how does the fantasy of things come to life reveal the desires we place on racial difference in the United States? If racial meaning continues to be harnessed to the circulation of negative feeling, what about love?

A case in point: the geisha car (figure Intro.1). A minor figure in an imaginary world populated by anthropomorphic vehicles in Pixar’s animated *Cars 2* (2011), Okuni is unmistakably Japanese. Is the cartoon funny? Cute? An example of yellowface caricature? Or all of these? The character relies on ethnic signs—fan, chopsticks, hairstyle, and textile patterns—detachable from the body to convey human attributes of gender, youth, and nationality. A visual



FIGURE INTRO.1. Okuni, *Cars 2*, Pixar/Disney, 2011

stereotype of dubious humor, the cartoon's economical reduction also invites a series of associations telescoping outward—geisha to Japan to technology to techno-dominance. A marginal figure in Japanese society, the geisha was privileged in the US imaginary during the occupation, a focus central to its postwar vision of Japan in reconceiving enemy as ally.<sup>2</sup> Racial meaning here circulates amid overlapping and heterogeneous networks: US-Japan, child-adult, ally-enemy, present-future—and implicitly, Ford-Toyota. The Japanese car invokes competition with overseas auto manufacturing while taming it through a visual joke, one extended in a franchise that relies on such shorthand to reinforce the “humanity” of its characters. Like the use of “booth babes” at car shows, the nonspeaking, unnamed feminized vehicle is largely ornamental, serving no function in the narrative other than to exoticize one of its backdrops in a world populated by talking machines. Okuni performs the inverse of capitalist reification: not the reduction of persons to things, but the fantasy of things come to life.

The geisha car represents a pleasurable form of racial abstraction,<sup>3</sup> a substitution that relies on metonymic signs, the part for the whole, that underlie the processes of stereotyping. Privileging the somatic (eye, skin, hair, etc.), the aesthetic (color, pattern), and the cultural (fan, chopsticks), racial abstraction

depends on the simultaneous interplay of reduction and exaggeration. The racial proxy calls forth not only approximation (almost the same) but proximity (a contiguous presence), the geisha car as Asian adjacent. Trading on iconicity in a minor key, object substitution through aesthetic resemblance enables racial desire.

This book is thus concerned with the implications of racial abstraction, how metonymic signs or projected qualities translate into (uncertain) racial feeling. The excess of significations and desires circulating through this seemingly innocent image provoked the millennial parent of my epigraph to opine, “How am I supposed to explain to a child the superimposition of cultural generalizations onto toy cars and monsters and space aliens? I can barely explain them to myself.”<sup>4</sup> This dilemma is not misplaced. Is Okuni sincere or satire? If the latter, does it punch up or down? Taboos against racial caricature that followed in the wake of 1960s social movements are only partially circumvented here; the figure both invokes and eludes the racist kitsch of mammy cookie jars and the like in its contemporary iteration of ethnic drag.<sup>5</sup> The geisha car might manage to fly under the radar of hard-won covenants against racist caricature because it exists in a fantastical world of equivalences where every car has ethnicity. Or because it evokes the sentiments that accrue to *kawaii*, the cute Japanese aesthetic that stimulates feelings of affection and care. Or does the cartoon fail to convey racial injury because it is *Asian*?

“The amazing gives pleasure,” Aristotle noted (2011, 485). If the amazing geisha car is a suspect pleasure, suspect to whom? What underlies the assumption that domination is reproduced in its circulation? Igniting a range of positionalities for spectatorship, Okuni embodies a curious paradox: racialized things that convey both delight and offense, innocent fun and discriminatory action (Butler [1990] 2004, 185). The Japanese car operates as a form of visual hate speech, a racial microaggression—that is also somewhat adorable.

*Racist Love* enters that discomfiting space of ambiguous racial feeling, one enabled, I argue, by the processes of abstraction, appropriating racial-ethnic signs from human subjects and local contexts. To be racialized is to be constructed according to a repetition of type; stereotyping is itself a process of abstraction in which a quality ascribed to one member of a group then applies to all. At first glance, the harm of projecting reductive racial meaning becomes obvious when externalized to things: a chopstick font, “ching chong” sounds, a kung flu. Countering race as embodied materiality, this book explores the meanings underlying racial abstraction in the most mundane and largely unremarked forms: talking animals in children’s picture books, home décor and kitchen

tchotchkes, dolls and machines come to life, both imagined and actual. And yet I suggest that the anthropomorphic figures in the following chapters are conduits for understanding complex, ambivalent forms of attachment surrounding Asian Americans within what Sara Ahmed (2004) deems an “affective economy” of circulated feeling that materializes collective bodies. In exploring how the racial imaginary in the United States is underwritten by the oscillation of feeling, this book explores the ways in which the nonhuman substitution of things for people becomes a means of narrating, visualizing, and *loving* difference at the millennium.

That structure of feeling was identified at the very origins of Asian American studies as “racist love.”<sup>6</sup>

### Racial Abstraction and the Ambivalence of Stereotyping

We’ve made it. Patels must have made it. Mamet, Spielberg: they’re not condescending to us. Maybe they’re a little bit afraid.

—Bharati Mukherjee, “A Wife’s Story”

This book explores attraction *as the very form* of anti-Asian bias. In 1972, writers Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan presciently suggested this affective formation in coining the term *racist love* on the heels of Asian American social movements: “Each racial stereotype comes in two models,” they wrote. “The unacceptable, hostile black stud has his acceptable counterpart in the form of Stepin Fetchit. . . . For Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril, there is Charlie Chan and his Number One Son. . . . There is racist hate and racist love” (Chin and Chan 1972, 65). Hate and love, they implied, are merely flip sides of the same coin of stereotyping. Years before Homi Bhabha (1994, 72–73) theorized the stereotype as phobia and fetish opening up “the royal road to colonial fantasy,” Chin and Chan foregrounded the ways in which typing operated along a continuum of split feeling, forecasting the ways in which Asian Americans in particular would increasingly occupy an anxiously interstitial space, “racist love” as oxymoron.

Illuminating the role of seemingly positive feeling in maintaining asymmetries of social power, this book foregrounds racist love not simply to identify idealized types as sources of attraction.<sup>7</sup> Rather than naming stereotypical *content*, I want to highlight the ways in which Asian difference in the United States incites a specific desiring structure, one characterized by equivocation. After 9/11, for example, comic Hasan Minhaj would ponder a specific paradox:

his white neighbors loved and feared him at the same time.<sup>8</sup> Chin and Chan's notion of racist love typifies an uncanny valley for Asian Americans, a point at which admiration tips into revulsion. Comedian Sarah Silverman performed this vacillation in a now infamous joke. Citing her reasons for declining to "write something racist" such as "I hate Chinks" on her jury summons to evade duty, her ignoramus persona cheerfully explained, "I love Chinks . . . and who doesn't, really?"<sup>9</sup>

Who doesn't, really? For Asian Americans, the slur can be indistinguishable from the compliment. Typed as the model minority and cast as subjects of national approval since the Cold War, they appear to confound metrics linking race and precarity.<sup>10</sup> Asian Americans figure ambivalently as uneasy signifiers of social injustice; according to selective and disaggregated metrics of inequality focused on income and educational attainment, they appear to confuse the association between race and disadvantage. With a title strangely evocative of horror movies, the Pew Research Center released a comprehensive report on the state of Asian America in 2012; *The Rise of Asian Americans* begins, "Asian Americans are the highest income, best-educated and fastest growing racial group in the United States."<sup>11</sup> As thinly disguised object love, such proclamations mark racial projection as a hiding place for the national libido. The repository of displaced narcissism, Asians have what "we" lack: ambition, discipline, gump-tion. In the designation "whiter than white," Stanley Sue and Harry Kitano (1973, 87) invoke a competitive racial framework.<sup>12</sup> As with any supernatural film announcing "the rise of" anything, that expectation is laced with anxious anticipation: they're coming. "The *highest*, the *best*, the *fastest*" speaks to an adulation that calls forth an underlying dread, an excessive idealization that evokes its opposite: being a little bit afraid.

The label *model minority* is quintessential racist love. Its double valence gestures to the split feeling underlying racial stereotyping itself as it vacillates between the philic and phobic. As revealed in Malcolm Gladwell's 2008 best-seller, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, the stereotype simultaneously binds Asian Americans to the national imaginary as it insists on difference: "Go to any Western college campus and you'll find Asian students have a reputation for being in the library long after everyone else has left," Gladwell asserts. "Sometimes people of Asian background get offended when their culture is described this way, because they think that the stereotype is being used as a form of disparagement. But a belief in work ought to be a thing of beauty." Here, as Asian American applicants to Harvard University might attest, the paradoxical nature of Asian racial typing becomes apparent: what gives offense to one audience is

“a thing of beauty” to another; moreover, the beautiful here is the very cause for exclusion. As model minority and Yellow Peril bookend a continuum of racial feeling, their differing valences obscure their identical processes: assigning a fixity of type that incites emotional response.<sup>13</sup>

Race in the United States triggers profoundly ambivalent desires split between repulsion and attraction, a structure of feeling not unique to Asian Americans.<sup>14</sup> In noting the “archetypal love of white male and black” in canonical American literature, literary critic Leslie Fiedler (1949, 147) asserted, “Either the horror or the attraction is meaningless alone; only together do they make sense.” Frantz Fanon ([1952] 1991, 8) famously diagnosed that attraction as pathology, declaring that “the man who adores the Negro is as ‘sick’ as the man who abominates him.” Yet I would argue that expressed attraction has become a potent form of anti-Asian bias, reinforcing, if camouflaging, racist hate. The “sickness” of adoration disproportionately envelops public discourse surrounding Asians in the United States, revealing itself in freely shared declarations of “loving” Oriental food, culture, or women. “Yellow fever” is not a confession of secret desire but uncensored proclamation; Asians are subject to a “carnal density of vision” (Williams 1995, 11) disproportionate to their visibility in the US public sphere. The excess of libidinal attachment that surrounds Asian Americans (“the highest, the best, the fastest,” “Patels must have made it”) indicates a fixity of typing that underwrites racial anxiety.

Colloquially mischaracterized as inaccurate content, the stereotype scripts racial difference into a narrow range of narratives and visual triggers whose pleasures lie, in part, in their repetition. The stereotype, Bhabha (1994) writes, “is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (66); “The *same old* stories . . . *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time” (77). Racist love is rooted in the reductive structure of typing, something it shares with racial profiling. Both take pleasure in the same old, same old.

### Cultural Appropriation as Racist Love

How might we understand cultural appropriation through the lens of racist love?

This book seeks to explore how the Asian American reduction to type masquerades as racial knowledge while operating as fetishistic pleasure. Fetishism represents a specific desiring structure in which attraction masks anxiety; I

suggest that, as a process of idealization, fetishism illuminates the structures of a collective racial imaginary in which apprehension manifests itself as overestimation. What Sigmund Freud ([1914] 1957, 122) identified as the “prodigal expenditure of libido” underscores the symbolic importance of Asian American presence to a national imaginary well beyond their proportional representation. The state of being in love, according to Freud, “consists in a flowing-over of ego-libido to the object” (122). Yet the fetishist requires an object substitute, imbuing it with libidinal excess as a form of disavowal; in his classic theorization, the fetish object represents a substitute for the woman’s missing penis, one that renders women acceptable in the face of their supposed castration (Freud [1927] 1961). For Freud, the emotionally invested thing allows for the disavowal of what is lacking; substituting for the penis, it enables arousal through the denial of castration. If bell hooks’s notion of “getting a bit of the Other” does not exactly represent the pathologized excitation of fetishistic arousal tethered to the object, her more colloquial understanding of race fetishism nevertheless also underscores a split desiring structure surrounding racial pleasure beyond a sense of the erotic, as *getting*. The concept of racist love highlights Asian American racialization as marked by a delight that forestalls repulsion. Beginning with the fetishistic reduction of persons to things, what does the displacement of Asian/Americans into nonhuman forms enable? What are the (ambiguous) forms of domination that this abstraction produces?

Excessive proclamations of attachment are fundamentally sketchy.<sup>15</sup> Race fetishism, whether classically understood as object substitution or colloquially understood as sexual objectification, is both an expression of power and an indication of its instability. In fetishism, desire and possession are not ends unto themselves; rather, as Anne McClintock (1995, 184) cogently reminds us, “by displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities.” Asian Americans, I suggest, occupy the space of terrifying ambiguity effectively masked by declarations of attraction compulsively expressed over and over again in the same narrative frames or forms. Asian object love announces a lack that requires compensation; it functions as a screen for what is repressed.

As a foundation of affect theory, psychoanalysis is thus a potent tool for understanding race as a site of excessive meaning and inflamed feeling.<sup>16</sup> At the outset of the twenty-first century, race has become an undue source of stimuli that must be (collectively) managed: “The object [*Objekt*] of an instinct is the

thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim," Freud writes. "It is what is most variable about an instinct and is not originally connected with it, but *becomes assigned to it only in consequence of being peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible*" (1915, 119, emphasis mine). Following Fanon, critical race theory has long illuminated the ways in which race has functioned as an overdetermined object of negative feeling, what Freud would deem a source of "unpleasure." Chin and Chan's colloquial framing, "racist love," represents the psychoanalytic concept of inversion: transforming race from a stimulus of "unpleasure" into a source of satisfaction entails a "reversal into its opposite" (Freud 1915, 123). The reversal of negative feeling into pleasure represents a defense, a means of coping with an anxiety-producing stimulus.

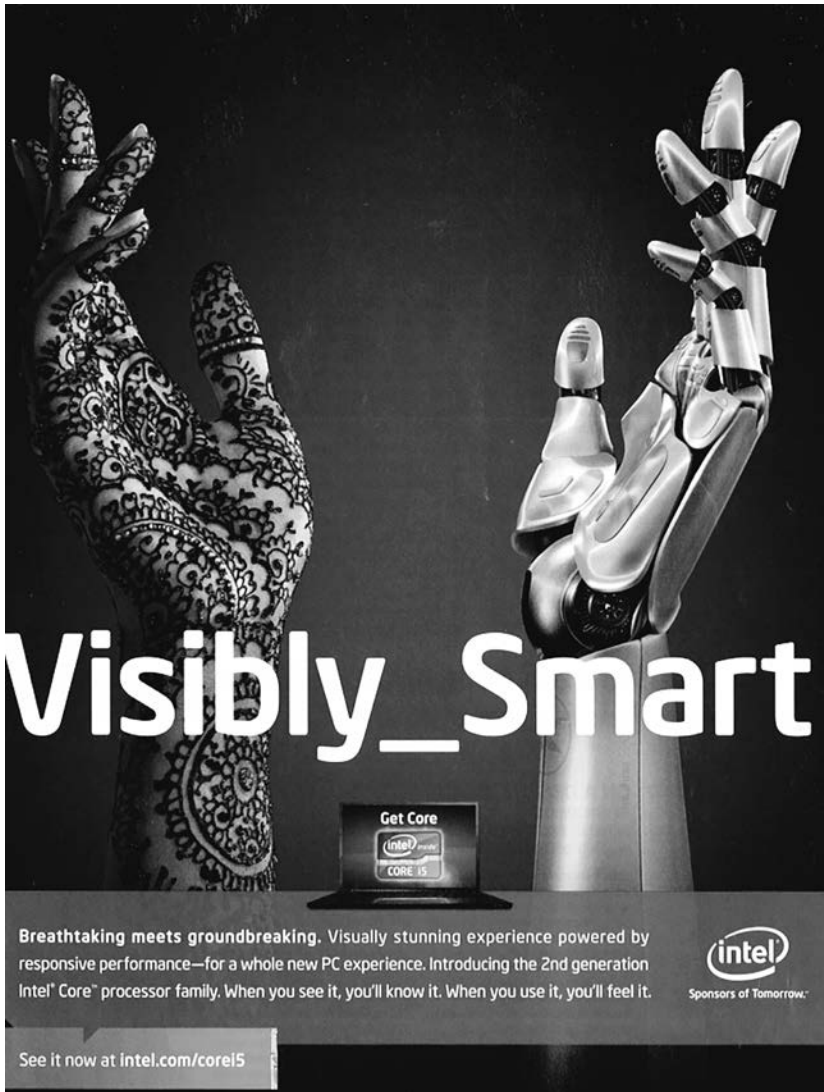
The activist's charge of cultural appropriation responds to these latent dynamics projected onto a collective and political terrain. The accusation of usurpation, particularly of racial-ethnic culture, makes these equations partially conscious. Appropriators fulfill narcissistic self-enhancement by possessing ("getting") an aspect of the exotic; appropriation represents, to echo Eric Lott, love and theft (Lott 1993). Accessorizing through difference also requires, as in fetishism, reduction or taking the symbolic "bit of the Other" (hooks 1992, 21). As in a figure such as Okuni, taking pleasure in difference requires abstracting and amplifying singular traits, visual signs, aesthetic forms, qualities, or commodities as stand-ins for something larger. At first glance, the charge of appropriation simply counters theft with an original claim to ownership, questioning the ethics of consumer choice. But whether centered on the authenticity of cuisine, ownership of dance moves, or origins of fashion, beauty rituals, and hairstyles, appropriation nevertheless betrays an underlying apprehension.

Appropriating difference at the millennium may be motivated by exploitative self-enhancement, but it veils melancholic loss. "Difference can seduce precisely because the mainstream imposition of sameness is a provocation that terrorizes," writes hooks (1992, 367). Neoliberal globalization's increasing urbanization, industrialization, bureaucracy, and secularization project a future world that terrorizes in its sameness. Thus the loss of uniqueness drives both the move to fetishize difference *and* the charge of cultural appropriation. Racist love calls up the erotic charge of seductive difference that responds to US fears of both homogeneity in the context of globalization and an Asianized future.<sup>17</sup> As in the past, racist love looks outward toward Asia for its "bit," for the object that makes satisfaction possible.

### Thingness of the Orient, Nonhuman Proxies

A malleable abstraction, the Orient exists as a willful iteration of the fantastic, in Roland Barthes's words, the very "possibility of a difference" ([1970] 1982, 3–4). The Orient has always been an object of fantasy, an excessive sign system in the United States; as Edward Said (1978) noted, "Orientalism" was a template for narrating the West's unbridled imagination, saturated with the residues of longing and fear. American Asiaphilia surrounding things was enabled by the deliberate absence of Asian people: "The notion of Chineseness under the sign of the exotic," writes James Moy (1993, 9), "became familiar to the American spectator long before sightings of the actual Chinese." Instead, Chinese commodities gracing colonial homes in the Americas since 1696, particularly porcelain, were conduits of putatively positive, ultimately mysterious associations.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, *chinoiserie* and *japonisme* as aesthetic styles ceded to the promise of global "Indo-chic" offered by mass marketers such as Pier 1 and World Market/Cost Plus.<sup>19</sup> By 1882, immigration laws, specifically, the Page Act (1875) and Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), ensured that "sightings" of Asians were rare. Instigated by nativist labor movements, exclusionary legislation targeted all "Asiatics" in turn: Japanese and Koreans in 1907, South Asians in 1917, and Filipinos in 1934 (Ong and Liu 1994). By 1917, the United States had extended the Asiatic Barred Zone from China and Japan to the rest of the Pacific Rim: India, Burma, Siam, the Malay Islands, and Polynesia, truncating the development of Asian American communities. The aura surrounding Asian commodities was in part due to the mysticism enabled by distance and material absence; they rendered Asia, in the words of Barthes ([1970] 1982, 3), "somewhere in the world (*faraway*)."

Numerous scholars have named the Orient as a detachable aesthetic. What Sunaina Maira deemed "Indo-chic" (2007); Jane Park, "Oriental style" (2010); Anne Anlin Cheng, "ornamentality" (2019); and Josephine Lee, "decorative orientalism" (2021) all reinforce the idea of Asia as surface. In keeping with their work, I would emphasize the ways in which racial meaning is conveyed without recourse to the human body, but I also highlight the split affective valence that motivates this process of abstraction. Both underlie David Morley and Kevin Robins's (1995) concept of techno-Orientalism, a mode of discourse and aesthetic representation linking racialized anxieties to futurist technology. The split feeling of techno-Orientalism becomes clear in a 2011 print advertisement touting advances in Intel's core processor (figure Intro.2).<sup>20</sup> A marked

An advertisement for Intel's Core i5 processor. The top half of the image features two hands reaching upwards against a dark background. The hand on the left is human and covered in intricate black henna patterns. The hand on the right is a sleek, silver robotic arm. In the center, between the two hands, is a small laptop screen displaying the text "Get Core" above the Intel logo and "CORE i5". Below the hands, the text "Visibly\_Smart" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, a dark grey banner contains the text "Breathtaking meets groundbreaking. Visually stunning experience powered by responsive performance—for a whole new PC experience. Introducing the 2nd generation Intel® Core™ processor family. When you see it, you'll know it. When you use it, you'll feel it." on the left, the Intel logo and "Sponsors of Tomorrow™" on the right, and a small box on the far left with the text "See it now at Intel.com/corei5".

# Visibly\_Smart

Get Core  
intel  
CORE i5

Breathtaking meets groundbreaking. Visually stunning experience powered by responsive performance—for a whole new PC experience. Introducing the 2nd generation Intel® Core™ processor family. When you see it, you'll know it. When you use it, you'll feel it.

See it now at [Intel.com/corei5](http://Intel.com/corei5)

intel  
Sponsors of Tomorrow™

FIGURE INTRO.2 Intel's microprocessor as Asian female cyborg

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visualization of racist love's reduction and exaggeration, Visibly\_Smart features an image of two presumably female hands: one mehndied and the other robotic.

Eroticizing the imagined human-machine interface through a feminized aesthetic form, the ad draws on a wealth of interlocking associations derived from the Asianized female cyborg. Henna decoration traditionally associated with Hindu weddings conveys the "marriage" of tradition and innovation, delicate beauty and technological mastery ("Breathtaking meets groundbreaking"). The gesture to India seems to be an arbitrary reference (the processors are not assembled in South Asia), but consistent with the logic of techno-Orientalism, it conjoins an appeal to tradition and an authentic past with a putatively positive vision of a posthuman, Asianized future. The creature invoked by two hands is neither wholly abstract nor wholly embodied but is *suggestively* human in ways that speak to robots as the quintessential template for anthropomorphic projection. As I discuss in chapter 3, "she" represents a potentially powerful new being who has yet been programmed to serve. The split halves of the cyborg suggest the split feelings it engenders: what is seductive is also to be feared. Like the accessorized parahuman in the Intel ad, the Asianized objects of the following chapters unveil a desiring structure that reorients anxiety into pleasure as a means of asserting control over Asian status ambiguity.<sup>21</sup>

The fetishistic reduction to thingness intrinsic to Asian racialization is also exploited in Asian American visual art. Hong Chun Zhang's charcoal on paper triptych, *Three Graces* (2010), for example, is a portrait of Zhang and her two sisters with a twist (figure Intro.3). Side-by-side panels depict the backs of three almost otherworldly creatures made entirely of hair. Eight feet tall, the triptych is larger than life, startlingly beautiful, but also slightly monstrous.<sup>22</sup> Withholding human faces, the work represents portraiture in the abstract; it denies the figures individuality. The visualization of self-as-hair invites a reading of race fetishism, Asian women substituted for a single sensuous body part in ways that render them identical, all alike. In this sense, *Three Graces* raises issues central to *Racist Love*, how metonymic substitution enables abstracted Asianness to be experienced as pleasure, whether erotic or aesthetic.

Both in their content and form, Zhang's drawings suggesting erotic typing call forth other racial meanings based on substitution. The work exchanges Chinese sisters for the Greek deities who represent a storied subject matter in Western art; mounted on scrolls, the three panels recall traditional Chinese ink painting. In withholding the face, Zhang literally turns her back on the conventions of Western portraiture, denying, in the process, the fetish of liberal selfhood



FIGURE INTRO.3 Hong Chun Zhang, *Three Graces*, 2011. Charcoal on paper with scrolls; triptych, left and right: 36 × 96 in., center: 36 × 100 in. Photographed by Aaron Paden.

located in individuality. The work echoes Joseph Jonghyun Jeon's reading of the possibilities of avant-gardist art in *Racial Things, Racial Forms: Objecthood in Avant-Garde Asian American Poetry*; Asian American poets, he argues, re-fashion "avant-garde queries of the thing into abstract questions about how American discourse manifests race in physical or visual forms" (2012, xxxvii).<sup>23</sup> In a turn to the political, the drawings could also be said to affirm the absolute unity of the sisters, their appearance as a single undifferentiated collective. Its portrayal of unity in resemblance recalls Yoko Ono's experimental work *Film No. 4: Bottoms* (1966), a sequence of 365 naked human buttocks shot in loving close-up for fifteen seconds each. The absurdist visual succeeds in affirming that, whatever our differences, our butts render us all alike "underneath." The

solemn beauty of Zhang's back-of-the-head portraits produces a different affective response while conveying a similar sense of collectivity, the facelessness of solidarity. Asian American artists take on the quintessential manifestation of racist love, race fetishism, and twist it, in the manner of Zhang's flexible strands, toward alternative political purposes. Here, racist love might also speak to Asian American attachment to coalition.

This book's fantastical objects—racialized cars, robots, hair, kitchenware, toys, and body parts—are neither detachable from the identity effects of realism nor wholly mimetic; at one level they reflect the “nonhuman turn” in academic scholarship (Grusin 2015). Contemporary work on animals, the environment, the biome, networks, technology, or tools invite a reconsideration of what constitutes the human, decentering the hubris of anthropocentrism. My engagement with “other” lifeforms or nonliving matter represents a logical extension of feminist, queer of color, crip, and antiracist scholarship focusing on subjects whose humanity was not always assumed or who face the greatest precarity in networks of domination. At the same time, the nonhuman interface can sit uneasily with work that travels under identity rubrics. For example, disability activist Jillian Weise (2018) claims cyborg identity to illuminate her bio-enmeshing with her prostheses, deriding able-bodied feminists who identify likewise as “tryborgs.” For her, *cyborg* is not simply a fantasy being, a metaphoric identification. With these risks and tensions surrounding material embodiment in mind, this book explores how the nonhuman function as ideologically invested templates for coping with race at the millennium. *Fantasy* here does not merely invoke “the impossible,” as in definitions of fantasy literature or speculative media genres, but represents a screen for projecting cultural and political desires, in Slavoj Žižek's (1989, 33) words from the epigraph, not “an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself.”<sup>24</sup>

Psychoanalysis has been unveiled as a colonialist discipline reinforcing modern and potentially repressive Western conceptions of race, religion, nuclear family structure, sexuality, and individualism. Ranjana Khanna (2003) cogently uncovers the imperialist violence that underlies the emergence of psychoanalysis, its ethnographic foundations as a colonial discipline. But like Žižek, she also demonstrates the importance of latent reading as a means of unveiling (“worlding”) buried ideology, highlighting the melancholia of the colonized, echoing Anne Anlin Cheng's work on Asian Americans' melancholic relation to the nation. McClintock (2009, 53) rightly cautions, “Nations do not have ‘psyches’ or an ‘unconscious’; only people do.” Yet Freud's ([1921]

1959, 14) acknowledgment of “collective mental life” has provided the tools for what would later emerge as the field of social psychology, and for illuminating the psychic lives of colonialism and white supremacy.

At the risk of anthropomorphizing the nation, I find psychoanalysis’s emphasis on latent feeling to be particularly generative for critical race theory, especially as it repeatedly coalesces around specific racial forms and narratives across a cultural terrain. Theorizing from the individual to the collective, a foundation of affect theory, signals the political consequence of feeling as it “sticks to” groups (Ahmed 2004); becomes ignited by (racialized) aesthetics (Ngai 2012); or underpins national ideology (Berlant 2011). Freud’s emphasis on (infantile) attachment, which laid the groundwork for object relations theory, helps to “world” the abstract nuances of racial feeling. Extrapolating from D. W. Winnicott ([1971] 1991), the imaginary figures of this book represent racial transitional objects whose manipulation reveals the “psychic reality” and needs of a culture writ large. With these tensions in mind, my goal is not to recuperate psychoanalysis but to explore how the latent feeling underlying collective attachment offers a potent tool for understanding the role race plays in the psychic life of the nation.

To illuminate the intersection of affect, the new materialism, and the fantastic, my “nonhuman turn” pivots toward a perhaps unconventional source: decluttering guru Marie Kondo and her mantra, “spark joy.”

### Spark Joy: Fantasy and the Posthuman

Things make us happy. This is the key to the international phenomenon known as the KonMari Method of decluttering popularized by Marie Kondo and her book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*. Selling 1.6 million copies in the United States alone since its 2014 translation and 3 million worldwide since 2016, the book spawned two sequels, an industry, a reality series, and acolytes, or “Konverts.”<sup>25</sup> Countering the utilitarian advice of professional organizers (including that offered by the source of her inspiration, Nagisa Tatsumi’s *The Art of Discarding* [*Suteru Gigyutsu*]), she does not simply advocate for minimalism or against hoarding.<sup>26</sup> Kondo’s philosophy centers on positive feeling; the criteria for holding on to a possession is simple: “Does it spark joy?” Masked as practical advice about organizing, the KonMari Method yet establishes a theory of human-nonhuman relationality also echoed in what other acolytes call 〇〇〇, or object-oriented ontology.

Cast as an eccentric, almost otherworldly figure in the United States, Kondo (2014, 169) intimated the secret of her business juggernaut in the disclosure, “I began to treat my belongings as if they were alive when I was a high school student.” Kondo’s charm to Western sensibilities in part stems from her unabashed anthropomorphizing of possessions held in a relationship of care and mutual respect. Returning home, her routine entails addressing each object in turn, putting them in their designated spots, thanking them for their service, and exhorting them to have a good rest. To her coat: “Thank you for keeping me warm all day.” To her accessories: “Thank you for making me beautiful” (2014, 168). To her purse: “It’s thanks to you that I got so much work done today” (169). Kondo’s animation of household things establishes a spiritual relationship between the human and the material, one based on reciprocity and recognition. “Some people find it hard to believe that inanimate objects respond to human emotion,” she writes. “Even if we remain unaware of it, our belongings really work hard for us, carrying out their respective roles each day to support our lives” (170). Kondo’s rituals evoke the iconic tidying scene of Disney’s *Mary Poppins* in which toys spring to life, happy to put themselves away.

The fantastical whimsy of the KonMari Method has been oddly embraced in the United States with a mania that some reserve for a cult. And it is derided (and racially denigrated) for the same reasons.<sup>27</sup> Central to her popularity in the West is the figure that she cuts: a diminutive, feminine, cute Japanese guru-slash-good fairy. Her “magic” cathects to multiple modalities of difference, all of which skew as relatively nonthreatening. In her invitation to declutter, she does not give the orders, she is merely the home therapist who honors your feelings—and those of the nonhuman entities who share your space. Affirming the autonomous lives of things, her philosophy derives from Shinto’s animist etiquette, a cosmology or worldview absent in the new materialism. Indigenous to Japan and merging with Buddhism, Shinto is said to reflect panpsychism, in which *kami*, or spirits, reside in objects in nature and built environments.<sup>28</sup> In effect, Kondo extends Shinto’s ritual practices into the “sacred” space of the home. Yet anthropomorphism here is redirected to a more Westernized belief in self-actualization, in the “life-changing” power of positive thinking. The ownership of things both reflects and impacts human happiness, either “sparking joy” or representing emotional burdens that prevent personal transformation. In effect, imagining objects living contentedly in a space made comfortable by our caregiving honors the home as a material setting for desire.

In situating possessions as workers held in temporary and benign trust, Kondo’s philosophy converges eerily with the loosely defined school of

post-Kantian thought that travels variously under the signs of the new materialism, speculative realism, or *ooo*. Here, *being* is not solely the province of the human. Philosopher Brian Massumi, for example, affirms the “irreducible alterity of the nonhuman in and through its active connection to the human,” a belief underlying Kondo’s Shinto-derived philosophy regarding the affective impact of possessions (Massumi 1995, 100).<sup>29</sup> In affirming reciprocity between the human and the inanimate, Kondo’s “life-changing magic” inadvertently expresses a radical empiricism fundamentally questioning anthropocentrism; her home-tidying disciples are essentially asked to assume the same humble viewpoint of ethical posthumanism. In making both literal and affective space for things, Kondo reorients the question of human agency to one of relationality. Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory articulates this interrelationality somewhat differently:

If action is limited a priori to what “intentional,” “meaningful” humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. . . . [B]y contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant. Thus, the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not? (Latour 2005, 71)

Pushing Latour and Kondo into dialogue, I ask, How do racialized actants spark joy? Can nonhuman things injure? Or both at once?

This book highlights the mundane forms that animate race at the millennium and the pleasures of spectatorship they incite. It looks at anthropomorphism not to affirm the “tiny ontology” of things or our ethical relationship to the nonhuman (Bogost 2012). Rather, *Racist Love* explores the agency of the fantastic, of things come to life, in parsing how nonhuman proxies “make a difference” in the course of “some other agent’s action” within a network of human-to-human relations (Latour 2005, 71). “Objects ventriloquize us,” declares Bill Brown (1998, 947). In light of Kondo, I would add that they ventriloquize us as they become imbued with feeling, generate attachment, or incite possession—or more specifically here, *split* feeling, *ambivalent* attachment, *possessiveness*.<sup>30</sup> The vulnerability (chapter 1), cuteness (chapter 2), or sexiness (chapters 3, 4) ascribed to Asianized things decisively contrasts the affective template assigned to Asian peoples: inscrutability. Or, as Sianne Ngai (2012, 95) puts it, the “pathos of emotional suppression.” Geisha cars (figure I.1),

robotic hands (figure Intro.2), and women's hair (figure Intro.3) suggest sites where Asian racial difference in particular triggers mixed feelings; in thinking through the ways that objects perform as racial proxies, *Racist Love* posits racial scopophilia where no humans exist.

### Scrutable Objects

Invoking the capacious term *fantasy* here, my engagement is not necessarily with fantasy genres (comics, speculative fiction, horror) or platforms (cosplay, anime, gaming) that might be the subject of panels at Comic-Con. Rather, *Racist Love* explores imaginaries surrounding Asian Americans in four sites: educational picture books and graphic novels for children and young adults; caricature in commodity forms; social robotics and speculative media concerning artificial intelligence; and contemporary visual art and media engaging fetishism. The racialized anthropomorphic cartoon animals, decorative figurines, robots, and life-sized fetish dolls that populate the following pages ignite fantasizing as a process, what Judith Butler (1993, 265) defines as “those *active* imaginings which presuppose a relative locatedness of the subject in relation to regulatory schemes” of the social. But I would argue that they further reveal what Laplanche and Pontalis (1988, 314), following Freud, identify as the phantasmatic, the projection of an imaginary scene “in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish.” *Fantasy* here represents not merely an object or genre but a screen for projecting cultural and political desires; I invoke the term to call forth sites self-consciously engaged with the pleasurable unreal but also the veiled phantasmatic processes underlying fetishistic spectatorship that encode desiring structures that have heightened significance for projecting race at the millennium.

In examining how the educational imperatives of social realism are reconciled with fantasy forms, chapter 1 explores the implications of using nonhuman figures to explain racial prejudice to children. The “fairy tale wars” of the 1920s set educational goals against the child's need for fancy, or imagination; this debate among educators, librarians, publishers, and writers was partially reconciled through the example of Margaret Wise Brown, in whose picture books animals modeled healthy attachments that spoke to the age-appropriate inner lives of children. As talking animals were subsequently enlisted to play out minor dramas of racial-ethnic conflict and coping in children's literature, this fantasy trope became harnessed to social change. Following studies in developmental psychology on how the young acquire racial biases, picture books

explicitly introduced themes of tolerance. Yet depicting racism in books for the young presents authors with a tricky conundrum: how to instruct against prejudice for an audience quite possibly innocent of it.

Chapter 1 suggests that species difference has become a routine way of portraying differences among peoples as a response to this conundrum. Biodiversity has become visual metaphor for racial diversity in “multicultural” children’s literature. Charting advances in developmental psychology that explain how children acquire and unlearn biases, I focus on picture books using animal surrogates to play out microdramas of racial-ethnic conflict. Following the rise in transnational adoption from Asia near the end of the twentieth century, this trend emerged as a specific genre: books that imagine the transracial adoptive family as cross-species alliance. Yet this seemingly innocent substitution (panda for adoptee) risks caricature as well as antiquated notions of racialized biology. Extending this exploration of the (unintended) consequences of the animal-race analogy in young adult literature, chapter 1 turns to Gene Luen Yang’s celebrated graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006) to consider how its use of species distinction also produces unintended messages about the limits of racial integration.

Overtly educative texts at first seem to violate Bruno Bettelheim’s ([1975] 2010, 63) view that fantasy “help[s] the child work through unconscious pressures.” Shifting that focus, I explore how animal proxies reveal “unconscious” adult pressures that derive from a specific paradox at the millennium: to promote both colorblindness and diversity, to further the belief we are simultaneously all the same and all different. In looking at the adult’s ventriloquism of imaginary figures for the imagined child, chapter 1 reveals the imperfect correspondence between “real-world” aims and fantastical form, the fissures that arise in turning to racial abstraction to express anxieties about intimacy and belonging.

Chapter 2 continues this line of inquiry examining a new iteration of racial kitsch, the anthropomorphic Asianized figurine, to explore the relationship between racial feeling and aesthetic form. Unlike ethnic Halloween costumes, American Indian mascots, and mammy cookie jars, mundane household items in the shape of Asian people—coin banks, handbags, and perfume bottles—appear to evade recognition as racist caricature through the Japanese aesthetic, kawaii, or cute-style. Kawaii commodities evoke both overtly positive feeling—the desire to protect or care for the small and defenseless—as well as the dark side of cute: the desire to dominate them.

Kawaii-style chinoiserie and japonisme appear to circumvent the prohibitions placed on racial desires in the twenty-first century, particularly the pleasure taken

in demeaning ethnic caricature. Through the ambivalent affective responses evoked by cute things, the chapter interrogates the association between caricature and harm, representation and injury. As cute tchotchkes abstract racial meaning, the chapter suggests, they allow for the enjoyment of unequal relations of power that veil anxieties surrounding economic globalization and Asian status shift.

Chapter 2's focus on the pleasurable repetition of type in humanized things continues in chapter 3's engagement with technology or, more specifically, with techno-Orientalist scopophilia. Here, more grandiose explorations of machine ontology and flexible embodiment cede to the inquiries that animate *Racist Love*: how speculative fantasies of a technologically enhanced future, as in Intel's mehdied cyborg, are yet tethered to existing racial and gender tropes. To suggest an answer to the question, Why imagine AI as having a body at all?, chapter 3 considers artificially intelligent robots and media portrayals of gynoids who take the form of young, attractive Asian women. In rendering a future interface between machines and humanity, the literary fictions and scripted dramas of simulated beings in chapter 3 paradoxically derive their force from human rights narratives. Anxiety triggered by superior machines is offset by racial form: Asian women as innocent, willing to please, sexually desirable, and, most importantly, vulnerable. That embodiment enables a specific narrative drawing on not only fears of mechanized "robotic" labor but, more pointedly, on real-world associations with global human trafficking, especially sex trafficking. As the form invokes racialized associations to sexual slavery, fantasies of female embodied AI, clones, or cyborgs enable two seemingly contradictory pleasures: witnessing exploitation (imagined as sexual assault) and witnessing its transcendence (imagined as rescue). These futurist neoslave narratives script a specific relationship to technology, one that transforms the negative valence surrounding techno-Orientalism into positive feelings of control. *Synths*, *fabricants*, and *sexaroids* enable reparative narratives that extend the hallmark of equal dignity and equal worth to things.

Chapter 3 turns from speculative media to innovations in robotics. As in artist Laurie Simmons's use of a hyperrealistic Japanese fetish doll in chapter 4, the life-size gynoids Aiko, Geminoid F, and Jia Jia ignite the split feelings of the uncanny. As in fictional dramatizations, the young Asianized female robots suggest a compromised human agency, here imagined as the incapacity for sexual consent. In tech demonstrations by men for men, female-embodied robots expose an expressly social behavior: the right to touch. The racialized mechanical bodies of chapter 3 speak to philosophical considerations not of

ontology, but of ethics: not *what* is human, but *how*. Reflecting the consciousness surrounding the viral movement #MeToo, the compromised agency of mecha women becomes the catalyst for illuminating the very vulnerabilities within the social matrix.

The sites engaged in the first three chapters—children’s literature, kawaii commodities, embodied AI—rely on the overrepresentation of Asian/Americans often to further the mirage of harmony and global interconnectedness. More specifically, they grant positive affective valence to racial typing: the Asianized human-adjacent being as diminutive, childlike, vulnerable, in need of care. These nonhuman forms are placed within familiar narratives that reference post-civil rights issues of visibility, inclusion, and equal rights: they are assigned what is essentially a caste position within progressive narratives in which redress is imagined not on behalf of people of color, but on behalf of their object substitutes. As openly fictive, nonrealist, and at times overtly playful fantasies of things come to life script human difference, they appear to circumvent taboos surrounding race at the millennium. For Asian Americans confronted with their racial proxies, those taboos may provide the very setting for desire.

### Asian American Perverse Spectatorship

What does it mean to be attracted to a reviled object?

In a 2019 Asian American Studies Association panel on the film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), scholar Elena Tajima Creef began with a confession subsequently echoed by every other panelist: she *loved* the film. For her, it was a once-every-decade rom-com with an all-Asian cast, not simply a “bad text,” a trigger for the racialized specter of neoliberal capitalist competition. Similarly, media scholars Eve Oishi and Peter X. Feng have written about their attempts to reconcile their critical awareness of the politics of spectatorship with their fandom of *The King and I* (1956) and *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960). As colonial fantasies, both films have been rendered forbidden objects in the field. Feng (2000) suggests that to remain both a critic and a fan of actress Nancy Kwan is to engage in equal measures of remembering and forgetting, pain and pleasure. Oishi (2006) notes that feelings of eroticized danger elicited by *The King and I* complicated the identifications surrounding her own racial location; she could not simply repudiate its retrograde racial imagery. Her “perverse spectatorship” of the film highlights the “infinitely oblique and circuitous routes through which identification passes, in this case for queers and for people of color” (2006, 649). Alternately disturbed and fascinated by plantation archetypes, African

American artist Kara Walker also testifies to the power of white iconicity. She situates the figure of Scarlett O'Hara as a source of her own perverse spectatorship, wanting to both be the white heroine and kill her at the same time.<sup>31</sup>

By the same token, can I (racist) love Okuni? (See figure Intro.1.)

Chapters 2 and 4 explore this split spectatorship for Asian Americans; both chapters engage the vacillation between pleasure and pain underlying Asian American attachment to fantasy forms that, as overdetermined repositories of racial feeling for white spectators, represent "bad texts." In chapter 2, collecting cute "racist" toys is a *guilty* pleasure. Does that hobby compromise one's membership in a community defined by antiracism? At one level, confessing an attachment to objects of ambiguously racist kitsch challenges the uniformity of feeling essential to coalitional identity. Chapter 4 centers on queer of color, crip, and feminist reimagining of the Asian fetish in photography, independent video, and mainstream media. Race fetishism runs afoul of liberal politics centered on the foundation of human dignity. Being made into a (sexual) object represents an affront; it reduces the individual to a type. Yet psychoanalyst Robert Stoller (1985, 155) surmised that "a fetish is a story masquerading as an object." Chapter 4 thus investigates not the stories underlying fetishistic desire per se, but those underlying attempts to reconcile that desire to reparative projects of racial community building and social justice. I situate Asian fetishism as a site to explore the nature of Asian American *political* desire.

Visual artists such as Mari Katayama, Laurel Nakadate, Elisha Lim, Greg Pak, Nguyen Tan Hoang, and Helen Lee subject the sexual objectification of Asian/Americans to scrutiny through parody, reversal, or what at first appears to be an embrace of sexual type, a concession to crip, queer, racial, or commodity scopophilia. In chapter 4, the depiction of "private" fetishistic desire is saturated with the uncanny residues of Asian American history, diasporic longing, and the rhetoric of collective rights. Artists question the horizons of racial redress—visibility, representation, and equality—envisioned in both the public sphere and at the foundations of Asian American studies. More complexly, the fetish presents Asian Americanists invested in politicizing racial representation, in ethical critique with presumed mimetic effects, with a critical paradox: the recognition that objectification is itself subject making. Racist love represents a structure of feeling that attaches to Asian Americans at the millennium as a form of racial management, but it might also represent a means of naming an ambivalent means of Asian American self-affirmation.

Yet "talking back" to racial fetishism produces oppositional pleasures that dovetail with the split desires of erotic fantasy; the very act of marking reductive

typing as beyond the pale may succeed in creating not only racial consciousness but libidinally charged racial taboos. How is the prohibition of erotic pleasure a source of political pleasure? Scholarly and pedagogic practices surrounding racial fetishism may well reflect the structural ambivalence intrinsic to fetishism itself; chapter 4 engages artistic, activist, and academic practices that both invite and avoid good-image/bad-image, inoffensive/offensive dichotomies to explore the phantasmatic processes that open up identificatory locations for Asian American self-imagining. This final chapter thus elevates what Freud theorized as individual sexual pathology to a form of collective imagining to understand the split nature of desires surrounding racial fetishism, including those held by Asian/Americans who take pleasure in bad objects.

For me, the nonhuman things of this book spark joy. And yet . . .

### Asian No Bodies

During the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 pandemic, the gloves of racist hate came off as the *same old* stories about Asian-as-threat became resurrected. For good reason, then, Asian American studies as a field addresses the effects of racial hatred and xenophobia—exclusion, scapegoating, discrimination, inequality, and violence—through objects of study that derive their political force through the realist representation of trauma. Moreover, race in the United States is often singularly presented as problem to be solved, particularly a problem of equity. Early Asian Americanist work was thus assigned value according to what Yoonmee Chang (2010) called the “ethnographic imperative” to contribute empirical accounts of Asian American experience, particularly those dealing with systemic inequality.<sup>32</sup> On one level, critical race studies is bound to negative feeling and a belief in the reparative impact of critique and its faith in exposure (Sedgwick 1997). Asian Americanists continue to debate the ways in which, as a foundational epistemology, identity politics appears to tether knowledge production in the discipline to the limited horizon of visibility, inclusion, and the recognition of collective trauma.<sup>33</sup> Kandice Chuh’s (2003) call for “subjectless” Asian American studies gave rise to Susie Pak and Elda Tsou’s question, “How might Asian American history be constructed without an Asian American body?” (2011, 171).<sup>34</sup> This book takes those concerns literally, arguing, in effect, for Asian American studies without Asian Americans.

Their proxies allow racial difference to be experienced as a source of delight. Here, I hope to illuminate the desiring structures surrounding race that exceed its public projection as a conscious “problem” of competing constituencies

within representative democracy. In suggesting that Asian racialization in the United States operates in part through fetishistic projection, this book hopes to uncover latent racial feeling as well as to explore the ways in which *racist love* might influence a collective sense of self. *Racist Love* thus seeks to understand the force with which race circulates through abstraction as racialized things circulate narratives of injury and transcendence without human subjects. As fantasies of the nonhuman echo tropes of difference and oppression, colonization and resistance, the “wounded” subjects of racial grievance are both oddly present and conveniently underground. The fantasy of nonhuman things come to life appears to evade prohibitions placed around race in the twenty-first century: “It’s not real” becomes a defense against implied political impact. Yet, as Juliana Chang (2012, 108) reminds us, “Politics cannot be explained solely by reference to rational interests. We must also understand how political identifications and desires are structured as fantasies.” If fantasy represents, in the words of Laplanche and Pontalis (1988, 315), “an imaginary expression designed to conceal the reality of the instinctual dynamic,” what is concealed by the pleasure taken in racialized things? How is racial resentment cloaked by love?

“Race has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before,” Toni Morrison (1992, 63) presciently noted. *Racist Love: Asian Abstraction and the Pleasures of Fantasy* is thus invested in exploring the political desires underlying the US racial imaginary and the ways in which race in the twenty-first century continues to be staged through the back door of the pretend. As Japanese cars, mehndied cyborgs, or women’s hair circulate racial meaning, Asian Americans are simultaneously everywhere—and, once again, nowhere.

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## Notes

### INTRODUCTION

Stephen Marche, "How to Read a Racist Book to Your Kids," retitled web version of the print essay "Loompaland Is a Complicated Place," *New York Times Magazine*, June 17, 2012, 60. Full references for popular culture and literature, mainstream media, and online sources appear in the notes.

1. In bell hooks's seminal 1992 essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," she famously defined the dominant culture's enjoyment of difference as a desire for "spice." She begins with the erotic encounter and broadens outward to the romantic fantasy of primitivism and the exotic, which are subject to appropriation and consumption, accessorizing normative white, middle-class life.
2. The postwar period fixed the occupier's vision of Japanese women as childlike and naive; "baby-san" became the generic name for young Japanese women. See Shibusawa 2006, 12.
3. In art, abstraction signifies a mode of nonfigurative representation, one that refuses overt references to material reality. In her definition of abstraction, Ngai (2015, 34) cites Leigh Claire La Berge: abstraction is a "mode of nonfigurative representation" that is "not fully realizable by a particular." For Phillip Brian Harper (2015, 19), abstraction denotes a representation's "remove from . . . those real-world phenomena" that it resembles; abstraction conveys a "state of *withdrawal* from some originary point." My own deployment of the term more closely aligns with what Manthia Diawara (1998, 51) has called "transtextuality," the "movement of cultural styles from character to character in film." "Tarantino's discovery," Diawara notes about the film *Pulp Fiction*, was that "black maleness, as embodied in *esthétique du cool*, can be transported through white bodies" (52). That is, abstracted through style, race is transportable as an associative sign system freed from the human body.
4. Marche, "How to Read a Racist Book to Your Kids."

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5. The substitution central to the *Cars* franchise, objects for people, taps the child's fascination with the power of machines through the cathected object. Less innocently, Disney harnesses children's desires to its juggernaut of global merchandising; Okuni only bears a name so that she can be marketed as a toy, or, exemplifying the ultimate in commodity fetishism, as a collectible. Dispensing with real bodies, animated films tap global box offices by obviating the need for audiences to identify with human protagonists in real-world settings. Despite mediocre reviews, *Cars* (2006) returned box offices of \$441 million USD (domestic) and \$551 million (global), enabling a third movie in 2017. As significantly, the first film generated more than \$8 billion in retail sales, a figure that prompted Disney to put three hundred toys, Okuni among them, in production prior to the 2011 release of *Cars 2*.
6. In naming an affective structure surrounding Asian American racialization, I am of course drawing on Raymond Williams (1977), who countered the "subjective" nature of feeling and the aesthetic apart from the political. A "structure of feeling" (321) represents a "cultural hypothesis" (132) undertaken to understand affective "connections in a generation or period" (133).
7. In the context of psychoanalysis, *love* signifies complex attachment, not merely romantic feeling. Echoing object relations theory, *racist love* speaks to the admixture of love and hate, ambivalence and anxiety, that underlies (infantile) attachment. The "good" object is entwined with notions of infant libidinal satisfaction against the withholding nature of "bad" objects. See Ainsworth 1969.
8. See Hasan Minhaj's stand-up comedy special *Homecoming King* (dir. Christopher Storer, Prod., Art and Industry, Dist., Netflix, 2017).
9. Silverman delivered the joke on Conan O'Brien's *Late Show* in 2001. When Asian American media watchdog Guy Aoki challenged her use of the slur, she defended the joke as ironic, as skewering her persona as a bigoted "ignoramus." See Lopez 2016 and Sarah Silverman, *The Bedwetter: Stories of Courage, Redemption, and Pee* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010) 146. By 2017, Silverman had renounced her previously defensive stance, noting, "There are jokes I made 15 years ago I would absolutely not make today"; Sophie Heawood, "Sarah Silverman: 'There Are Jokes I Made 15 Years Ago I Would Absolutely Not Make Today,'" *Guardian*, November 19, 2017.
10. For a nuanced account of these metrics, see, for example, Lee and Zhou 2015.
11. In fact, that assessment was inaccurate. Census records reveal that between 2000 and 2010, Asian American populations saw a growth rate of 47 percent in contrast to the growth rate of the Latinx population at 49 percent. Resistance to disaggregating data across Asian ethnic groups allows Asian Americans as a group to avoid being pathologized via conventional forms of race scares of the twentieth century—criminality, drain on social welfare resources, educational achievement gaps. Yet they likewise lack the political power of other groups as an electoral demographic that must be recognized, courted, or empowered. The Pew report's summary was so glibly celebratory that the Asian American Pacific Islander Policy and Research Consortium, an organization of university-based research centers, immediately issued a statement condemning the summary as highly biased, incomplete,

and “implicitly misleading and damaging for Asian American communities” (“Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Research Consortium Response to Pew Center Report,” Asian American / Asian Research Institute, June 25, 2012, <https://aaari.info/news6/>). The full Pew report, released on June 19, 2012, can be found on Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, updated April 4, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/>.

12. As Stanley Sue and Harry H. L. Kitano (1973) note, Asian Americans were thought to be “patient, clean, courteous, and Americanized” and successful “by virtue of their hard work, thrift, family cohesion, and obedience” (87). The ambiguously positive stereotype famously materialized in 2011 in Amy Chua’s coining of the term Tiger Mother, lionizing Asian parenting as a conduit to mimicking the apparent educational and economic achievement of Asian Americans. Six years earlier, the title of a now out-of-print self-help book by Soo Kim Abboud and Jane Y. Kim cheerfully confirmed that Asian achievement was available to all: *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers—and How You Can Too* (New York: Berkley, 2005). The Asian American as model minority speaks to the paradox of racial interstitiality as neither Black nor white, but that sense of racial spatialization is likewise neither wholly here (local) nor there (global) as well (Bow 2010). While historians ably document the consolidation of the model minority image during the 1980s, historian Cindy I-Fen Cheng (2013) highlights its oscillation during the Cold War era: lauded as the “first” to break occupational barriers as proof of US meritocracy, Asian Americans were simultaneously represented as communist subversives disloyal to the democratic cause.
13. Public engagement with racial stereotyping relies on repetition as well as contiguity or proximity (Asian/library) and reversed valence (not negative but positive). It also involves cognitive and psychological structures: transductive reasoning and confirmation bias. Transductive reasoning involves overgeneralization: what applies to one applies to all. Gladwell’s confirmation bias is also revealed here, as *Asian American* selectively displaces *student* in a narrowed field of vision that might otherwise include all people in a library: rather, he *notices* Asian Americans in that space because it confirms a prior belief. Gladwell’s thesis on hard work and practice underlying success also relies on faulty transductive reasoning focused on Asian culture. Arbitrarily, he turns to the complexities of rice paddy farming in south China and the structure of the Chinese language to explain why Chinese Americans are good at math, ignoring restrictive US immigration laws that favored extending visas to those in occupations that require individuals to be *good at math* (Malcom Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* [New York: Little, Brown, 2008]). For a longer discussion of the structure and content of Asian American stereotyping, see Bow 2017. In explaining the educational attainment of first- and 1.5-generation Chinese and Vietnamese Americans, Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (2015) point to neoconservatives who likewise turn to essentialist explanations of culture, speculating that “there must be something unique about Asian culture and values that leads to these exceptional

educational outcomes” (67). They note that culture “does play a role, but not in the way that pundits often claim” (67). That is, Asian immigrants rely on ethnic networks for educational resources, import practices such as after-school tutoring, and pool family resources to benefit one member.

14. In *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon Patricia Holland (2012) asserts the primacy of the Black/white binary in US race relations: “I do want to insist stubbornly that the psychic life of racism can best be read in the context of the United States in the space where black and white intersect” (7). “Where black and white intersect” is indeed a potent site for exploring *Asian* racialization (Bow 2010). Yet racism also reveals itself in everyday, less dramatic intersections. Rather than inscribe a competitive framework around race relations, I would assert that the psychic life of racism as racist love is particularly illuminated where “Asian” intersects with the veiled discourses of white supremacy.
15. Freud’s “On Narcissism: An Introduction” ([1914] 1957, 122) provides a key insight into racist love as an affective structure illuminating racial attachment writ large. The “neurotic” who is unable to “attain his ego ideal” seeks a way back to self via romantic idealization: “He then seeks a way back to narcissism from his prodigal expenditure of libido upon objects by choosing a sexual ideal after the narcissistic type which shall possess the excellences to which he cannot attain. This is the cure by love.” The *model minority* image represents that “cure by love” by refracting back an idealized racial type that “possesses the excellences” that the nation fears it can no longer attain.
16. In “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915, 117), Freud reads feeling as the nervous system’s response to a stimulus that is both mental and somatic. “Feelings,” he suggests, “reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place.” At the millennium, these triggers have assumed racial form with violent outcomes. The flip sides of the coin that I engage here, racial hatred and racial love, derive from opposing instincts, for Freud, self-preservation and sexual pleasure, that stimulate “unpleasure” and pleasure (136). Psychoanalysis allows for an understanding of both overt and latent feeling prefiguring what would emerge as the field of social psychology. Exploring how feeling produces politicized classes of people lies at the heart of my critical method, one well mined in interdisciplinary Asian American studies.
17. Numerous scholars have remarked on the paradox surrounding the desire for difference in the face of neoliberal globalization’s erosion of the local. Philosopher Charles Taylor (2000, 367) noted that in “‘traditional’ societies, we were very different from each other. But once these earlier horizons have been lost, we shall all be the same.” Thus mass culture “publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of difference” (366). See also Harvey 2006 and Žižek 1997.
18. On early American consumption of Chinese imports, Caroline Frank (2011, 12) writes, “According to unanimous consensus among decorative arts scholars, there was one thing all these diverse socioeconomic groups had in common. That was an ignorance of the Chinese significance of the decorations on their dishes.” On

- Chinese commodities in the eighteenth century, see also D. Jacobson 1993 and Bush 2007. Chi-Ming Yang (2011) argues that eighteenth-century British representations of China were not simply based on Orientalist associations with barbarity, but on ideas of technology and civilization embodied by objects such as the umbrella.
19. On the term *Indo-chic*, see Maira 2007. On the implications surrounding global marketing of Indian style, see Moorti 2003.
  20. Around the height of Japan's economic rise in 1995, David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) coined the term *techno-Orientalism* to describe the underlying anxieties surrounding the projection of an inhuman future ushered in by a technologically advanced world of cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, and simulation. Consistent with earlier iterations of the Yellow Peril, techno-Orientalism denies the East as coeval with the West on both ends of the historical spectrum: it produces the East as archaically feudal yet technologically empowered with the potential to transcend Western modernity.
  21. On Asian American status ambiguity, see for example, my *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (2010) and Jennifer Ho's *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* (2015).
  22. The portraits evoke the macabre character Cousin Itt from Charles Addams's gothic cartoons. In Zhang's oeuvre as a whole, hair assumes heightened importance. Her drawings of "hairy objects," ordinary things made of hair—book, hamburger, toilet paper—speak to the simultaneity of beauty and repulsion. Elsewhere, twisted strands assume the form of a cyclone, evoking Zhang's connection to her Kansas home. Here, she is not Dorothy transported to a new land by a force of nature, but herself a destructive natural force.
  23. Regarding Asian American poetry, Jeon (2012, xxxi) engages "the calculated strangeness of avant-garde art as an occasion to emphasize the physical and visual oddness of racial constructs." My emphasis on "thingness" in the context of abstraction deviates a bit from Jeon's. I focus on mundane objects that not only represent intellectual, conceptual puzzles, but trigger racial feeling. For additional consideration of the relationship between race and abstraction, see also Philip Brian Harper's *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture* (2015).
  24. As a genre, fantasy is invested in drawing distinctions between mimetic and non-mimetic art, between realism and the imaginary. J. R. R. Tolkien ([1939] 1983, 132) expressed that distance by invoking a distinction between the "Primary World" and fantasy's "Secondary World." Gary Wolfe ([1982] 2004, 222) writes that "whatever we are to call 'fantasy' must first and foremost deal with the impossible." David Sandner (2004, 149) asserts that "what is wanted from fantasy is a *distancing from the ordinary*."
  25. Published in 2011 after decades of rampant consumerism in Japan, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* came on the heels of forced downsizing following Japan's financial crisis of 1997 and tsunami in 2011. The translation appearing in the United States in 2014 sold 1.6 million copies in two years and spawned a sequel, manga edition, and, by 2019, the

Netflix series *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*. Jocelyn McClurg, "Pure 'Magic': Marie Kondo Finally Hits No. 1," *USA Today*, January 14, 2016.

26. A bestseller in Japan, Tatsumi's *The Art of Discarding: How to Get Rid of Clutter and Find Joy* is relentlessly practical, almost hectoring in tone, even as it addresses the psychology of its audience: "Don't think you can't throw something away just because it can still be used. Change your mindset. Think to yourself, I've used it once, so I can throw it away"; Nagisa Tatsumi, *The Art of Discarding: How to Get Rid of Clutter and Find Joy*, trans. Angus Turvill (New York: Hachette, 2017), 126.
27. Of course, Kondo's eager embrace in the United States might be attributed to the fact that she deals only with the symptom of unbridled consumerism, not its cause. Her extensive coverage in the US press (*Atlantic*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New Yorker*, *Slate*, *Vogue*) portrays her on a continuum of strangeness from tiny and childlike to slightly unhinged and mentally unbalanced. She drew the ire of professional organizers for privileging discarding over organizing: one of her chapters is subtitled, "Storage Experts Are Hoarders." Response to the KonMari Method at the National Association of Professional Organizers convention in the United States was apparently laced with racist xenophobia; a *New York Times* reporter conveyed the most mild mannered of these, noting an American organizer's assessment: "It's a book if you're a 20-something Japanese girl and you live at home and you still have a bunch of your Hello Kitty toys and stuff." Quoted in Taffy Brodesser-Akner, "Marie Kondo and the Ruthless War on Stuff," *New York Times Magazine*, July 6, 2016.
28. Stuart Picken (1994, 363) defines *kami* as the "object of reference in Shinto" to avoid extrapolation to "gods" in Western contexts. See also Holtom 1922 and Nakamaki 2003. Kondo (2014) reveals that she worked for years as a "Shinto shrine maiden," or *miko*. The *miko* is now "most probably a university student collecting a modest wage in this part-time position," whose duties likely involve selling souvenirs and fortunes (cited in Kuly 2003, 201).
29. The relationship between owner and possession is nonetheless hierarchical: items are privileged in relation to proximity to the human body. This philosophy is articulated in Kondo's sequel, *Spark Joy*: "Items such as forks or undergarments, which come in direct contact with delicate parts of our bodies, should be treated as a rank above the rest whenever possible" (2016, 183).
30. For Brown (1998, 942), things serve as the *petit objet a*, the third term that mediates self-other relations: "The hybrid object, then, may be figured as a participant in the intersubjective constitution of reality."
31. Cited in "Kara Walker: The Melodrama of 'Gone with the Wind,'" *art21*, November 2011, <https://art21.org/read/kara-walker-the-melodrama-of-gone-with-the-wind/>.
32. Rachel C. Lee (2014a, 40) aptly summarizes the value assigned to Asian American literature: "Broadly speaking, Asian American texts have been valuable to a revisionist U.S. literary canon precisely because of their testament to the active racial exclusion of Asians. Belying the promise of color-blind political equality, this exclusion occurs through legal bars to immigration, educational segregation, labor

stratification . . . criminalization as enemy aliens and spies, and social and psychic wounding through harmful stereotypes.”

33. For an early engagement with concerns surrounding liberal cooptation of the field, see San Juan 1991. For more current assessments, see Chiang 2009; C. Lee 2013; and Ho 2015.
34. This question was more recently posed by Michael Omi in a paper delivered at the 2019 Association for Asian American Studies.

#### CHAPTER 1. Racial Transitional Objects

Kathleen Horning, personal communication, Madison, WI, September 8, 2016; I extend my deepest gratitude to her for some of the primary sources here. An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “Racial Abstraction and Species Difference: Anthropomorphic Animals in ‘Multicultural’ Children’s Literature,” *American Literature* 91, no. 2 (2019): 323–56.

1. For an overview of animal stories in children’s literature, see Kimberley Reynolds’s *Children’s Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011), which gives a history by type and use from morality tales such as *Aesop’s Fables* to point of view tales such as *Black Beauty*.
2. The characters appear in *Richard Scarry’s Storybook Dictionary* (New York: Golden Book, 1966).
3. See Dare Wright, *Edith and Big Bad Bill* (New York: Random House, 1968); Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain, *The Berenstain Bears’ New Neighbors* (New York: Random House, 1994); and Gary Soto and Susan Guevara, *Chato Goes Cruising* (New York: Putnam, 2005).
4. Mickenberg and Vallone (2011) note other key moments in the emergence of children’s literature as a discipline: the creation of a juvenile division at MacMillan in 1919, the establishment of the Newbery Medal in 1922, and the founding of *Horn Book Magazine* in 1924.
5. Cited in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which abolished school segregation in 1954, the Clarks’ doll test was hailed as a watershed that established evidence toward the link between segregation and its psychological toll on African American children (Clark and Clark 1947). In the decades following, the doll test was subsequently challenged for its “forced choice” question structure (Holmes 1995; Bernstein 2011). The Clarks’ findings could not be replicated under other laboratory conditions; for example, Phyllis A. Katz (1976) questioned whether the doll measure was adequate and found that replicating the test with a choice of four dolls did not produce the same negative self-esteem outcome as the Clarks’ original study.
6. Mary Phelps and Margaret Wise Brown, “Lucy Sprague Mitchell,” Lucy Sprague Mitchell Papers, 1878–1967, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
7. Edith Thacher Hurd, eulogy for Lucy Sprague Mitchell, delivered at the New School for Social Research, New York City, December 1, 1967, Sprague Mitchell Papers.