

TINA CHEN

**A SPECULATIVE
HANDBOOK OF
ACADEMIC
LABOR**

**ALIEN
FORMS &
MINOR
GENRES**

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A SPECULATIVE HANDBOOK OF ACADEMIC LABOR

TINA CHEN

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For Sean, Nora, and Emma—
and in loving memory of my mother, Sophie Chen

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UNLIKELY PROPOSITIONS

A TRIO OF INTRODUCTIONS

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Introduction 1

BOOK PROPOSAL

Keywords

GLOBAL ASIAS | ACADEMIC LABOR | SPECULATIVE FICTIONS | GENRE | ASIAN STUDIES | ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES | ASIAN DIASPORA STUDIES | STRUCTURAL DISSONANCE | MINOR GENRES | TRS

Overview

Alien Forms and Minor Genres: A Speculative Handbook of Academic Labor questions the ways in which academic labor is parsed into the categories of teaching, research, and service (TRS) and argues for a more expansive notion of scholarly work. It is motivated by two simple questions: How might acknowledging the diversity of scholarly labor critical to the profession transform the genre of the academic monograph? What happens if we treat field formation and alternative genres of academic writing as speculative fictions, forms through which to reflect and reimagine the possibilities and value of scholarly labor?

Drawing on the diverse kinds of intellectual work I've undertaken over the last ten years—founding and editing an award-winning journal, foregrounding the significance of pedagogical principles and practices in scholarly spaces beyond the classroom, establishing and directing the Global Asias Initiative at Penn State as a research enterprise for collaborative knowledge production, creating and directing mentoring programs for graduate students and early-career colleagues, and developing research and scholarly expertise in the multidisciplinary field of Global Asias—the book proposes that we treat the genres of academia with the same nuance and critical insight that we deploy when we study literary and other cultural genres. Even though embracing more capaciously imagined ideas about

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the diverse genres of academic labor may not move us entirely away from unequal distributions of labor and a system that shunts devalued forms of such labor into the category of “service,” doing so can help us conceptualize new models for how questions of distribution and value might be reapproached. Leveraging genre criticism’s attentiveness to issues of form and the representational conventions that undergird how we communicate, and inspired by the imaginative energies of speculative fiction, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* draws theory, literature, and labor into disjunctive relation to speculate about how and why academic work matters.

In highlighting different genres of academic labor and, equally importantly, encouraging us to be more open to imagining the connectedness of the varied kinds of work we do as intellectuals, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* advances three interrelated goals: to interrogate the inadequate schematics that organize the work of academia; to explore the ways in which theories and concepts of genre and form can be usefully applied in order to reassess the priorities of the profession; and to imagine how a scholarly project that embraces diverse professional activities as part of a connected, differentially coherent practice might simultaneously engender new forms of knowledge and recognize undervalued knowledge practices. To make these arguments, this project reflects upon the diversity of academic labor involved in creating Global Asias as a field and method of knowledge production and indexes a praxis of engaging institutional imperatives through a dual approach that combines tactical skepticism with speculative worldmaking. Such a dual approach produces uneven and sometimes idiosyncratic results but can also generate new modes of professional practice—and alternative ways of being in the profession. In my case, this combination of tactical skepticism and speculative worldmaking was catalyzed by a late-stage cancer diagnosis and manifested as a series of “unwise” professional decisions guided by refusing to value research more than mentoring; embracing administrative and program-building work as “impure” genres of academic labor that combine pedagogical, scholarly, and service orientations; and choosing editorial work to advance the profession at the expense of individual professional advancement. In writing a book—*this* book—not solely as a primary research and professional goal but as a record of scholarly labors that are often devalued or underrecognized, I trace an inverted trajectory of research creation, one that transforms the hierarchies and priorities that structure the valuation of academic knowledge production and suggests the critical importance of imagining different forms of scholarly labor as equally valuable.

Calls to recognize that scholarly work takes a variety of forms are not new. As Ernest Boyer argued in his influential *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), professors are often caught between competing obligations within a reward system that does not accurately assess or value the full spectrum of scholarly activity. The US system of higher education has evolved around the principle of stratification, and the triad is a structural feature reflecting a strategy of combining competing interests that evidences the overlapping and uneven priorities of temporally distinct approaches to the university and its role in civic life. Although David F. Labaree (2017) has argued that such stratification and willingness to keep competing priorities in dynamic tension results in American higher education's distinctive "organizational complexity," the TRS model of assessing scholarly labor often functions disingenuously by suggesting that the institution (equally) values different forms of academic work but consequentially privileging some forms over others—particularly when it comes to recognizing the contributions of teaching and contingent faculty, or evaluating people for tenure and promotion.

Arguing that the traditional academic monograph is a genre that inadequately represents the diversity of scholarly accomplishment—and, indeed, may even contribute to the impoverishment of intellectual life through its narrow focus and constraining of what is legible as scholarly research practice—this project has a generic hybridity that reflects an expansive approach to recording and advancing scholarship and intellectual endeavor. My professional efforts over the last decade have focused on imagining and promoting a more capacious conception of scholarly practice, a praxis that moves me beyond the rhetorical lip service often paid to various types of scholarly labor to a daily enactment that creates its own conceptual energies. This volume is an effort to compose the academic monograph in such a way that it encompasses not just research publication but also the scholarly labors of pedagogy, editing, mentorship, program-building, and administration to which I have been devoted, and upon which the academic profession and the field of the humanities are built. Given that research activity and publication are often disarticulated from the labors of pedagogy and service, this book imagines an alternative future by speculating about how the hierarchies of value assigned to different forms of academic labor might change if the genres in which we write were to evolve.

Alien Forms and Minor Genres is thus a book about genre, speculation, and worldbuilding. It asks us to think about the varied genres of academic labor and to rethink how they operate synergistically to advance knowledge

production and the humanities. In approaching teaching, research, and service as in/distinct forms of academic labor, how might the hermeneutic practices of literary criticism and formalist reading enable us to reimagine the hierarchies of value that determine scholarly merit? If, as Caroline Levine (2015) has argued, a careful attentiveness to the forms and genres in which we work challenges the ways we have separated literary forms from social forms, how can we reconceptualize scholarly labor through the varied genres in which we write and think? More specifically, how would leveraging the simultaneous dissonances and resonances between prosaic, pedagogical, administrative, and research forms enable us to generate more encompassing, and possibly more energizing, models of scholarly labor? Is it possible to create and celebrate alternative genres through which to register and engineer intellectual inquiry while not discounting or devaluing the importance and significance of scholarly expertise and research publication?

Argument

Alien Forms and Minor Genres makes two major arguments that exist in non-aligned relation. The first argument focuses on professional practice and assessment, exploring how the categories through which we assess scholarly work—teaching, research, and service—should be analyzed with the same attentiveness we pay to literary genres, to complicate what we understand as the nature of such work and to recognize in more meaningful ways that we create scholarship through diverse practices. The second argument is epistemological and disciplinary in orientation, focusing on the processes of field formation and highlighting the emergence of Global Asias as a multidisciplinary field of academic inquiry that cross-pollinates knowledge from three distinct interdisciplines—Asian studies, Asian American studies, and Asian diaspora studies—to reimagine scholarly knowledge production about the fundamentally transnational and global nature of Asia-focused worlds and epistemologies.

Shaped by frustration with the ways in which the complex diversity of academic labor is underrecognized by assessment practices based on reductive categorization and misvalued through increasingly specialized notions of “research” and “expertise,” this project assumes that much of the work that I’ve done over the last decade which has been categorized as “service” or “pedagogy” is also scholarly and critical to advancing new research. I have approached conceptualizing and editing *Verge: Studies in*

Global Asias as both a research endeavor and a pedagogical opportunity, not just a service obligation. I have devoted significant time and energy to creating and leading mentoring programs and workshops, and this act of centering mentorship constitutes an implicit argument about how collaborative knowledge production can generate new research forms and practices. I have spearheaded the creation of the Global Asias Initiative (GAI), a research enterprise that advances Global Asias as an increasingly legible field and method of studying Asia in relation to its multiple diasporas, in the process acknowledging but also disrupting the divides between area studies, ethnic studies, and diaspora studies. And while all these projects—journal, mentoring programs, GAI—are ostensibly counted as “service” on my annual faculty activity report, they have been fundamentally and instrumentally a part of the development of Global Asias as a field of scholarly research, operating in tandem with the essays, proposals, descriptions, introductions, and myriad other types of writing I have generated about field formation over the last decade. In recognizing how my “research activity” around Global Asias has advanced not simply through a commitment to the scholarly labors of pedagogy and service, but through a praxis that refuses to prioritize research activity over teaching, editing, program-building, and mentoring, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* endeavors to provide a more nuanced and accurate depiction of how we create scholarly knowledge.

While the book’s two main arguments are different in nature and scope, both are *institutional* insofar as they are meant to cast light on how academia cultivates, manages, and rewards scholarly labor. Even as critical attention has been paid to the policing of knowledge in the imperial university in conversations about academic freedom, political dissent, and the relationship between protest and pedagogy (Chatterjee and Maira 2014), the spectacular moments of such enforcement (evidenced via tenure denial, coordinated attacks on scholars, or public protest and censorship) have drawn more analysis than the decidedly unspectacular infrastructures of assessment that powerfully determine the legibility of knowledge and the legitimacy of supported knowledge practices. Focusing on the routinized labor through which we enact daily academic practice, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* encourages us to appreciate cross-pollination between prosaic genres of administrative, editorial, and pedagogical writing (faculty activity reports, lesson plans, reader reports, project proposals, annotations, PowerPoint presentations, and editorial headnotes) and research activity in order to more accurately account for the nature, function, and impact of the intellectual work that we do as scholars.

In other words, even though these arguments look as if they belong in two different books, partly because they are differently oriented and partly because they manifest through and as different genres, one of *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*' goals is to argue—and to exemplify through its formal constitution—that embracing their incongruity, and understanding their distinctions as distinctions of form rather than always as distinctions of content, enables us to reconceptualize the nature, function, and praxis of scholarly work. Simply put, the formal differences between the book's two arguments make visible how a holistic approach to academic labor, one that recognizes service, teaching, and research as equally important, has been critical to the development and advancement of Global Asia as a multidisciplinary and multigeneric collective knowledge formation. Even as the book's arguments about the diverse genres of academic labor are bolstered by examples drawn from the work of building varied platforms (journal, book and conference series, research initiative, summer institute, and institutional partnerships) supporting the development of Global Asia's scholarly practice, the arguments about the methods, epistemology, and praxis of Global Asia are shown to emerge from a series of unlikely locations: the *minor genres of academic writing*, a term I use to describe the peripheralization and undervaluation of the many types of writing we do as academics, and the *shadow archive*, the repository that houses the plethora of unseen documents—many of them composed using minor genres of academic writing—that an expansively conceptualized scholarly praxis generates. Instead of bracketing different genres of academic labor and writing from each other, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* creates a record of activity that embraces the multifaceted nature of scholarship, in the process imagining how scholarship is continually remade not just through our research publications but also through our teaching and service commitments.

Methodology

According to Ranjana Khanna (2018), speculative praxis is often disciplinarily specific. In philosophy, speculation is about logic and conjecture and posed against practice. In finance, speculation involves planning to heighten gain and/or reduce risk. In literary studies, speculation is investigative, anticipatory, and imaginatively demanding, a modality of reading and writing that acknowledges how what is not yet visible determines the shape of interpretation. Fundamental to *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*

efforts to make legible and credential the diversity of scholarly practice is its embrace of literary speculation. More specifically, the project's speculative praxis operates both as a reading strategy that makes visible alternative interpretations and futures and as a methodology that recognizes the critical ways that generic conventions shape the forms in which we write so as to write into possibility new modes of knowledge production. As I have argued elsewhere, "Global Asias as a speculative endeavor makes imaginable alternative conceptual topographies and alternative circuits of relation, not just for the study of Asia but for ourselves as thinkers, writers, teachers, and collaborators" (T. Chen and Eubanks 2025, 46). Correspondingly, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*' speculative efforts focus not just on conceptualizing Global Asias as an approach that maps alternatives to the siloed institutional fields of area studies, ethnic studies, and diaspora studies but also on the power of generic friction to imaginatively conjecture alternative conditions and ambits for the academic labors we perform.

Fundamental to *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*' theorization of Global Asias and the book's method of composition is the embrace of *structural dissonance*. While my earliest efforts to conceptualize the incompatibilities undergirding the imaginable ageography of Global Asias utilized "structural incoherence" (T. Chen 2018) to name the infrastructural conditions out of which Global Asias knowledge production emerges, witnessing and orchestrating the possibilities of collaborative nonconsensus integral to this emerging scholarly field has encouraged me to focus more systematically on dissonance as method and praxis for such work. Given the totalizing impulse inherent in the concept of Global Asias, the critical import of attending to the disagreements, disjunctures, and discordances between interlocutors and collaborators, and between genres of labor and genres of writing, cannot be overstated. Accordingly, as editor of *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, I have emphasized the importance of creating genres designed to enable scholars working from different positions and vantage points to engage productively. Recognizing both the possibilities and the limits of the thirty-page academic essay, in my editing I have encouraged the development of the journal's *Convergence* features, which provide opportunities for scholars to engage across differences, to collaborate through scholarly debate, and to generate scholarship using generic conventions not traditionally associated with academic writing. The journal's juxtapositional ethic—allowing different authors, genres, fields, disciplines, geographies, and forms of scholarship to coexist in nonaligned relation—reflects the structural dissonance at the heart of Global Asias as method, which

“embrac[es] dissensus and creat[es] space for agreement and contention to be equally valued forms of collective engagement” (T. Chen 2021a, 1004).

Alien Forms and Minor Genres is a singular collection of scholarly, pedagogical, and bureaucratic genres. Moreover, the book’s structurally dissonant form results from its assembly of an idiosyncratic archive of critical and primary texts for its arguments. Inspired by Jenny Rice’s conceptualization of archives as inventional, this project embraces what she characterizes as a “gargoylian method” of assembling the texts that make its arguments legible. Noting the incongruities of chimeric creatures, Rice notes that “something new is made from strange juxtaposition” (2020, 26). Indeed, the “strange juxtaposition[s]” powering *Verge’s* advancement of Global Asias as a knowledge formation repeat in the formal composition of this book. Despite being authored by a single individual, the book embraces polyvocality and generic friction, which manifest formally in its use of “nonresearch” genres to advance its scholarly arguments. Eschewing the genre of “the chapter,” the book engages the possibilities of generic friction not only by articulating its arguments through forms not usually considered research genres but also by allowing its different argumentative strands to remain entangled yet distinct.

Dissonance manifests differently in each of the book’s three sections. Part I—“Unlikely Propositions”—offers three different introductions to the project. Using the genres of the book proposal, the (speculative) faculty activity report, and the lesson plan, the introductions included in this section emphasize the simultaneous disjunction and reinforcement between the genres in which we write and the arguments we make. Part II—“Minor Genres and the Shadow Archive”—questions the assumed disjunction between minor genres of academic writing and the major work of academic field creation. Embracing the project’s use of the many types of writing we produce as academics, this section of the book is written using a constellation of genres—statement of purpose, PowerPoint presentation, annotated bibliography, keyword essay, and statement of endeavors—that are traditionally not considered effective vehicles for making research arguments. As examples of what I am describing as “minor genres,” these forms of academic writing are often relegated to the shadow archive, the repository that houses the plethora of (generally unseen and often undervalued) documents that an expansively conceptualized scholarly praxis generates. Part III—“Alien Abduction, Alien Form”—captures the multigenre realities of scholarly knowledge production by taking a single idea and tracking how it is developed through, and develops across, different genres: the

symposium, the conference paper, the syllabus, and the academic research essay. By focusing on the resonances and dissonances between two different literary genres (ethnic fiction and speculative fiction) and the diverse genres of academic labor, the varied forms in this section draw attention to how scholarly arguments build and evolve as they are worked through the distinctive conventions of research and pedagogical writing.

Critical Contexts and Relationship to Recent Scholarship

Reflecting the project's embrace of structural dissonance, generic friction, and relational nonalignment, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* is informed by and engages several different critical conversations, albeit in distinct ways. In terms of its form and the arguments it is making about the genres in which we write, the book imagines itself in dynamic engagement with a diverse group of critical texts authored within the last decade by women working in, against, and alongside academia and its practices. Focused on topics ranging from Black diasporic visual culture, Indigenous science, autoethnography, consumerism, and Asian American mental health to breast cancer, fugitivity, archival impossibility, mushrooms, and creativity (among many other things), these texts are not unified by subject matter or research area. Rather, they are all experimental in form, written in ways that challenge the narrowness of the genres we use to create, publish, and share academic knowledge. Like this project, these texts are *alien forms*, books that recognize that academic knowledge can (and should) take many forms, even if those forms are strange and estranging. Including Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), Elizabeth Chin's *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries* (2016), Julietta Singh's *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018), Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (2019), Mimi Khúc's *Open in Emergency: A Special Issue on Asian American Mental Health* ([2016] 2019), Anne Boyer's *The Undying: Pain, Vulnerability, Mortality, Medicine, Art, Time, Dreams, Data, Exhaustion, Cancer, and Care* (2019), Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's *The Hundreds* (2019), Avery F. Gordon's *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (2017), and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), these unconventional volumes of scholarship explore the potential of scholarly

writing by embracing multiple genres, situating knowledge production both within and beyond academic contexts, locating authorial expertise in bodily as well as intellectual sites, and cross-pollinating knowledge across disciplinary and field boundaries through writing that is both critical and creative.

This exploration of speculative genres of academic writing/labor also responds to ongoing discussions about the ways in which disciplinarity structures the forms in which we write, think, and create. In part catalyzed by Christina Sharpe's (2016) exhortation that "we must become undisciplined," questions about what it might mean to "undiscipline" academic work have percolated over the last decade, most notably in the work of feminist, decolonial, Indigenous, and queer critics such as Duane Champagne, Mel Chen, Susan Squier, Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, Chris Andersen, and Tiffany Lethabo King. Leaning into the possibilities of what undisciplining entails—self-reflexive examination of the conditions under which we produce academic knowledge; the refusal to prioritize academic forms and practices over local ways of knowing; a willingness to migrate across different conceptual and epistemic borders; being comfortable with states of flux, becoming, and argumentative unraveling; and an insistence on the role of the personal in countering the epistemic violence of abstraction—the diverse group of scholars assembled by Heather Houser and Stephanie LeMenager (2022) for a recent forum of *ASAP/Journal* utilize the short-form response to collectively explore the possibilities and limits of what it means to work within and without disciplinary forms and structures. Although *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*' tactical skepticism extends to whether or not undisciplining is truly possible within academia, it makes its modest contribution to this conversation by dwelling with nonspectacular genres of academic writing to imagine how our engagements with different scholarly, pedagogical, and bureaucratic forms are quotidian opportunities to think, write, and enact a broadly conceptualized scholarly practice, one that is perhaps not so much undisciplined as it is willing to experiment with different forms of discipline to push against the institutional regulation and authority to which we are all subject.

In its efforts to explore the processes of field formation and to trace the emergence of Global Asias as a scholarly field/method, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* builds on earlier and ongoing critical engagements with globalization manifested in the increasing attention over the last twenty-five years to "inter-Asian" connections in area studies, the "transnational turn" in American studies of the 1990s onward, the surfacing of what Prasenjit

Duara (2021b) calls “circulatory histories” in interdisciplinary fields like transpacific studies and Indian Ocean studies, and emerging critical approaches focalized through the movement of populations such as migration studies, diaspora studies, and critical refugee studies. Additionally, the book responds to previous efforts to reimagine Asia as an interlinked set of formations stretching beyond national, territorial, or cultural boundaries, by showing how the imaginable ageographies of other conceptual paradigms—“Inter-Asia,” “Other Asias,” “Global Asia,” “InterAsia,” and “Transnational Asia”—have been developed not only through critical studies (authored by Kuan-hsing Chen, Chua Beng Huat, Gayatri Spivak, Eng-seng Ho, and others) but also through institutional initiatives (like Penn State’s GAI, Duke University’s Global Asia Initiative, and NYU’s Center for Global Asia).

While theorizing the speculative genres of academic labor through the multifaceted work required to develop Global Asias as a new field/method is distinctive to *Alien Forms and Minor Genres*, some of the questions, arguments, and forms of the project, and the project’s general concern with the inequitable assessment of varied forms of scholarly labor, respond to the progressively shrill but by no means new conversations about “the crisis in the humanities.” When J. H. Plumb published *Crisis in the Humanities* in 1964, the sense that humanities work was increasingly specialized, insular, and irrelevant was already part of the conversation about the uses and mission of humanists. According to David Arndt (2007), this crisis must be understood in relation to the genealogy of the university whose four main historical iterations—the Christian university, the liberal arts college, the research university, and the commercial university—have different goals, assumptions, and definitions about the nature of scholarly labor. More precisely, the subsumption of the liberal arts college by the research university pressured humanistic disciplines into adopting the assumptions and forms promoted by the modern sciences. Accordingly, the “crisis in the humanities” stems in part because there exists a dissonance between the contemporary genres of humanities research and the traditional goals of a liberal arts education. Although not initially conceptualized as a direct response to this particular type of discordance, structural dissonance as form and method to argue that the valorization of research over teaching and service prevents us from recognizing the multifaceted practices and multigeneric forms through which we advance scholarly knowledge in the humanities can offer humanists some useful ways of reapproaching their academic labors.

Audience

Alien Forms and Minor Genres addresses a wide variety of audiences. Even as I imagine several different cohorts of readership for the volume, these potential readers fall into two main groups: those whose areas of research expertise aligns with the book's a/geographical preoccupations and (multi) disciplinary investments, and those who are interested in issues of labor, the academic profession, and the development of more inclusive scholarly practices. While there is overlap between these two readerships, the book's two main arguments will draw somewhat distinct audiences; the commitment to keep the arguments operating in nonaligned relation means that the project is constructed to encourage different kinds of readers to be in conversation without necessarily being converted, or having to declare allegiance, to a singularly defined field of academic study.

Readers from the first group will be those working in the fields of area studies, ethnic studies, and literary and cultural studies. The burgeoning scholarly community invested in Global Asias as a field and method of studying Asia in relation to its multiple diasporas will welcome the book's effort to map the evolution of Global Asias as an architecture designed to generate provocative conversations that redefine what it means to work in, at, for, and around Global Asias, not as a settled object of knowledge but as a dynamic praxis of engagement. Scholars in Asian studies, Asian American studies, and Asian diaspora studies will appreciate the ways in which the varied genres included in this volume make visible the overlaps and discontinuities between these different interdisciplines. Critics interested in genre, speculative fictions, literary criticism, and critical ethnic studies should find the book's attentiveness to the interrelation between social forms and literary forms illuminating.

Readers from the second group will approach their shared interests in academia, professionalization, and the nature of scholarly labor from a diverse set of vantage points. For graduate students and early-career scholars, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres'* arguments and formal experimentation serve to make transparent the diversity of scholarly praxis and the myriad genres through which scholarship is enacted. This volume reflects my ongoing commitments to training graduate students (for positions both within and beyond academia) and centering mentorship as a critical scholarly praxis; indeed, it is designed to complement my pedagogical and mentoring work by making more transparent the varied kinds of labor that make the profession possible. For mid-career colleagues, whether contingent, newly tenured, or

those who, like me, have not “progressed” in ways expected by our institutions, this book is written to make legible some of the reasons why we should undertake the work of reimagining the professional activities that contribute to scholarly knowledge production, and to sketch an alternative path for career advancement—one not overdetermined by the university’s reliance on assessing our work by using the TRS triad in determinative ways. For senior colleagues and administrators, this book is written as a rejoinder to “business as usual” and encourages us to reassess how we value our work, and to speculate about the possibility of creating multiple pathways for professional advancement by embracing the full spectrum of scholarly activity we undertake.

Compositional Form: A Conceptual Topography

Alien Forms and Minor Genres is a hybrid mix of academic and professional genres. Its mongrel composition is an attempt to capture the diverse natures of scholarly labor—and recognizes that, as Jacques Derrida has famously argued, the genres in which we write, think, and imagine ourselves into being are always mixed. To explore the hybrid character of the genres we use, the book systematically asks readers to think about the relationship between form and function by putting research, pedagogical, editorial, and administrative genres of writing in nonaligned, proximal relation. In other words, the project mixes genres not only to show that the genres in which we write are always mixed but also to speculate about how they exceed the TRS taxonomy in enabling capaciously imagined forms of scholarly work.

PART I

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Making arguments through admixture leads to uneven results. There are logics but they are not always logical; insight comes from juxtaposition and friction (or sometimes combustion). In its embrace of the alien—the unfamiliar, the unvalued, the unrequited, the unowned, and the unimagined—this project chooses to make its points through constellation, recursion, and dissonance. Due to its strangeness, a table of contents may not be especially useful in helping a reader navigate its terrain. So perhaps the conceptual topography I offer here may help.

As scholars, we have so many forms at our disposal. While academic monographs and research articles are valuable genres for advancing scholarship, they are not the only genres that can be used for such purpose. And the other forms of scholarly labor and writing that we undertake are not necessarily less important than the research we pursue. This book utilizes some of the many genres in which I regularly write—editorial headnotes, book proposals, comments, faculty activity reports, abstracts, lesson plans, keyword essays, PowerPoint presentations, syllabi, conference papers, annotations, narrative statements, and reader reports—and constellates them to make visible the ways in which I have developed *Global Asias* as a differentially coherent scholarly endeavor, one that values varied forms of academic labor equally. The proliferation of forms is thus one distinctive feature of the project, a formal manifestation of the broader arguments

Alien Forms and Minor Genres makes in support of acknowledging the diversity of academic labor and the dimensionality of scholarly practice.

To return to one of the questions opening this proposal: What happens if we treat field formation and alternative genres of academic writing as speculative fictions, forms through which to reflect and reimagine the possibilities and value of scholarly labor? Speculative fictions help us to imagine different outcomes for current action and to visualize alternative futures through the inventional act of worldbuilding. Writing the introductions to this book using the genres of the book proposal, the faculty activity report, and the lesson plan is a speculative praxis that makes visible how my ongoing scholarly work of editing, teaching, and administration is simultaneously distinct from, but also a form of, the intellectual labor that I perform as a scholar committed to building Global Asias as a multidisciplinary, multigeneric, and collaborative field of knowledge production. The book's speculative praxis operates through two specific practices—dissonance and constellation—which generate new opportunities to imagine the variegated social and literary forms that collectively compose scholarly endeavor.

In refusing the conventions of the academic monograph and the orderly evenness of chapters, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* offers proliferation and juxtaposition in place of linearity and teleology. Although the book is arranged in three sections, the sections can be read in varied order. There is both resonance and friction between sections and within sections, which means not only that the book imagines different ways of enacting scholarly work—it imagines a different kind of reader. The book is written for readers looking for alternative ways of thinking, of writing, and of enacting scholarly practice, collaborators interested in contributing to the project of reimagining the conditions under which we labor. More specifically, *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* imagines a reader who is willing to be alienated, to be refused comfort or clarity. Even as the book mobilizes certain genres in the interest of transparency, these forms are deployed as speculative fictions, which means that they are sometimes unreliable—and occasionally disingenuous. There are no certainties here beyond an insistence that scholarly work must be capaciously imagined and that the field of Global Asias is worth building. Uncertainty is not the register in which I have been trained to demonstrate scholarly expertise, but it is a register that has led me to different ways of conceptualizing and enacting my scholarly praxis. *Alien Forms and Minor Genres* is built in ways that invite its readers to share in that uncertainty and use it to reimagine what work we can and should be doing.

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