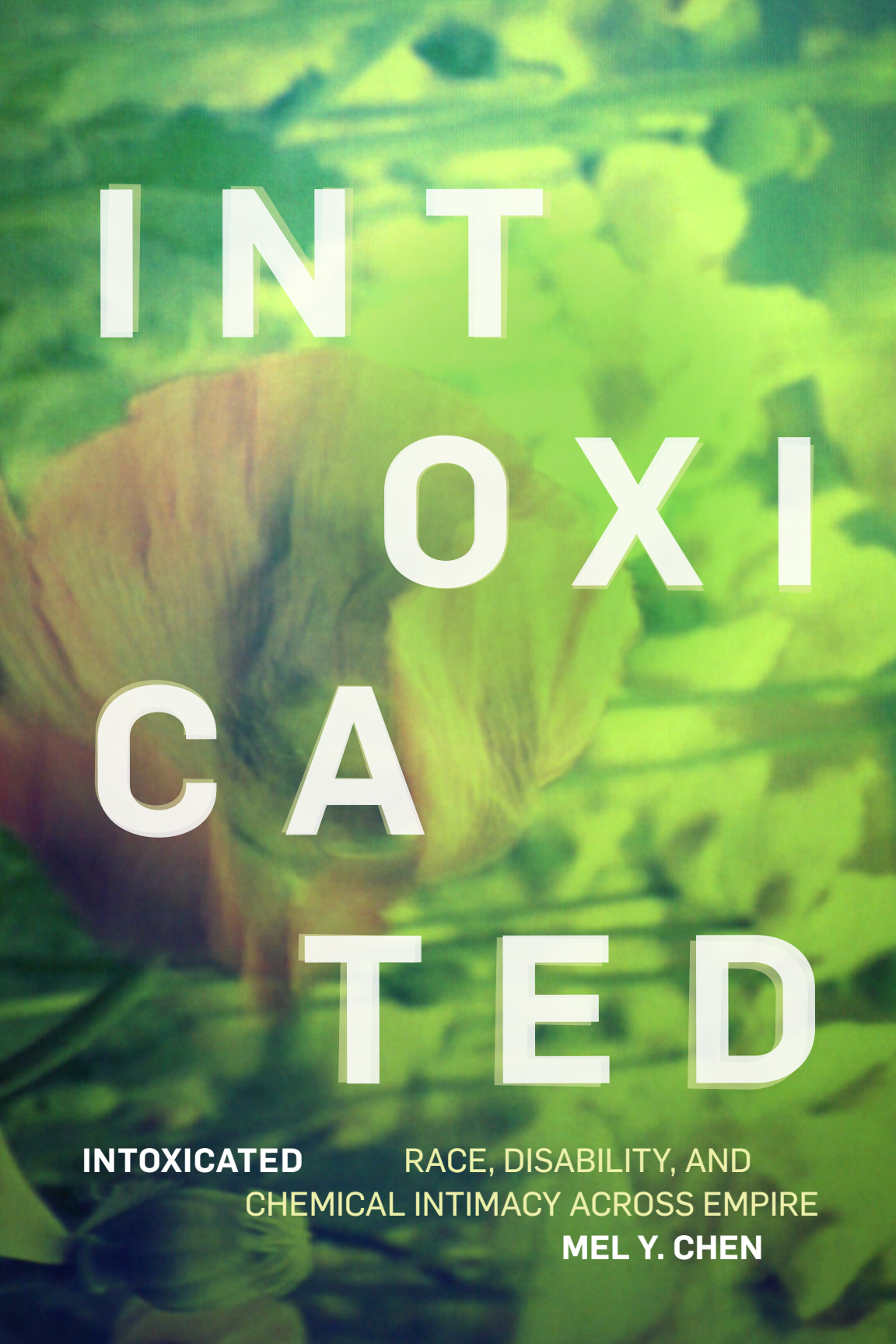

INTOXICATED RACE, DISABILITY, AND CHEMICAL INTIMACY ACROSS EMPIRE

MEL Y. CHEN

INTOXICATED

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A series edited by Mel Y. Chen, Ezekiel J. Dixon-Román, and Jasbir K. Puar

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For Julia, my person

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INTRODUCTION INTOXICATIONS, INTIMACIES, AND INTERFORMATIONS

This is a strange book; welcome. Please know, at the outset, that I wrote this book for several reasons, only some of them rational. Perhaps bearing the intractable burden of a second book,[1] it is written with both openness and fracture, moments of novel legibility even as the text reaches for different registers, tries to set different prints. I still follow what seems inevitably to be a characteristic mode of transdisciplinary scholarship with a dance between density and touch.

Intoxicated attends to the fibrillations of what we might call an affective nexus between race and disability—not as they are, or should have been, but as they seem to become. And they do become; even if racial or disabled *identity* can be experienced as permanent or immutable, scholars in both major specialties know the immense complexity in their lives as notions. Neither is given, not even when historically situated; rather, each is unstable, protean;

each is also given extraordinary potency. Is the race/disability nexus I attend to a peculiar one? Perhaps, given the spatiotemporal paths I choose to traverse here, which I visit more than a hundred years ago but are still ever-present in England, Australia, and beyond, and given that the global enactment of the nineteenth-century British commonwealth was itself peculiar. The archival cases that I bring forward here—particularly from a mainstream biopolitical imagination of contemporary life—might also appear fairly peculiar when examined in queer, disability, and critical race modes of thinking.

At some signal moments in the book, I turn to the nineteenth century as a way to make sense of contemporary entanglements of intoxication, race, disability, and sexuality—what I am calling "chemical intimacy"—for it is in the nineteenth century that many of the dramas seen today were formatively staged and given a kind of patterned shape. In two of the historical precedents considered in this book—the case of "mongoloid idiocy" introduced in 1866 in England and the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act from 1897 in Queensland, Australia—one can perceive the presence of quantified and qualified raciality. In the first, proto-Asian and white raciality as viewed through European scientific categorization appear together in an intellectually disabled person. In the second are fairly insistent deployments of Chinese and Aboriginal–Torres Strait Islander as well as white raciality primarily in relation to questions of racial integrity through sexual reproduction. If racial essences or materials are present, raciality consists in how the encounter between racial beings is given *reconstituting* meaning, and what additional potency is lent by the *consequential* (non-incidental) presence of intoxication in both scenes.

The need to investigate ongoing interactions between race and disability cannot be overstated, as scholarly work and many recent activist movements—disability justice and the Movement for Black Lives among them—have helped to make clear. Environmental justice movements of all kinds have, furthermore, made the point that racialized and Indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly made to absorb environmental harms (and their associated disabilities, to the extent that they rise to thresholds and priorities of identification), often over generations. And if the occupation of a racially gendered position is enough to discredit someone intellectually, then the dyad between race and disability is well entrenched indeed. But exactly how is it that some forms of disability themselves bear distinctly racial histories? I wouldn't allow that one just falls out of the other, as many still claim about race—that race is simply derivative of class, or that one is simply a nuance of another.[2] Nor would I insist on the uselessness of one or another term, as if disability were simply "white" or race

were simply, at this point, institutional; I continue to hear versions of both. Rather, I accept that race and disability live with deep mutual entanglement; and I have also spent too long in these weeds to call any of this obvious or formulaic. There is, and was, far too much traffic, too much mysterious exchange.

This book adds itself to these voices plumbing the entanglement, with a plea that—owing to its mode of knowledge making—perhaps you may see fit to take note of resonances rather than seek out thorough coverage, resonances in surprising places. This is a book that disavows the consolidated areal metaphor of coverage, of thorough aboutness—another form of cripping in a place where transdisciplinary objects already push exhaustive diligence out of practical reach.[3] One aboutness that has surprised me, however, is the insistent presence of the university: in many ways this book concerns itself with the politics of knowledge in the academy. Perhaps in response, I'm letting go here of a thoroughly, neatly tight grasp on a form of scholarship that grates hard on its material, too hard anymore. Instead, that will come and go with the moment; read what you like; take in the proximities that you seek. Included in what I am letting go is a sense of thoroughness or readerly currency in citational practice, and I write this with some apprehension; to speak to this question directly, even if reparative citation refuses to accumulate canonical intellectual property, it still attempts to give rightful credit to names and traditions. But non-thoroughness isn't only a directed political curation of the type that Katherine McKittrick would dub citational "erasure" (following Sara Ahmed's announced programmatic refusal to cite white men), nor is it, in McKittrick's further historicizing of Ahmed's intervention, a longer-established, clear-visioned black studies praxis or method "that helps us, collectively, understand and navigate and perhaps undo the wrongness of the world . . . not about who belongs and who does not belong in the index or the endnotes; rather, it is how we, collectively, are working against racial apartheid and different kinds and types of violence."[4] The wish is there to build citational company in shared reparative spirit; neurodivergence however queers even anti-imperial citation, because accretive iteration itself runs out of time, giving way to agitated reading, slow thinking, agitated writing, slow reading, agitated thinking, slow writing. And sometimes the fog doesn't clear.[5]

There is one *seemingly* unlikely place where the nexus between race and disability vibrates, has vibrated, quite resoundingly, and yet is perhaps one of the most transparent participants in becoming, for it represents nothing but change. Change that tips into damage, or threatens abandonment, spiritual escape, or even revolution, or all three. That place is toxicity—or intoxication. Both toxicity and intoxication hover around disability (as intoxicated

incapacity or depressed capacity, for example); and because of the chemical intimacies attached to race, they also hover around that. If you join me for these archival explorations, you will witness intoxication's explosive role in two scenes that became immensely relevant for the disability–race nexus, and in very different ways. The telling that is most attendant to history's abuses is that oppressive policy and settler colonial imagination made it a likelihood that Indigenous land and the surrounds of many racial others would be most exposed to toxic chemicals.

And this is true. I also had some different questions. I wanted to know how the inedible soup of illusion and design sloshed and cavorted into beloved beings, altering their lives and deaths forever. I wanted to describe beyond doubt the doubling effect in which chemical abuses were followed by discrediting of the beings so affected. You can call that racism, settler colonialism, and it is; but it also has more to teach me. I delved into a nineteenth-century historical archive (which appears in chapter 1), that of John Langdon Down, because I finally had to face it, after years of disbelief, that someone could gamble, and so ostentatiously, to make connections that had no business being made. Later I realized how ordinary and in-line his scholarly gesture was, and how ordinary it might still seem today, but with a few tweaks. And I thought about the making of connections that had no business being made and wondered about that; that's when I decided to look at Down's archive more closely. Which connections had no business being made? It was no longer an example of "look how bad it got," but of "think twice, it's right here next to us."

But all the above still discusses intoxication like it's only a violent reflex of pollution, coming on like a wave from elsewhere. I also wonder about what it brings in spite of itself, and how it has been welcomed, even desired. In other words, I want to consider here intoxication's own capabilities—the ways it seems to enable taking leave of a flattening, even murderous present, to a temporal and sensory otherwise, to a place of tolerability. Is there a way in which it is matched, even suited, to the resonant natures of race: that racial beings often feel so much more spectacular than, so much more than, what is alleged?

Intoxications

Besides the fraught and mobile *toxic* in *intoxicated*, my subtitle highlights the terms *chemical* and *intimacy*. This introduction would be the place where one might define them. Yet I have always resented definitions. They distort, they territorialize, and they feel compulsory, particularly to someone who couldn't easily feel their way to the center of a word. My training as a cogni-

tive linguist—which I sought in part because of the elusive mystery that language represented, and the promise of what I took as word puzzles—has lent "professional" heft to my suspicion that definitions are too prescriptive, not allowing for the semantic play and richness of, say, metonymies, subordinated or peculiar meaning; who's to say that that over there is not more important? Sometimes, but only sometimes, "subordinated metonymies" are also the affirmation of subordinated knowledges. At other times they mark the possibility of an experiment of contiguity without propriety. My investment as a teacher and scholar has been to decenter approaches to learning that take some simplified definition as a fulcrum, because it then delimits what can happen. A book's introduction is usually the location where an author's terms are provisionally sketched, but true to form I begin *Intoxicated* obliquely. Besides representing a kind of chemical intimacy, toxicity subtends the entire project, and it is explicitly consequential for each of the historical touchstones studied in this book, including how they are approached.

If we were to try to reflect on means by which things come to operate, then toxicity behaves like an affect, an affect from which both toxin and intoxication can also be derived. But why not turn to primary references from medicine or science? Firstly, medicine or science cannot be primary arbiters in this book, even if they inevitably participate in my thinking. Both domains—diverse and contradictory as each is—suffer from heavy capitalization and the burden of interest. To take one example that has stayed with me all these years, Michelle Murphy made clear in their book on sick building syndrome that early versions of toxic thresholds in the regulation of chemicals in the United States were defined only with regard to one type of ill for human being—cancer—and even then, with the caveat that such definitions must not interrupt the flow of the chemical industry.[6] Such invested policy suggests that both the designated-toxic and the designated-nontoxic cannot help but be equally implicated in chemicality. How we then define where chemicality begins and ends becomes not a question of quantification, threshold, scientific trace, or material history alone. This is important, because some of the scenes in this book are about domains that have been securely established as a chemical absence, or seem not to be concerned with chemicals at all. While I am more interested in the management of matter that could become lively, whether living or not, I remain drawn to scenes in which chemicality could be not only a racial allegation but a constitutional appliance.

Whatever scientific definitions of toxicity I am sympathetic to are outrun by what I would argue are the forces of communal emotion, government, and economic policy; as a comparator from this contemporary moment, consider

the invested, quite incompatible definitions for the COVID-19 virus (*not quite a toxin, behaves like a toxin, behaves like an affect*): the scientific community's or epidemiologist's rendering of the coronavirus, versus the right-wing imagination of a hostile bioterrorism from Chinese people (the "China virus"). Affect is agnostic with regard to the material bindings of its operands, which is precisely what makes affect a punt for some thinkers but useful here for the surprises it reveals. Toxicity generally is taken as a severe affect, one that frequently threatens death. But in the United States, intoxication, differently, seems to carry a milder aspect. Whereas the term *toxicity* advertises severity and the threat of permanence, the term *intoxication* suggests inconsequentiality, everyday tolerability and easy recoverability, and carries sensibilities of freedom, gentle excess, or moderation—with the exception that *legal* intoxication might yield blunted responsibility for severe harms caused by the intoxicated.

But one of the most harmful aspects of oversight is to consider toxicity as a unipolar phenomenon—almost as if to follow its cue of exception—rather than as something rampantly interwoven with other phenomena. In this book I map some of the ways that toxicity, disability, and race live—and have lived—together, in rich exchange, in what could be considered an affective approach to select scenes of chemicality, the toxic spectacular along with the toxic ordinary going back to the turn of the twentieth century. The forms of coexistence, communion, and multipronged governance mapped here illustrate the hostile and sometimes beautiful confusion happening all at once, and reveal forms of becoming that do not hew to fantasied integrities achievable only in sites of advantage. That is, the colonialities that are sometimes identified as so neat as to be simply diagnostic are just one of many points of failure.

In some ways this book extends the argument that a state archive and its controlling fantasy are superseded, challenged, by its referents, living or dead. I take the argument further to profile means of art and worldmaking that occur within and nearby the educational sphere; that include and even embrace forms of intoxication that not only debunk traditional forms of order, but also allow the seeking of forms of collective indistinction, restfulness in non-masterful partiality, vibrations of different, truer coherence.

Toxicity also takes on a particular vibrancy in relation to debility, a term whose relevance to this project has been made profoundly available by Jasbir K. Puar.[7] I find that disability and debility remain in vivid exchange, exchange that is more complex than polarity or binarity, and that care about the conditions of their interaction is important. If disability has a significant adherence to administrative being, then debility tells of the conditions of, or forewarning, disablement (that may never be recognized as such), including

statistical materializations that are beholden to necropolitical arrangements. Debility is the secret behind the cultivated fantasy of the autonomous imperial, neoliberal body that falls all too neatly into place for well-ensconced structural conditions best positioned to take advantage of legal measures like the American Disabilities Act.

This book's approach to toxicity, understood in its capacious, expanded sense as a form of troubled, changing, or compelling intimacy, allows the exploration of repulsive political affects and dynamics wrought through a fantasy of chemical exchange. In this approach, substances—even nonmaterial but deeply consequential entities such as the bodies of finance capital—are carriers of political meaning and, in their effectivity and rationalization, and their shared occupation of medicalized discourse, lend themselves to embodied logics, sharing more rather than less with what are understood as "actual" toxins. Furthermore, distinctions between "intoxication" and "toxicity" reveal themselves to be non-neutral differences that articulate through affects and temporalities.

Intimacies

Much like any form of influence, perhaps, toxicity rearranges matter—at least as far as whatever is deemed "intoxicated" may be concerned, meaning that it also rearranges the world. It can kill a body, or affect a group. It also has the potential to modify feeling itself, whether in terms of emotion, or its broader analogue, affect. The sense of ensemble can shift, altering bonds, even the nature of kin itself, including how kinning itself is done. It is important to note that although a threat or alteration (indeed, queering) of reproductivity is the most obvious aspect of sexuality to attend questions of toxicity (such as species or human familial survival in a polluted environment), there are many other factors relating to the movement of a group through time and its means of being affected; associated questions of inheritance, transfer, and gender also become exposed to queer possibility. Furthermore, the intimacies—the active proximities and resonant alignments wrought by "toxic substances" that are brought in line with bodily sites and systems—are many; but they extend well beyond the individuated body, particularly when they become a matter of governance, a management of chemicality that works across communities, across populations.

Some kinds of affections linger; they can become habitual, too. I have written about intoxication before. The concluding two chapters of my first book, *Animacies*, explored the affective worlds linking pollutants, including those

categorized as toxins under certain conditions (lead, mercury), and their dangerously proximate (nominally) human bodies further marked by conditions of relative vulnerability to forms of structural and other violence.[8] There, while traveling the affective depths of the administration of lead, I began to appreciate not only the truly prodigious contemporary reach of intoxication logics, but also their concentration around—and underneath—the modern categories of race and disability, each of which has taken on an administrative function in addition to its layered hauntings. It was not enough to take each as an ostensible integrity upon itself, however, because they have long been intertwined, interconstituted, partly through the destructive tools of colonialism: in particular, the securing of administrative benefit through the fictitious measurement and also spiritual indictment of capacity to secure what could then be presented as a purportedly immanent achievement of the circumscribed human—the governor, the propertied, the worthy.[9]

In the time since I concluded that research, I developed an even greater sense of the importance of the transnational, in all its senses, to a historically textured apprehension of race or disability. Coming to terms with the fabric of the transnational lives of race, time, and disability meant locating some moments in which race and disability's historical mutual imbrications were traceable in their generativity, especially where the status of one or another as an administrative category was still inchoate. It remains important, certainly, not to reanimate race as a unified abstraction without living specificity, without living meaning, unless it had consequence precisely as such an abstraction.

Why does intoxication often lurk in scenes where race and disability come together? Because, first and foremost, it is a means of "constitution by policy," not only an attempted disablement of a population but a tamping down of what is imagined to be a "cleanly" cognitive mode of resistance by legal or other means of distinction. But also: Because it is taken as spiritual, metaphysically liberating, even cosmic; because it involves the disordering of things, sometimes by blurring, sometimes by rendering spectacular; because it is worldmaking, and world collapsing.

As I argue, intoxication could never be taken as innocuous from the point of view of governing. In turn of the twentieth-century Australia, Aboriginals' "protection" from opium's ills, for the Queensland legislators, was but a posture for the implementation of drastic punitive and radical forms of economic expropriation, containment, and gendered and sexual control. Disability, in its turn, appears not only as a threatened result of racial mixing (as deficiency or the weakening of white stock) but also in other modes of constitution that are particular to the intoxicatory scenes of each of the archival nineteenth-

century cases in this book. Note: I call these "archival" only because they were partly touchable through archives.

In particular, there is something about opium's temporal characteristics as a drug (and in its particular formulations in England, as well as in Queensland) that interacted in strange and compelling ways with the temporal characteristics of the *images* of slowness, proto-disabilities in the form of intellectual delay and Indigenous workers' purported "malingering," that were arguably undergoing description in London and Queensland, respectively. And it becomes clear, too, that race and disability in their eclectic configurations could not be considered as segregated integrities, but as interacting participants *within* the shifting integrities understood to be provisionally human individuals or people of some kind, subject to overlapping, if not identical, regimes of judgment and manipulation.

In chapter 1, "Slow Constitution: Down Syndrome and the Logic of Development," I begin by tracing the antecedents of slowness in theories of race as well as disability. Moving to my first archival study, the case of mongoloid idiocy (Down syndrome), I extend the focus on constitution to consider what I call racial tuning and chemical suitability, and understand environmental injustice (and environmental privilege) in terms of "constitution by policy." One condition for this suitability in Down's case might well have had to do with the disseminating knowledge, including sensory knowledge, of opium's effects in China—and in Chinatowns in London. The constitution by environmental substances, or environmentalization, can be found in the popular contemporary depictions of slow-moving zombies and their attachment to signifiers of urban decay, as well as capital indebtedness. Slowness is indeed an artifice of capitalist modernity's and neoliberalism's self-imagination: with the delineation of speed and efficiency come the identification of what they would overcome or outdo. But the resistances to such speeding orders are complicated and often compromising. If academic labor has been subjected to increased speeds (and it has, differently across the categories of employ), attempts to modulate such forces are found in attempts to outline gently resistant (yet still neoliberally aligned) and individually "sustainable" practices like those found in a recent book entitled *Slow Professor*.[10] Much as these moments of coming-to allow for improved forms of self-care, this management approach skims the surface of speed's global casualties.

But slowness is also an imputed characteristic of intellectual disability, which is all too often unjustly projected as productive time's other; and slowness furthermore is a feature of reclaimed, anticapitalist crip time: Retorts the person with muscle weakness or brain fog, "I'll finish it when I finish it." And

again, slowness is a feature of the global imagination of the relative development of nation-states, which has a legacy relationship to colonial economies. These are not unrelated: consider the long-burnished destructive fictions that continue today, of the indolent, languorous, unproductive racialized worker from southern climes; or that of the mechanically repetitive, asocial, subhuman Asian that has been produced from the point of view of US illusions of labor. Racism often has a polarizing temporality, and in this chapter I discuss the insistent *decelerations* of racialized chemical intimacies.

In chapter 2, "Agitation as a Chemical Way of Being," I lay out agitation's primacy in such seemingly alienated domains as Western biomedicine, education, and political agency and expression. I explore agitation's underexplored valence as a chemically intimate or multiply intoxicated way of being, and move to entitle the racialized gestural lives of disabled, including environmentally harmed, people, as legitimately political acts alongside the choreographed gestures of muscular, avidly nondisabled protest. I briefly revisit the scene of opium in China, historicizing beyond and after the nationalist actions of Lin Tse Hsu, to break out the diverse roles it played in bodily politics and regime change. Then, against the temptation I have laid out previously to revalorize agitation as having potential for resistive, rather than delegitimated, being, I turn to explore the possibilities (and abuses) of white agitation, in particular the forms of white violence and spatial aggressions made so apparent in scenes of police violence and the January 6, 2021, occupation of the US Capitol. I conclude with a turn to "nonhuman" agitation, that of ash, in a commissioned work of Badtjala artist Fiona Foley that is installed at the Brisbane Magistrates Court in Queensland, Australia.

Chapter 3, "Unlearning: Intoxicated Method," continues with Foley's work, while first considering the question of differential being and emergent agitation in the university. Foley's *Black Opium* installation in the Queensland State Library stages a site of learning kin to, but precisely not located in, the university proper. I continue with an attention to the intense bodyminded choreographies of the university where it comes to its unreal demands on cognition, juxtaposing it with the everydayness of brain fog. Michelle Murphy, in "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations," writes, particularly in mind of Indigenous life: "Studying alterlife requires bursting open categories of organism, individual, and body to acknowledge a shared, entangling, and extensive condition of being with capitalism and its racist colonial manifestations."[11] Inspired by Murphy's injunction to do better than recycling and thus reinstituting damage in chemical study, I attempt to profile and honor Foley's

lead rather than following the extractive script, mindful of my own ongoing accountabilities.

I close with a turn to intoxicated method as a justified mode of (dis)engagement; it is a mode of unlearning in part precisely through the ways it allows metaphysical suspension or worldmaking already established. This is not so much a question of drug voluntarism, though it could be, as it is a form of "(in)toxic(ated) historical presentism." In a time of pandemic and wildfires, it is not only the ash shearing out of place; climate change is throwing spaces and places asunder in ways that outscale the habitual temporalities of the manageable for a critical majority. One of the consequences is the divide between private and public in relation to the management of viral and ash particles, and its inutility outside of the schemes of the propertied. I extend some of these thoughts in my brief "Afterwards: Telling the End Not to Wait," on "edge times" and the climate experiment that draws all in its clasp. I consider a queer-crip imaginary as proffered (in my reading, opportunistically) by artist Mai-Thu Perret, in a 2007 work titled *Underground*, rich with ambivalences (as to value) and an explicit discussion of (un)learning. I conclude with a meditation on the underground, affirming and perhaps foregrounding the role of racialized debility-disability in furnishing what Kandice Chuh has called "illiberal, uncommon sensibilities."[12]

Here I feel the need to add a further caution to my approach to both race and disability, marked as troubled terms for me, terms not only historically dynamic but also worth reworking. Beyond sociology, where the term *racialization* refers to the ascription of racial characteristics to a group not otherwise known as such, it is now fairly common interdisciplinarily to use this term to express the ways in which a structure has become, in some way, internally organized, informed, by race or racial difference. But what does it really mean for one notion to inform another—or, taking a different manipulation, to comprise it? Ever attentive to language and its sly relation to materiality, in this book I choose to take race and disability as "notions," not concepts or categories or words, because they no longer feel like any of the latter; they are ideational *and* lexical but not exclusively so, because they cannot map without materiality and they are certainly not separable from it.

A "notion," drawing on feminized and craft associations, can refer to a token commodity (a usage that originated chiefly in the United States in the nineteenth century in the craft arts and that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, referred to: "Small wares, esp. cheap, useful articles. Now chiefly: spec. haberdashery; buttons, hooks, ribbon, thread, etc."), whose minor existence has nevertheless an effervescence of meaning, a creative potential that

may or may not be fulfilled, an effervescence whose effect may come from the very opacity and temporality of its constitution.[13] It may sound deeply inadequate for me to state that on their own, notions, particularly the racial and disability notions under formation in the nineteenth century, are fairly meaningless (small wares, "cheap") unless assembled, creatively, with other pieces. This means they cannot stand alone, they cannot be comprehensive, and are dependent. Notions best approximate, to me, race and disability, and are what, through either solidity or intangible evanescence, we engage at our own risk. In her excellent book *Fantasies of Identification*, Ellen Samuels called the nineteenth-century appropriation of early biological characterizations "fantasies of identification," which, she wrote, were "far less concerned with individual identity than with placing that individual within an identifiable group."[14]

Chapters 1 and 2 are organized around states (and archives) that showcase some of the purportedly negative consequences of disabling intoxication, ones that I instead re-narrate as generative facets of racialized chemical intimacy: slowness and agitation. Chapter 3 examines what can be done with the epistemological uncertainties that arise from the clash between unevenly secured civic being and the ongoing material experiments of modernity, what I call unlearning, itself an inherently experimental, anticipatory, and unknowing mode.

Interformations

To end with "unlearning" is not only to valorize and commend the challenging intricacies and promises of agitative art and being with the inherent creativeness of racialized disability, or crip of color being, or the textual forms of undisciplined, transdisciplinary conjuncture and conjecture. I am an academic—and, like many of my colleagues, also neurodivergent, even if I have an unstable relationship with the linguistic signification of this term.[15] Ending with unlearning is also to insist on the seemingly contradictory reason I have so far remained *in* the academy: to help or at least give permission to my students to unlearn the modes of the university that make sensations or assertions of present-day colonialities feel forbidden, that deny colonized or mad positionalities entirely, or shape beings in ways that make them unrecognizable to themselves and their loved ones; to allow for all the ways of being cognitive and also noncognitive, affective, passionate, offscale, and lively, that are disallowed in these stringently classed and racialized intellectual bodily cultures; to allow for necessary work to thrive. Where life has felt possible in the university—and it has, in spite of itself, by virtue of those who also live here—I want for it to feel

livable, and to make it more livable still. For that to happen, whether or not knowledge accumulates, unlearning must continue.

My hope in this book is not only to complement a broad revisitation of two archival nineteenth-century moments—moments that retain some awful presence in their legacy, as Fiona Foley, one of the artists whose work has been pivotal to my thinking, makes clear with her work—but also to, along the way, point to the famously protean materialities of a race and disability that in no way could be isolated from one another in the nineteenth century, and arguably still cannot be today, as Moya Bailey and Izetta Mobley outline from a Black feminist perspective.[16] To that end, *Intoxicated* extends the lessons of what might have been called "moments of interformation" toward more contemporary registers, thinking about the ways agitation finds racial and disabled articulation under consideration of environmental harm, white aggression, political resistance, and ordinariness, and about the overlapping intoxicatory unravelings, or unlearnings, of the strictures fomented under the names of race and disability.

In examining legacy effects of historic traces around race and disability, I feel respectful kinship with Chris Bell, including his edited volume *Blackness and Disability*, Alondra Nelson, Leroy Moore, Ellen Samuels, Nirmala Erevelles, Jasbir Puar, Sami Schalk, Moya Bailey, and Therí Alyce Pickens, and many, many other people from whom I continue to learn, among them my editorial co-conspirators in *Crip Genealogies*, as well as the authors within that volume.[17] It feels critically important, also, to follow the impulse we followed in *Crip Genealogies* to look beyond works on "disability" toward works that may not self-announce as being "about" disability in critical ethnic studies, critical race work, Black studies, Asian American studies, Latinx studies, Indigenous studies, and more. Many historical works, of course, do not find easy placement in modern disciplinary and content-field-based nominations. To overlook these works is a practice of injustice, and my intention has been to work across and in relation as best as I am capable and as I learn.

At the same time, it requires more—the hard work of forms of alliance—to reach beyond a field that recommends you stay within its clear boundaries, and to reach in a gesture that may carry the condescension of false inclusion or overwrite. This is not to say, on the other hand, that I have been easily claimed by disability studies, for I suspect some of what I do is dyspeptic to the field. I have longed especially for more kin to think about the troubles and intersections of Asian being and becoming in relation to disability (thanking Cynthia

Wu, James Kyung-jin Lee, Lydia Brown, Eunjung Kim, Natalia Duong, Michelle Huang, Jina Kim, Mimi Khúc, Chad Shomura, Leslie Bow, and many, many more). Even Asian being that also isn't Asian, as we will see: Wu writes, "The challenge for scholars as this line of inquiry moves forward, especially in the field of Asian American studies, is to explore how these interpretive lenses can be repurposed to go beyond—but not transcend—a predictable archive."[18] This book is my effort to continue to think alongside Asianness as a non-isolate and as something that notionally and materially is deeply entangled with other forms of being, and other positionalities, in ways that are both beautiful and devastating.

What are called "race" and "disability" are notions that sum—into labile, responsive form—massive distributions of being, sensation, and matter, distributions with interested histories. Affect studies suggests that if the calculus of race and disability often seems simple or formulaic in terms of legislation, labor practices, or public policy, what it reveals under examination, even within these domains, are deeply contingent, highly specific formulations that only come to seem entrenched and repetitive. It is true not only of race, but of disability, that the scopes of their deployment are endlessly flexible and appropriative. I have thus felt compelled to think in relation to both notions ever since sensing the vastness of their complicity with the mechanisms of capitalism and, by association, education, which inevitably articulates (even if complexly) into majoritarian society and its embroilments.

And yet: At the present moment, both race and disability seem to risk, especially in the fixing language of diversity, being institutionalized as orthogonal in nature to one another rather than co-constitutive. This has resulted in feckless and further harmful administrative "solutions" to diversity problems of insisting, on the one hand, as many US universities have over the last couple of devastating years, that a reckoning about Black lives is possible while looking askance at a history of medical and environmental injustice, or asserting that disability in all its variations during the COVID-19 pandemic could be handled—handily—by turning to the American Disabilities Act, which was never supposed to be anything more than a legal device to encourage or advance compliance. And it is a great disservice to take disability as one and the same with damage, or as a nonintersectional monolith, alien from other more familiar measures, an invocation that I also regularly see. And so, rather than a strikingly unipolar compliance, which in many cases serves as a last resort, I am deeply interested in intimate alliance and its many forms; a willingness to hold many factors while they remain supple, dynamic, and in constant change in relation to one another. My ultimate wish is that of common thriving.

In this spirit, attention not only to the form of knowledge making as method, but also to the *presentation* of knowledge, is important for the writing of this book. Who will read it? How will they want, or need, or wish, to encounter it? How will the forms of address work, as they are perceived? If universal accessibility remains an elusive goal, particularly due to conflicting access needs, what choices does one make? Are there ways to offer choices even in a book that is purportedly linear, in at least a core sense?

Many years ago, when I was midway in my writing of my dissertation, a young colleague asked me, "So what is your argument?" and I promptly found myself both speechless and ashamed. I think that I gently negated the idea that I had one, amid neuroqueer confusion, racial diffidence; I now wonder that someone cared to have the work encapsulated in a sentence or two. She went on to ask, "Well, what is your discipline?" and to my again mumbled description of linguistics and queer studies, she then retorted, "Everyone has a discipline." I remain surprised that one could be certain that things work this way. Even if I got lost in periphrasis, the overarching feeling was that in my mind there was *so much going on*, as well as, of course, a worry about its contents, that perhaps there was nothing of worth there. Is this just neuroqueerness? Brain fog? Interdisciplinarity? Transdisciplinarity? Field specificity is a disciplined want. Looking back, I think rather that on top of what might be called a generalized brain fog, I also had *many* arguments by virtue of the intellectual bridging I was trying to do between fields, and by virtue of not ruling out relevances—and that also meant that disciplinarily I could feel that I had *none*. What a strange load to sit with. Throughout this book, I detail and think from moments in which method is not only confounded, but changed by unexpected circumstance.

I have been struck by this interminable battle in someone who is a seasoned interdisciplinarian, between thinking I have "something," but in such multiplicity that it could be untrainable, and "nothing," not for lack of ideas, but because it feels so diffuse. Kind of like brain fog. But better. Or not better, as the book will eventually claim. This "something or nothing"—this treatment of ideas, or arguments, as fleetingly shaped masses—is not terribly different, as it turns out, from past and present experiences of genderedness, or intersectionally ample being, at the very least when I have tried to understand myself against a national culture or bureaucratic backdrop (not a recommended daily assay for people like us, even if it is required), or, most poignantly, the strictures around a kind of aestheticized minimalism even within intersectional or otherwise sympathetic domains among academic intellectuals. This means that unless you can motivate the inclusion of a particular factor for your argument,

it isn't "necessary" to write about, it sits out of place. This happened in relation to queerness for a student for whom I participated in a defense recently: despite the passionate inclusion of queerness in the student's presented method, its necessity was questioned by a colleague otherwise sympathetic to queer studies. This paring down, this praxis of minimalist cropping, is an enormous loss, even if I don't know how to solve it.

The investment in the delivery of a condensed argument—with all respect to arguments and their potency—continues to toss opportunities onto my path. Almost twenty years after the disciplinary/disciplining question, an audience member at Wesleyan commented on a talk I was giving (entitled, in fact, "Something about Nothing"), on trans pronouns and the multilingual stresses, liberties, and assaults of pronominal "it," that they "weren't convinced." I promptly replied with a smile, "I'm not trying to convince you of anything!" and simply stated that I was there to allow for certain new forms of thinking to take place. I leave the rendering as argument to you. Some things haven't changed; I continue to resist what I experience as an often extractive rendering of knowledge making—is "the argument" really all you want, and is it enough?—preferring to rest in the possibilities of worldmaking, of feeling the touch between things, the new, odd, unfamiliar movements that become possible in the encounter. For a given reader, this may resolve into a satisfying form of operationalizable interdisciplinarity, or it may not; perhaps the promise I sense in studying the relationship between race and disability—one of the most vulnerable interchanges at the university—is precisely not in remaking an institution (or buttressing its institutionality), but in the possibility of its unlearning how to be one.[19] The stretch and movement between things, premised on change and even nonidentity, is what makes vivid and, indeed, lasting alliance possible. It turns out that "everybody has a discipline" is not the attitude of most intellectuals and thinkers—just of some well trained in the academy who are so invested in a familiar distribution that it becomes natural for them.

This is not to say that the "redistributive" method that appears from time to time (not always!) in this book—"redistributive" being a play between propriety and property—that I've dug even more into after *Animacies*, works for everyone. For me there is a certain opaque transparency to aligning this method with slipperier objects and operations. Throughout this book there is a valorization of blurring, for reasons that will become apparent, and blurring is meant to enter the subjectivity of the pages. The sense of transparency comes from the feeling that there is an odd, ulterior familiarity in the redistributive modes of writing and thinking, and that one might succeed in naming some of that familiarity's sources, or some of its good company, in the living methods

of others. Transparency is equally part of why I am no longer able—despite being a very private person—to restrict certain living vocabularies of importance to me, like transness, from being available wherever I go; it is part of disclosure, and it is part of what some of my people call "dirty laundry." Using that transparency in or alongside scholarship, however, is opaque still to me. That is, I try my best to effect resonances as described, but am also at the moment incapable of giving a fuller description of how it is meant to work. Perhaps, too, that is part of unlearning. My humble attempt at it, at least.

Beneath everything in these pages, in the voice I present here and its unuttered underground, is an orientation to being that is an ethics, deeply informed by the ones who have come my way and proposed shapes for my inchoate sensibilities. I hope this book honors them as they would like. Only some of them will take interest in the words or images that fill this book, but others might sniff it, or flip it, or bite it, or mash it, and I look forward to that.

This book is about how things take shape, and how they don't.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 I'm thinking here of the jumble of associations with second books in the mythography of tenured academics, often (1) an emotional complex of "second book jitters" that sometimes leads to extended nonarrival of the book, or (2) a relaxed act of self-expression, "letting it out" as a follow-through of built confidence or a sense of explosive release along the lines of unbounded gestures, or (3) a result of further entrainment, having "learned one's lesson," or "gained bibliographic authority." All of these imaginations bump up against the reality of something otherwise, a gained humility and the embarrassment of having proffered declarative words at all in print form, and that friction can result in an emotionally confused manuscript or a nonarrival: "a failure to thrive or to publish." Frankly, I feel that second books, privilege or not, are a miracle if they happen at all.

2 Erevelles and Minear, "Unspeakable Offenses."

3 Chuh, "It's Not about Anything," 121. Also see my work on cognitive partiality: Chen, "Brain Fog," which appears here in revised form in chapter 3.

4 McKittrick, "Footnotes (Books and Papers Scattered Throughout the Floor)," 28–29. McKittrick was commenting on Ahmed's "White Men."

5 See the related volume published in 2023, *Crip Authorship: Disability as Method*.

6 Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome*.

7 Puar, "Prognosis Time."

8 Chen, *Animacies*.

9 See Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog.*

10 Berg and Seeber, *Slow Professor*. For two years at the Association for Asian American Studies conferences, my colleagues Mimi Khúc, Mana Hayakawa, and most recently Sanzari Aranyak and I have led workshops called "Sloth Professor"—open to staff, students, untenured lecturers, and professors in the academy—that help to move conversations beyond management or compliance and toward rethinking care, anticapitalist practice, and academic ableism.

11 Murphy, "Alterlife," paragraph 10.

12 Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*, 3.
13 Thank you to Julia Bryan-Wilson, whose work on craft I have had the privilege of following and learning from.
14 Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 6.
15 For more on racialized neurodivergence, see Brown, Ashkenazy, and Onaiwu, *All the Weight of Our Dreams*.
16 Bailey and Mobley, "Work in the Intersections."
17 Bell, *Blackness and Disability*; Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*; Pickens, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*. The volume *Crip Genealogies* (Duke University Press, 2023), which I coedited with Alison Kafer, Eunjung Kim, and Julie Minich, was Alison's brainchild many years ago. It is a collection of works, along with an extensive introduction, that challenge a genealogy of white, imperial disability studies. The four of us are, in addition, co-writing a short monograph with further attention to possibilities for pedagogy.
18 Wu, "Disability," 56.
19 I gratefully acknowledge Moten and Harney for articulating many resonant unlearnings so powerfully, and will revisit their work in chapter 3; Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*.

CHAPTER 1. SLOW CONSTITUTION

1 A note on terms: "Mongoloid," as a reference to Down syndrome, survives to this day as a lay term; it is largely no longer accepted as a clinical term, even though it is still occasionally used by doctors. Down syndrome itself is often referred to instead as trisomy 21, referring to the presence in most, but not all, people with Down syndrome of the particularizing characteristic of three copies of chromosome 21, signaling a shift toward genetic accounts of disabilities. I should note here, too, that the shift not only in naming, but also in description, from "Down syndrome" to the more recent "trisomy 21" is a shift from a syndromic, assemblage-like rendering (*syn-drome*) attributed to a researcher, to a more unitary, and monovalent, genetic one named by the gene; it is a radical displacement of the constitutional *and* attributive means of a wholly definitive disease description. In this chapter, I use the term *Down syndrome* unless I am specifically referring to Down's own terminological choices; I prefer to avoid the notion of scientific finality or purity involved in the genetic description, and my using *Down syndrome* is meant to reflect the way in which the term looks back to Down's legacy.
2 Note "Mongoloid" is not the same as "Mongolian blue spots," a fully accepted term used to refer to birthmarks that occur disproportionately in those of African and Asian descent. In terms of clinical practice's continuation of "Mongoloid," I recall watching a television interview (I regret that I can no longer locate the source) with a Black woman physician specializing in obstetrics and gynecology; she was describing the importance of having Black obstetricians, and relayed the shock she had felt when a teaching physician during her training a few years earlier had freely used the term "Mongoloid." My understanding of the connection she was making was that some forms of medical racism could be abated by race-aware physicians.