Sounding Orientalism: Radical Sounds and Affects of Asian American Women Who Rock

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Gilbert B. Rodman

July 2021

Acknowledgements

This dissertation and my doctoral career would not have been possible without the help and influence of many people. I want to first thank my committee members for the wisdom and time that they have generously shared with me over the past few years: Dr. Gilbert Rodman for the invaluable intellectual guidance as I explore a research career by taking rock music seriously and the long emails and Zoom calls whenever I need help; Dr. Mark Pedelty for inspiring me to use my research to reconnect with the grassroots music communities where I come from and to embrace music and sound studies as a field of inquiry that is exciting, important, and with infinite possibilities; Dr. Mary Vavrus for the endless support and mentorship as I navigate graduate school as a somewhat isolated international and immigrant student who is eager to learn, grow, find communities, and also to teach; Dr. Michael Gallope for being a role model for me as a passionate interdisciplinary music scholar and a music wizard at the same time and for making me feel like home in the field of music studies. I also want to thank Dr. Eric Hung for introducing me to various Asian/American communities who also believe in the power of arts and music and for the delightful chats about Asian American music. I am also grateful for the faculty members of the review committee for selecting my cohort five years ago, whoever you are. Thank you for trusting in my potential and I hope what I will do for the decades to come and what I have accomplished proves your decision worthwhile.

I cannot go by without thanking my multiple families. I am grateful for my mother Song Li for working so hard to support my passion in music and riding me to keyboard lessons when I was little, rain or shine. I am also lucky that I have met my

partner and biggest cheerleader Matthew S. Liu, who has made my Ph.D. journey and life journey a blessed experience. I also want to thank my “natural family” in the department, Elja Roy and Samira Musleh, for being there for each other every step of the graduate program and for witnessing each other’s struggles and growth. I thank my music family, my bandmates and music buddies, for taking me in and letting me borrow cheap equipment when we all had nothing.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the radical and queer voices of Asian American women rock musicians and influencers who are often sidelined in scholarship on American popular music by articulating local, national, and transnational forces on racial formation, musical affects, and Asian American experiences. It unsettles the idea that Orientalized aesthetics and affects are tools only for nefarious agendas by exploring how a number of Asian American women artists transform musical Orientalism into a political form of art. In so doing, I argue that these musicians devise novel and socially efficacious ways to effectively debunk the myth of Asian American apoliticism. Over the course of four chapters, my case studies range from the entirely fabricated "oriental riff" to post-punk's postmodern experimentations, from the first notable Asian-women-fronted rock band Fanny to recent musical ventures like Japanese Breakfast and the Drag-On Ladies, and from musical movements such as women's music, queercore, and riot grrrl to Los Angeles' Chinatown and Little Tokyo. Through articulating the relationship between sound, race, and affect with these case studies, I contend that the sounds, affective inscrutability, and diasporic sensibilities of Asian America have powerfully redefined U.S. radicalism and challenged hegemonic formulations of what musical activism looks like, feels like, and sounds like.

My methodology involves a range of politically engaged qualitative and critical approaches: digital archival research, oral history, musical analysis, and close reading and critical and cultural analysis of representative musical performances and media texts from the 1960s to the present. The dissertation collects and examines a variety of qualitative data, including materials from both traditional and unconventional archives: e.g., Rock's

Backpages, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Women Who Rock Oral History Archive, and grassroots and crowdsourced materials, such as playlists, blog posts, and encyclopedias about women rock musicians and Asian American music. To tackle the paucity of formally documented Asian American popular music history, it also entails conducting oral histories with a range of musicians, such as Cambodian American musician Bohan Huy, Korean American Adoptee musician Mayda Miller, and biracial Chinese American musician Leslie Mah, regarding their life, musical journey, and creative devices. Other relevant data include cultural productions (music; performances; merchandise), personal narratives (zines; memoirs; interviews; social media), and published media discourses (documentaries; news media; music criticism). Although the documentation of Asian American women in rock is relatively scarce, a variety of materials nonetheless provide a rich basis for better understanding their complex affective, rhetorical, and cultural prowess.

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Introduction

> The story we find between the notes of Asian American music is sometimes nothing less than the story of Asian America itself.
>
> — Oliver Wang (2001)
> "Between the Notes: Finding Asian America in Popular Music"

Korean American musician Michelle Zauner intentionally named her indie rock band Japanese Breakfast, even though its aesthetics are primarily Korean. Through her music, she first confronts and then weaponizes musical Orientalism by unapologetically engaging her Korean heritage and employing diasporic sentiments to explore her multicultural identity. In doing so, Zauner conjures up a pan-ethnic solidarity among diasporic communities and carves out a space for underrepresented musicians and listeners. This is one example of how the musicians I am studying in the dissertation bend the aesthetic strategies of musical Orientalism and transform musical Orientalism into a tool of subversion to debunk the myth of Asian American apoliticism. Through exploring how this transformation happened, this dissertation studies how Asian American women musicians and influencers transgress and transform the sonic, affective, and political boundaries of musical Orientalism.

Critics and listeners today are used to finding musical Orientalism across genres, a phenomenon that speaks to the Western imperialist ideology and epistemology that reproduces knowledge of the East as sexually and intellectually alien and regressive through appropriating Asian instruments, rhetoric, and aesthetics for varying reasons. Although Asian cultures have long been subject to appropriation in Western rock music,

a genre that has been much celebrated for its anti-hegemonic endeavors and countercultural agenda, Asian American musicians' *responses* to the legacies of musical Orientalism are almost entirely ignored. Women radicals who have been undermining Orientalist fantasies using the transcultural and multisensory tool of music are often treated as "yellow peril" or lost in the soundtrack of predominantly white feminist and queer movements in ways that erase the racial and ethnic particularities of their art. As Oliver Wang (2001) suggests, the stories we find while finding Asian America in popular music sometimes tell the exact stories of Asian America (463). There is an urgent need to restore the history of these musical radicals and reclaim the sounds and histories that they have been making.

A 2017 *Vice* article, titled "The Defiant Sound of Asian American Women in Indie Rock," surveys a range of Asian American women rock musicians to reflect on the challenges and changes in the Asian presence in rock music over the past fifty years, noting that "until now, it never felt like the preeminence of Asian American women in rock could break through novelty and create a new normal within mainstream rock" (Euse, 2017). Media discourses such as this are a good reminder of the marginalization of and discrimination against women musicians (Clawson 1999; Goldman 2019; Leonard 2007; Reddington [2007] 2012; Whiteley 1997) as well as the significant overlooking of how Asian women musicians in the diaspora have contributed to the radical and activist traditions of Western popular music (Brooks 2008; Pedelty and Weglarz 2013; Reynolds and Press 1996).

Deborah Wong (2004) poignantly observes that "the primary place of Asians and Asian Americans in the music industry has been as representations, not as agents" (256).

Scholarship on this topic also reflects this tendency of overshadowing the political interventions of the Orientalized subjects. Communication studies scholars tend to approach musical Orientalism from perspectives of representation, globalization, hybridization, or postmodernization (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Timothy D. Taylor 2007; McLeod 2013; Goodwin 1991). Meanwhile, existing scholarship on musical Orientalism largely ignores rock and popular music and tends to focus on classical music, opera, and musicals (Bellman 1998; Locke 2011; Rao 2017; Sheppard 2019; Zheng 2010). In the very few scholarly works that do address the transformative power of counter-Orientalism rock and popular music by Asian Americans (Balance 2016; Rubin and Melnick 2007; G. Wang 2015; Wong 2004), the majority of the focus is on male musicians, ignoring important examples of women's musical activism. Foregrounding the voices of Asian American women who rock, therefore, fills a huge research gap left by such oversights.

It is also worth noting that music is already a less explored subject in the literature on Orientalism. My research contributes to a pool of feminist and queer interventions into Orientalism studies that often prioritize non-musical fields, such as literary criticism (Yeğenoğlu 1998), art history (Lewis 1996), and terrorism studies (Puar 2017). This dissertation is one of the first to extend musical Orientalism to the realm of rock and subcultural sounds while foregrounding and re-contextualizing women's roles through their own voices and their musical traditions. Particularly, it articulates some rare insights regarding musical Orientalism in relation to the cultural myth of Asian American apoliticism (Hing 1993; Kim 1999) by tracing the particularities of Orientalist traditions perpetuated in Western rock music and how the Orientalized subjects tackle and

transform these traditions to serve their own agenda. While doing so, I amplify the voices of Asian American women rockers, punks, and singer-songwriters who are often marginalized in their own musical fields through examining the political messages in their music. Indeed, when Asian American rappers have become ever more visible, Asian American rockers still relatively have gained less attention from at least the academics (Hutchinson 2016, 431).

As a result, this interdisciplinary project challenges both the cultural myth of Asian American apoliticism and the overgeneralization of how we understand Orientalism. My project calls out scholars and critics' reductionist reading of musical Orientalism and argues that we need to understand Asian American women musicians' struggles with stereotypes on their own terms. For example, when Sandra Song (2015) in a *Pitchfork* article reviews how K Rizz and Mitski debunk Asian American female stereotypes in music, Song fails to differentiate musical Orientalism from Orientalism in other fields by conflating that "the way Asian women are portrayed in music culture is no different from how they are stereotyped in the mainstream." This overgeneralization exemplifies a totalizing comprehension of (musical) Orientalism that I aim to challenge, which lumps together all variant practices and trajectories of Orientalism and significantly overlooks the particularities and nuanced insights that articulating Orientalism with rock music could offer. I accomplish this through an interdisciplinary approach using theoretical lenses from communication studies, critical media studies, feminist and queer studies, music and sound studies, and Asian American studies.

The dissertation consists of a series of critical and comparative case studies of Asian American women musicians and influencers who have strategically transformed

musical Orientalism. I first examine how rock bands in the late 1970s and early 1980s employed musical Orientalism to express their anti-hegemonic positionality, which as a result repackaged musical Orientalism as an ambivalent countercultural technology, embodying the idea that I call "sonic ethnic chic." Within this context, I conduct a series of case studies of how a range of Asian American women radicals—rockers, punks, singer-songwriters, and influencers from the 1960s to the current moment of the 2020s—tackle the legacies of musical Orientalism and continue to trouble the politics and normative formulations of identity, activism, counterculture, and community-building in the U.S. Finally, this dissertation argues that reorienting Orientalism as a changing countercultural tactic and as a sonic intervention is critical for deconstructing the gendering and racializing of bodies, sounds, and affects as well as for understanding the unaccommodating performances by women radicals in the diaspora and their continued political relevance at today's activist front.

Research Questions

To study the connection between musical Orientalism and the cultural myth of Asian American apoliticism, the dissertation is guided by the main research question:

> Main research question: *How do Asian American women rock musicians and influencers variously re-politicize and challenge stereotypes ingrained in Orientalist rock and, in doing so, transform musical Orientalism into a tool of subversion and cultural critique that debunks the myth of Asian American apoliticism?*

To do so, first of all, chapter 1 contextualizes the main research question by exploring the sonic and affective contours of Orientalist rock. I pursue this inquiry by tracing the various formulations of Orientalism in rock and popular music in the 1970s

and 1980s. I consider the historical context, rationale, forms, characteristics, and cultural and political significance of Orientalist rock by elaborating on the idea of sonic ethnic chic. As a result, this chapter shows why Orientalism has valorized as a meaningful creative device in rock musical practices. Within this historical context, the remaining chapters explore the main research question from different perspectives. Instead of simply describing how Orientalist stereotypes and strategies have evolved since the 1960s, I study how they have continued to haunt today's Asian American women rock musicians and foreground their responses and counter strategies. While doing so, I pose the following correlated sub-questions:

> 1. *How do Asian American women musicians/influencers tackle, trouble, and transcend musical Orientalism in ways that challenge its sonic and affective stereotypes?*
>
> 2. *What political interventions do they make to challenge notions of Asian American identities and musical activism?*

Instead of a linear investigation, these questions are interlocking and oversee every chapter. Chapters 2 to 5 give answers to the above questions from different perspectives by conversing with the racial politics of L.A.'s early punk community, diasporic strategies of world-making, mainstream queer and feminist musical movements, and contemporary politics of musical activism. Besides the "how" question, I move further to examine what political messages are delivered and what challenges are stimulated in the process. One specific complication that I examine throughout the project is the complicated relationship between Asian American musical activism and larger musical movements and communities, such as between the punk promoter Esther Wong and the L.A.'s early punk movement (chapter 3) and between Asian American queer women rockers and the riot grrrl movement (chapter 5).

Research Design and Methods

Informed by my training in critical media studies and cultural studies, my general methodology is interdisciplinary in nature and encompasses a range of politically engaged approaches, including digital archival research, oral history, musical analysis, close reading, and critical and cultural analysis of representative musical performances and media texts from the 1960s to the present. I have done extensive research to curate a textual archive for this dissertation. I collect and examine a variety of qualitative data, including materials from both traditional archives and unconventional archives to rediscover the sounds and stories of Asian American women often left out of traditional archives. These sources include, for example, Rock's Backpages, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Women Who Rock Oral History Archive, as well as grassroots and crowdsourced materials, such as playlists, blog posts, and encyclopedias about women rock musicians and Asian American music. Other relevant data include the cultural productions (music; performances; podcasts), personal narratives (zines; memoirs; interviews; social media), and published media discourses (documentaries; news media; music criticism) made by or related to the musicians at the heart of my case studies.

To tackle the paucity of formally documented Asian American popular music history, it entailed conducting oral histories with a range of Asian American musicians regarding their life, musical journey, and creative devices. Oral history can be considered as evidence (Grele 2007), a method of archiving and documenting context (Fogerty 2007), a reorientation to center the autonomy and voices of the unheard in their own words (Haynes 2010; Kathryn Anderson et al. [1990] 2020), and an opportunity to "bring

courage to the old, meaning to communities, and contact between generations" (Thompson and Bornat [1978] 2017). I conducted oral histories, independently or collaboratively with the Music of Asian America Research Center as a volunteer researcher from 2020 to 2021, with 22 musicians from various cultural and professional backgrounds, such as Cambodian American fusionist pop musician Bohan Huy, Korean American Adoptee indie musician Mayda Miller, biracial Chinese American punk musician Leslie Mah, and Indian American classical musician Viswas Chitnis. Each of these oral history interviews lasts about 2-3 hours and was conducted remotely on Zoom. Given the nature of oral history, these interviews generally go where the interviewees want them to go, but some reoccurring themes include:

1. A general life trajectory;
2. Realization of Asian identity;
3. Music they grew up listening to;
4. Music training and music writing;
5. Activism and community engagement;
6. Experiences of visiting the homeland; and
7. Songs that have special meaning to them.

Most of these interviews have been or will be posted on the Music of Asian America Research Center's website and become publicly accessible resources for future researchers. Although the dissertation does not analyze every single one of these interviews, they have provided me with perspectives to contextualize my research on Asian American musical history.

Given the interdisciplinary and multi-method approach I take in the dissertation, it can also be understood that my overall methodology is informed by the spirit of queer methodology and the theory and methodological framework of articulation. "A queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect

and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam 1998, 13). This dissertation in a sense is a queer project not only in its attention to queer Asian American women punks and rockers but also in its dual objective to both "collect and produce information" to articulate an alternative genealogy of American rock music that has seldom been seen as a focal point, one that centers Asian American women. To do so, I combine close reading, oral history, and personal narrative analysis, all of which involve discussions of authorial intention—a move often cast as taboo for literary studies and critical research, with methods such as critical discursive analysis and contextual analysis. In doing so, this dissertation also performs queer listening, which "implies an element of perversity, an orientation somewhere at cross-purpose with that of music's creators" (Fuller and Whitesell 2002, 16). Following Timothy D. Taylor's (1997) critique of postmodern theory's effects of removing agency from the subaltern, I discuss authorial intention insofar as it serves as "metanarratives of progressive political change" (204). Listening queerly, instead of avoiding the intentional fallacy, my research strives to show that because of the historical removal of the voice of the subaltern, circumventing discussions of the authorial intention of the subaltern precisely plays into the imperialist logic of the discourse of intentional fallacy.

In his attempt to develop an anti-reductionist cultural studies approach to Marxist theory and concepts like ideology, dominance, and hegemony, Stuart Hall (1980; 1985; 1986; 2002) develops the concept of articulation to examine social formations as

complexly articulated unities embodied in different combinations of economic, political, and ideological relations. Debating between Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault, for Hall (1985), articulation means

> a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not "eternal" but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged. (113)

Moreover, articulation is both about finding "the connection that can make a unity of two different elements" and understanding the certain conditions that enable such "a specific linkage," a linkage that can be broken (Hall in Grossberg 1986, 53). These linkages can be found between different various dimensions and structures of society. "Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures" (Grossberg 1992, 54). As a methodological framework of cultural analysis, articulation calls attention to the internal organization and external conditions of the specifics, in addition to the contextual, the epistemological, the political, and the strategic (Slack 1996; Clarke 2015). For a cultural field that has very limited literature and formally documented narratives, studying Asian American rock music benefits from articulation theory's generative attention to what is beyond the "necessarily given," its acknowledgment of social instances' "relative autonomy," and its consideration of articulations in flux, necessitating the space for observing or constructing alternative articulation (re-articulation and dis-articulation) through practices that reconstitute previously non-existing relations (Hall 1985, 95–96). Thus, varying capricious practices of articulation account both for how hegemony subsumes counter-hegemonic sensibilities

and generates consent from the non-dominant, or Gramsci's understanding of common sense, and for the interstices of such articulative practices, failing to re-articulate, or renew, a dominant combination of ideological, political, and economic relations.

Following these duo attentions of articulation, this dissertation considers both how the ideology of Orientalism is articulated into practices of rock music through cross-racial alliances and pseudo-progressive relationships with Asian women as well as how Asian American women rock musicians and promoters, while living in the shadow of the racist and dehumanizing legacies of Orientalist rock, manage to dis-articulate such linkages and re-articulate their positions in the landscape of American rock music. The practices of dis-articulation as a tool of counter-hegemony work similarly to the practices of "excorporation" that Grossberg (1984) proposes to understand rock music's response to the hegemonic incorporation of countercultural resistance to undermine the established meanings of signs, objects, and styles and to create "a temporarily impassable boundary within the dominant culture" (232). However, we cannot understand dis-articulation or excorporation as simple binary oppositions to articulation or incorporation, falling into the same trap of reductionism and essentialism that Hall sets out to avoid. In a way, articulation in itself is always already (re)constitutive and involves "the forging of a connection or relationship that *appears* to be entirely natural when it is no such thing at all" (Rodman 2017, 8). Likewise, dis-articulation is also about denaturalizing normative assumptions. The lens of dis-articulation, I suggest, matters for the study of the political voices of differently marginalized social groups precisely for its emphasis on debunking assumptions of the silenced groups as perpetually silent. Therefore, I understand dis-articulation as a reorientation of signs towards failing the original linkage structure, thus

gesturing towards multiple directions, as opposed to one binary "opposite." One result could be disidentification—"a reformatting of self within the social" and "a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification" (Muñoz 1999, 97). While only chapter 4 works with this concept of José Esteban Muñoz's in detail, most of the case studies of the dissertation might also be approached from this lens.

Lastly, because this project takes on the dual objectives of finding and centering Asian women in American rock music as well as unraveling their various strategies to counter the Orientalizing gaze and debunk the apoliticism myth, some chapters prioritize depth by engaging more detailed and focused critical and cultural analysis (mostly, chapter 2 and chapter 3), while some prioritize breadth by presenting the range and diversity of Asian American women musicians' involvement in the trajectory of rock music (mostly, chapter 4 and chapter 5). Because of this research design, chapters 4 and 5 engage with more analysis of oral histories and personal narratives in order to discover common counter-hegemonic strategies and sketch a genealogy of Asian American women rockers. In contrast, chapters 2 and 3 zoom in on specific moments and locales of U.S. rock history.

The "Asian Stagnation" Mystique and Inscrutable Asian Women

While "Asian stagnation" is most frequently used when discussing the socioeconomic aspects of Asia, I borrow the term and recast it as a Euro-American-centric system of racialized cultural mystique.[1] The Asian stagnation mystique not only

[1] I view stagnation as a system of racialized cultural stereotypes and beyond a socioeconomic stagnation point of view. The latter is perhaps most often associated with Marxist notions of Asian stagnation as the opposite of West-centric notions of modernization and civilization. This notion is often associated with Marx's "the Asiatic mode of production" as part of his theory of social development. For reviews of this

unveils patterns of stereotyping Asians, among other things, as inert and unfeeling beings but also calls attention to the mystified nature of these stereotypes as a stable and consistent mechanism of biopower and geopolitical instrument across history, geography, and cultural fields. The naming of the Asian stagnation is also an irony in itself because of the failure of Western discourses to construct accordingly stagnant discourses about Asianness. The perplexing nature of the Asian stagnation mystique has been invented and mobilized to mirror an idealized image of the West, shaping how Asians in and outside Western civilizations are perceived. However, the Orientalized body, as a construct, has never been as stagnant as stereotypes are supposed to be. By calling out the Asian stagnation mystique, instead of focusing on debunking certain Asian stereotypes, I emphasize the contradictions and inconsistency of stereotypes, articulating the interstices between Asian bodies and many inscrutable qualities, for example, as premodern, primitive, and nonautonomous.

The fictionality of Asian stagnation might be best illustrated by its inconsistent, shifting, and gendered meanings over time. While tracing "when and where" Asia and Asians entered the European and American historical consciousness and imagination, Gary Y. Okihiro (2010) looks at the ways that notable Greek figures such as Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Alexander the Great characterized Asians in the 4th and 5th century B.C.E. Okihiro shows that a figment of exotic and inscrutable Asia has long been ingrained in

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mode of production, see Marian Sawer's (1977) *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* and Daniel Ross Gandy's (2012) *Marx and History: From Primitive Society to the Communist Future*. While many have defended Marx's conceptualization of the Asian mode of production, such as al-'Azm ([1981] 2000, 225-228), Anderson (2016, 31), and Shiozawa (1966), it does not mean these notions of Asian stagnation are rid of problematic rhetoric and values or that we should ignore the fact that contradictory values can coexist within Marx's view of Asian societies. For critiques like this, see, for example, Edward Said's ([1978] 2003) critique in *Orientalism* (153-157) and Armah's (1984) "Masks and Marx."

the Western consciousness, epistemology, and philosophy. For example, Hippocrates estimated from his physician's point of view that Asians were stagnant both in terms of physicality and characters due to the ease, wealth, and uniformity brought by climate and governance. Asians exhibited a "monotonous sameness" in physicality, whereas Europeans had diverse physical types. Asians were slack, cowardly, and lacking spirit, while Europeans were courageous, enduring, and energetic. Hippocrates made these accounts based on the assumption that uniformity leads to slackness and cowardice; in contrast, variation cultivates endurance, which stimulates bravery.

In a similar vein, Aristotle described Asians as low-spirited, servile, and "always in a state of subjection and slavery," inviting subjugation. Following Hippocrates, Aristotle also attributes such observation to the climate in Asia.[2] In addition to being monotonous, inert, timid, and servile, Okihiro also discerns another connotation of the Asian stagnation, which is ahistorical and passive. He notes that in early Christian European texts (4th and 7th century C.E.), both an otherworldly, exotic Asia and a demonic, strange Asia were depicted, "where a prerational, stagnant configuration existed," inviting the West for conquest and longing for an identity (7). Similar to Aristotle, Alexander the Great also saw Asians as "a nation of slaves," but his view of the Asian stagnation has a gendered element to it, calling Asians enemies being "enervated by long ease and effeminacy." If effeminacy was behind the Asian stagnation and the natural slavery, Asian women, then, were doubly stagnant and doubly inviting subjugation.

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[2] Some have tried to make sense of Aristotle's controversial notion of "natural slavery," such as Malcolm Heath's (2008) "Aristotle on Natural Slavery" and Jill Frank's (2005) *A Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics.* On the flip side, see Susan Lape's (2006) review of Frank's book for a rebuttal that briefly highlights some issues of this notion.

Nevertheless, the Greek representation of Asian femininities is inconsistent, as Okihiro notes that, "The Greek representation of Asia yielded not only soft men and erotic women but also hard, cruel men and virile, martial women" (8). Additionally, Okihiro reviews the Old English *Wonders of the East* (written about in A.D. 1000) and finds that the depiction of women moves beyond the erotic-virile spectrum and into the grotesque, tellingly revealing the fictionality of the stereotypes, or imagination indeed, of Asian femininities. *Wonders of the East* catalogs a variety of "wonders" of the East, most of which are presumed to be West and South Asia. Here, women are described as nonsensical beings with boar tusks and oxen tails and that they are "thirteen feet tall, and their bodies have the whiteness of marble, and they have camels' feet and donkeys' teeth" (Campbell 1991, 64). While Asian men have been emasculated, Asian women have long been associated with grotesque, abnormal femininities, a rather different approach from the contemporary infantilization or hypersexualization of Asian women (Shimizu 2007). This inconsistency reflects the conjunctural shifts over time, entailing the construct of various frameworks of inscrutable Asia. Such inconsistency, on the one hand, serves as a gateway to debunking the inscrutability of Asia and, on the other hand, reveals a Euro-American stagnation that has been consistent in its self-serving, self-centered, and gendered approach to imagining Asia.

Moving forward to the present day, understanding the politics of Orientalist rock is a vexing task because this politics exists between seemingly contradictory discourses of Asian cool, yellow peril, and sometimes yellowface. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 largely increased the quota of Asian immigrants. The height of Orientalist rock of the 1970s and the 1980s coincided with this more flexible political context for

Asian immigrants to relocate to the U.S. Although the concept of race and the ways that Asians entered the European and American consciousness in the late 20th century were drastically different from those in the Greek and medieval social formations (Goldberg 1993; Okihiro 2010), no matter how these tropes have taken shape and adapted into Orientalist rock and popular music, we can recognize the same mechanism behind these seemingly changing tropes, a mechanism that functions as a mirror of Western desires and expressions—a central function of the problematic ideology of Orientalism.

In terms of the representation of Asian women, even though that raga rock popularized South Asian attire, accessories, religions, and cultures since the 1960s in Europe and the U.S. and that female sexuality was not a defining element to this male-dominated scene (Durham 2001, 204–5), we can still articulate a racial and sexual politics of Asian femininity by examining the roles and representation of Asian women in musical practices, or, "when and where" Asian women entered the landscape of Orientalist rock. As Okihiro (2000) reminds us, "the feminization of Asia was well under way before the colonization of Asia by Europe in the sixteenth century, as evident in the accounts of Hippocrates, Herodotus, Aristotle, Arrian, Egeria, and Adamnan" (7). Similarly, to examine the racial and gender politics of Asian American women rock musicians, a group of musicians only until recent years started gaining considerable and serious media attention, we must look far back.

In sum, "Asian stagnation" is a racialized and gendered discourse. Through gesturing towards the motley and oftentimes preposterous imagination of Asian women in the Greek and medieval period, I underscore the fictitiousness, inconsistency, and gendered nature of the stagnation mystique that is often associated with Asian peoples

and societies. These stereotypes, varying, inconsistent, and at times contradictory, all serve as tools to justify different forms of exclusion and discrimination. As Homi K. Bhabha (1983) reminds us, the concept of "fixity," "the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism," that colonial discourse depends on to construct the ideological Otherness is "a paradoxical mode of representation" (18). This discourse, moreover, is not just about how Western civilizations construct and imagine the East but also about "when and where" we can find Asian American experiences.

It is also important to understand the stagnation behind the *place* of Asian women in Western imagination in order to debunk the seemingly improved images of Asian women and cross-racial alliances. There are many reasons behind the decision to focus on Asian American women rock musicians and influencers for this dissertation. Besides the general lack of scholarly attention to Asian American rock music, the jarring contrast between the scarce literature on Asian American rock music and the abundant literature on musical Orientalism, especially on the representation of Asians in American classical and popular music, is another motivation. Approaching musical Orientalism from a gendered perspective, my project unravels the problems with rock's relationship with Orientalism. Many Western rockers in the 1970s and 1980s invoked the figure of the Asian woman in their music in order to deliver counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist messages that were often intended to be sexually, racially, and politically liberatory. These efforts, however, renewed the long-established articulation of Asian women as apolitical vessels made to deliver someone else's agenda. If "articulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices" (Grossberg 1992, 54), we may dis-articulate the Orientalist gaze from

the Asian woman's body by destabilizing the perceived unities out of the stereotypical characters of the ethnified and feminized Asian body. For Reina Lewis (1996), this is to analyze "conflicts inherent in a discursive formation marked by the terms of gender and race," allowing "a glimpse of points of resistance within the fantasized unity of Orientalist discourse" (19).

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2, "Sonic Ethnic Chic: Orientalist Rock and the Oriental Riff," examines the long-existing, problematic, yet rather creative history of the "Asian cool" discourse by looking at the practices, creative works, and media texts of Orientalist rock between the 1960s to the 1980s. Rather than a general survey of the representation and involvement of Asian artists and Asian women in this cultural field, I focus on examining how the ideology of Orientalism became articulated into rock music through parsing out a racial politics of the relationship between sound and affect. Particularly, the chapter examines how Asian bodies are used affectively often as pseudo-progressive instruments by non-Asian, often white, musicians. Besides a sound-affect approach, I take a comparative approach that contextualizes Orientalist rock's cross-racial alliances with Asian communities by considering the broader racial politics of rock and the politics of ethnic chic in fashion. The chapter first introduces the idea of "sonic ethnic chic" to capture the particularities of how ethnic chic organizes Asian bodies into semierasure (simultaneous visibility and invisibility) through music and thus shapes the political and affective capital of Orientalist rock. Two case studies are presented. The first case study is on the seminal humanitarian project *Concert for Bangladesh* and examines the

semierasure of co-organizer Ravi Shankar while highlighting the often-dismissed dis-articulative agentic power of Bangladesh. The second case study examines the oriental riff, a cliché melody that has become a sonic representation of East Asia, and how the various adaptations of the riff are used in affective and gendered ways. These case studies aim to show that sounds and affects have been integral to the Asian racialization, arguing that Orientalist rock's tendency to build affective cross-racial alliances has repackaged musical Orientalism as a countercultural strategy, where Asianness is fossilized as an apolitical vessel to deliver messages often intended to be culturally and politically progressive.

Within the historical context detailed in chapter 2, chapters 3 to 5 demonstrate how a range of Asian American women have wielded the affective power of Asian fury and being gentle rebels to debunk the myth of Asian American apoliticism and shape the ways for us to understand musical activism. In simplified terms, my examination of Asian American affects accentuates "angry Asian women" (chapter 3 and chapter 5) and "gentle Asian women" (chapter 4), which can be seen as their satirizing efforts and responses to dismantle the perpetuated tropes of the controlling dragon lady and the submissive China doll/Geisha girl. In a way, to unravel how a range of Asian American women conjure up their own performances of the angry Asian woman and the gentle Asian woman is to unravel counter figures and take on the project of articulating counter-Orientalism and its varied subversive potential enabled through mobilizing Orientalist stereotypes (Kondo 1997).

Angry Asians have assumed a fundamental role in documenting and producing Asian fury in response to the racial violence and discrimination against people of Asian

descent, putting unequivocal counter-expressions out there to debunk the myth that Asians are meek and politically indifferent. Chapter 3, “Inscrutable Asian Fury: Bad Punks of L.A. Chinatown and Little Tokyo,” zooms in on the leadership of Asian immigrant business in L.A.’s early punk scene and theorizes “bad punk” as a specific type of what Eve Oishi (2000) refers to as “Bad Asians”: Bad Asians in the punk rock business, bad as in unfit and badass to be punk. Specifically, the chapter mainly looks at three iconic locations in Los Angeles, Madame Wong’s, Hong Kong Café, and Atomic Café with an emphasis on two unapologetically angry Asian women behind the scene: Madame Wong’s owner Esther Wong and Atomic Café’s owner Nancy Sekizawa (a.k.a. Atomic Nancy) and how they responded to racialized violence with unaccommodating anger. Asian fury, however, is not always a legible affective performance that registers as punk, anti-institutional, or radical. Therefore, I first examine the Orientalist discourses around Esther Wong as a punk promoter, revealing immigrant bad punks’ simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible critical roles to the scene. Next, the second half of the chapter offers an alternative punk historiography by centralizing how Asian fury weaponizes the antisocial thesis of punk spirit and the alternative forms of punk antisociality produced by Asian American experiences. I argue that by refusing to accommodate to some of the punk expectations, angry Asian women punk promoters such as Wong and Sekizawa conjure up indelible punk sensibilities of non-accommodation and non-assimilation, expanding the formulations of punk and becoming a version of punk unruliness and anarchy in themselves. Ultimately, the chapter reclaims the cultural memory of the nascent West Coast punk scene for Asian America.

Chapter 4, “Gentle Rebels: Diaspora Sensibilities and Ghostly Performances,” takes on the project of radicalizing the gentle sounds and acts of Asian American women rock musicians, i.e. non-hegemonic sounds and acts of musical activism. It examines how a range of contemporary alternative and indie rock musicians engage with their cultural roots and mobilize mediated intimacies enabled by transnational and cross-generational dialogues to negotiate a normative sense of belonging in ways that do not necessarily conjure up hegemonic shapes and sounds of activism. The chapter starts with the assessment that vulnerabilities and emotional honesty are radical Asian affects. Next, I move onto a case study on the musical works and life stories of two Cambodian American fusionist musicians, Laura Mam and Bochan Huy, and explore how they manage to challenge the limited narratives around refugees with music and how the concept of freedom takes different shapes, reconfiguring the “war victim” image often desired by Western saviors. Lastly, I further explore the performance of diaspora sensibilities through an object-oriented approach by looking at the music video of Japanese Breakfast’s “Everybody Wants to Love You” (2016) as a ghostly performance. With these case studies, I call for attention to the gentle acts that turn inwards as a way to decenter the whiteness and the hegemonic ways of listening and feeling musical activism.

Chapter 5, “Musical Movements Revisited: Asian, Queer, and Rock ‘n’ Roll,” redirects chapter 3’s inquiry of angry Asians for the quest for articulating an Asian American musical movement by tracing the imprints of Asian American women rock and punk musicians roughly from the mid-1960s to the early 2000s. As the time frame suggests, this chapter aims at presenting a kind of breadth as a counter argument against the discourse of Asian American rock as a novelty. Instead of a normative trajectory that

follows major underground feminist and queer musical movements such as women's music, queercore, and riot grrrl, I propose a method that I call "turning to fringes of fringes" and turn to the fringe of, outside of, and between these musical counter-discourses. The chapter surveys such musicians and bands as June Millington of Fanny, Dianne Chai of the Alley Cats, Janis Tanaka, Leslie Mah of A.S.F. and Tribe 8, and all-Asian queer women punk bands Lucy Stoners and the DragOn Ladies. Overall, I argue for the genealogy of an Asian American musical movement that accentuates queer Asian American women punks and rockers and that this genealogy not only challenges the unrepresentability of Asian bodies in American rock but also speaks most loud in the margins of the margins. While it is a common demand to reconstruct the narratives of rock by putting back erased bodies, this chapter gestures towards the dangers of accepting this interpellation at the expense of further erasing those who never fully belonged to any established frameworks of musical narratives. Finally, it calls for the significance of imagining elsewhere and actively articulating alternative vocabulary and spaces.

The conclusion chapter ponders over the idea of "an Asian American sound" and how to understand it as sounds of counter-Orientalism. While musing on the many sonic qualities of an Asian American sound, it sheds further light on alternative musical activism within immigrant communities, such as Vietnamese new wave and Cambodian cover bands.

Chapter 2:

Sonic Ethnic Chic:
Orientalist Rock and the Oriental Riff

Introduction

I was Asian before it was cool.

— Sierra Katow, Comedian
Just For Laughs, "Straight Up, Stand Up" (2019)

"Asian stuff just was not cool. There was no foodie culture yet. Sushi was exotic still. Thai food was just all one type. There was nothing regional. Chinese food was slop suey, and when it came to design, or art, cinema, Asian stuff was not cool at all" (Surasmith 2016, 04:24-04:43). This is how Martin Wong in the podcast *Asian Americana* reflected on the cultural milieu when he co-founded the *Giant Robot* magazine in 1994, one of the first Asian American punk zines. These days, from animated television series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008), all-Asian principal cast Hollywood film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), and Netflix reality show *Bling Empire* (2021) to Britpop band Blur's *The Magic Whip* (2015), vaporwave aesthetics, and rising Asian American rappers, it seems that "Asian stuff" is finally cool. However, when we look back at the heyday of rock music from the 1960s to the 1980s, it seems that Asian stuff was already cool. In fact, from the eighteenth-century chinoiserie and nineteenth-century japonisme to the undying popularity of musical exoticism, Asian ethnic chic has a long and rather creative history. More recently, however, Ali Nobil Ahmad (2001) accurately captures a contradiction behind the media fuss about the 1990s South Asian influenced British dance music scene, calling it a "slightly embarrassing truth . . . that Asian Cool was a party to which Asians were either not invited, or chose not to go to"

(84). Both Wong and Ahmed's sentiments have foregrounded a key perspective: Asians themselves do or did not perceive their culture as cool. This points to the issue of cultural agency behind the discourse of Asian Cool, making us wonder: who is making Asian things cool and who gets to celebrate this coolness? As for the popular songs that have made Asian stuff cool in the last century, it is often the non-Asian musicians who have wielded their creative and cultural autonomy to make Asian things a cool theme in their musical works. However, celebrating this coolness is a joy Asians rarely enjoyed or chose not to enjoy.

Deborah Wong (2004) has captured the lopsided membership and authorship of Asian Cool, noting that "the primary place of Asians and Asian Americans in the music industry has been as representations, not as agents" (256). Notably, the 1990s British dance music is not the first nor the only musical space where discourses of Asian Cool are populated. We can observe a similar phenomenon in the 1960s—1980s rock and popular music across the Atlantic, from raga rock classics like the Beatles "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" (1965) and the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black" (1966) to Siouxsie and the Banshees' unexpected international hit "Hong Kong Garden" (1978), the Vapors' one-hit wonder "Turning Japanese" (1980), and a variety of loosely China-inspired musical works such as California punk pioneers the Dils' "Red Rockers (Rule)" (1979), English band Japan's art rock album *Tin Drum* (1981), and New Orleans-based band Red Rockers' new wave hit single "China" (1983). Meanwhile, we cannot neglect a series of fetishizing, often superficial interracial love songs such as the Hollies' "Oriental Sadness" (1966), Deep Purple's "Woman from Tokyo" (1972), Hanoi Rocks' "Oriental Beat" (1982), David Bowie's "China Girl" (1983), and Gyllene Tider's "Teaser

Japanese" (1983). Behind many popular tunes is a generation of Asians and Asian immigrants who did not enjoy the same degree of agency to steer the looks, sounds, and affects of their own ethnic and cultural legacies in mainstream spaces.[3] Instead, they often appeared in spiritual, cultural, and creative terms—representation, that is.

Asian ethnic chic propagates in popular discourses often for its novelty value,[4] but this value is built on an Asian stagnation ideology that fundamentally displaces Asian temporalities and experiences with one that is stagnant yet inspiring and enticing, one that remains distant from Western civilization and awaits to be discovered. In popular culture, Asian stagnation takes many forms. It is aestheticized as "a fossilised Asianess" that can be modernized through George Harrison's psychedelic rock while having nothing to do with British Asians' lived experiences (Ahmad 2001, 80). It also manifests in raga rock's ornamentalization of Indian traditional music, techno-orientalist retro-futuristic reimaginations, or in blatant stereotypes that fix Asians as "perpetual foreigner" or "model minority." The irony of Asian stagnation, indeed, lies in its versatility and polymorphism. This chapter provides another angle into the ways Asian stagnation functions through attending to the racial politics of the relationship between sounds and affects. It examines how Asian bodies are used affectively in orientalist rock and popular musical practices often as pseudo-progressive instruments by non-Asian, often white, musicians through two case studies: the *Concert for Bangladesh* and the oriental riff.

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[3] This is not to erase the cultural agency of Asian musicians in the West. As illustrated in the rest of the chapters, Asians in the U.S. have assumed a variety of roles outside of the mainstream popular musical landscape.

[4] For a focused study on the politics of novelty and popular music, see (Dale 2016).

This sound-affect approach is in part dictated by the prevalence of cross-racial affective alliances in the practices and musical works of orientalist rock.[5] Building affective alliances is one of the five hypotheses that Lawrence Grossberg (1984) proposes to study rock affects. He defines an affective alliance as "a network of empowerment" that "both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world" (227). This dimension is important to rock music studies because rock functions both affectively and ideologically while seeking to disrupt the dominant structure and assimilative mainstream incorporation. Mediated through flexible affective alliances, therefore, rock affects are largely political and diverse in structure. Adding the lens of race to studying rock affects is critical because orientalist rock's cross-racial affective tendencies, like other types of cross-racial relations, are bound up with racial politics and power differences. Both case studies chosen for this chapter, the *Concert for Bangladesh* and the oriental riff, provide a rich lens to examine the intersections of orientalist rock, Asian sonic ethnic chic, and the politics of cross-racial affective alliances.

Building on scholarship on ethnic chic in popular media and cross-cultural musical collaboration while considering the audiovisual and multisensory modalities of musical communication, I first propose the idea of "sonic ethnic chic" as a lens to center the (disembodied) sonic while exploring ethnic chic's semierasure (simultaneous visibility and invisibility) of the (embodied) ethnic body. It approaches the

[5] I (Liu 2019) have argued elsewhere and proposed the idea of "avant-orientalism" to describe a series of musical practices—exemplified by what some may call art rock, avant-rock, or simply experimental rock music—that evinces avant-garde sensibilities by experimenting with Asian instruments, aesthetics, and rhetoric in problematic ways. We can broadly refer to such musical practices as "orientalist rock" in order to attend more closely to the intersectional problems of arts and less to the genrefication of popular music. My theorization of avant-orientalism vis-à-vis rock music shares similar traits to Ahmed's consideration of Asian Cool vis-à-vis dance music. Moreover, while my theorization of avant-orientalism focused on rock music, the term can be thought to describe a series of similar cultural practices beyond rock or music.

ornamentalized and ethnically marked sounds as disembodied force, shaping the political and affective capital of practices of sonic ethnic chic. The first case study on the seminal humanitarian project *Concert for Bangladesh* examines the semierasure of co-organizer Ravi Shankar and the representation of Bangladesh while highlighting the often-dismissed agency of Bangladesh in re-appropriating similar discourses for their own political and cultural agenda. By adopting a comparative and transnational approach, this case study expands the Western-centric scope of ethnic chic and displaces the body-centrism in examining ethnic chic's power hierarchies. The second case study is on the oriental riff, a cliché melody that has become a sonic representation of East Asia in Western popular music and media. It is a more focused study on the relationship between sounds and affects and emphasizes the aural perspective of Asian racialization. Specifically, I examine and compare various appearances and adaptations of the oriental riff to unpack how and why they sound and feel certain ways through Carl Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting" (1974), Rush's "A Passage to Bangkok" (1976), David Bowie's "China Girl" (1983), Day Above Ground's "Asian Girlz" (2013), Siouxsie and the Banshees' "Hong Kong Garden" (1978), Nancy Kwan's "Fan Tan Fannie" (1961), Aneka's "Japanese Boy" (1981), the Hollies' "Oriental Sadness" (1966), and the Vapors' "Turning Japanese" (1980). Together, the two case studies call for multi-modal, transnational, and transhistorical perspectives for examining the increasingly intricate networks of global musical flows.

Dangerous Crossroads: Sonic Ethnic Chic and Cross-Racial Alliances

In *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*, George Lipsitz (1994) introduces "dangerous crossroads" as a metaphor to describe both

the opportunities and dangers of intercultural communication as manifested in different kinds of crossroads in popular music such as multi-racial and cross-national music, noting that:

> In an era when every continent seems convulsed by ethnic, religious, and racial violence, examples of cross-national and multi-racial music offer hope for a better future. Yet, certain kinds of multi-culturalism and internationalism are also essential elements in the project of transnational capital to erase local differences and distinctions . . . But while very much a product of the ever expanding reach and scope of capital, these cultural creations also testify to the ways in which artists from aggrieved communities can use the very instruments of their displacement and dispossession to forge a new public sphere with emancipatory potential. (14)

Lipsitz's commentary touches on the core of the dilemma of intercultural communicative and creative practices—the danger of obliterating geographical and cultural specifics through mass production and hegemonic mediation as well as the potential for historically marginalized artists to gain an interventionist tool of voice. One strand of danger that Lipsitz examines is the ethics of appropriation and cross-racial, transnational collaborations, particularly through Paul Simon's 1986 album *Graceland*, which Simon co-created and toured with South African artists, as well as Talking Heads' 1988 Afro-pop influenced fusionist album *Naked* (56-63). With both cases, Lipsitz asserts that the musicians' benign and appreciative intention does not offset the consequences of uneven artistic agency, "especially when participants in the dialogue speak from positions of highly unequal access to power, opportunity, and life chances," perpetuating discourses

of primitivism, exoticism, and orientalism (4-5; 60-61). In sum, cultural crossroads are hotbeds of musical orientalism. If we take the metaphor of crossroads further, two kinds of crossroads are common to find: ethnic chic and cross-racial alliances. Next, I would discuss them in more detail to contextualize the complications of dangerous musical crossroads.

Ethnic Chic and Introducing "Sonic Ethnic Chic"

Chic, as a noun and as defined in *Oxford English Dictionary*, means (1) "Sophisticated stylishness and elegance, esp. in dress, taste, or manner" or (2) "As the second element in compounds: the style or look associated with a specified lifestyle or subculture (now esp. one which might seem unlikely as a source of inspiration) regarded or appropriated as fashion" such as "as eco-chic, geek chic, heroin chic, radical chic" (OED Online 2020).[6] These definitions have captured two common orientations of the term in academic writings: Some treat "chic" as an equivalent to "fashion" (e.g., Steele and Major 1999), while some take the meaning of chic further and primarily view it as an ideology-ridden discourse that is indissociable from the issues of appropriation and power relations (e.g., Durham 2001; Leshkowich and Carla 2003; Abaza 2007). Ethnic chic as chic of ethnic symbols is commonly practiced in fashion and mass culture in general and by both those who have a righteous heritage and those who don't. Thus, a multi-directional review of how ethnic chic works as a discourse of power and as

[6] Another meaning given by OED Online (2020) is: "In the fine arts: (the use of) the imagination as the source from which artwork is produced, as distinguished from working from life. Also: guidelines (rather than natural artistic ability) followed in the production of lifelike artwork (sometimes *depreciative*)." I bracket the further elaboration of this meaning because of its contextual difference (mostly in fine arts) and temporal difference (mostly used from the mid 19th to early 20th century, as shown via OED's quotations) from my study.

mediated by different types of agents is needed for gaining a dynamic, comparative, and non-Euro-American-centric view of its political leverage as a type of dangerous crossroad.

Ethnic chic can function as a tool for signifying classist and elitist differences (Tarlo 1996; Abaza 2007) and "as status markers and a means to social elevation" (Adbaza 2007, 295) when used by those with a righteous cultural heritage in its original contexts, including those commonly imagined locales of orientalist discourses such as India and Egypt. These functions dovetail nicely with Ann Marie Leshkowich and Carla Jones' (2003) inquiry of "what happens when Asian chic becomes chic in Asia." A short answer would be what many would characterize as "self-orientalism" (e.g., Maira 2008), which, too, derives from drastically different rationales and entails multi-directional interpretations. However, self-orientalism is not to suggest a submissive Asia internalizing the orientalist gaze. Rather, what lies at the intersection of ethnic chic and self-orientalism, I emphasize, is the potential to unsettle a (neo)colonialist temporality that perceives the non-Western as newfound treasures, especially if we consider through a transnational lens. Mona Abaza's (2007) study of ethnic chic in contemporary Egypt offers a glimpse into how this situation works. Abaza points out two elements behind self-orientalism that can disrupt the central position of the West in orientalist discourses. The first element is how the open-door policy, which was at its height in the late 1970s Egypt, encouraged Egyptian companies to assume an active role in cultural and commerce exportation; the second element is the highly intercultural experiences of the designers behind their cultural exportation, adding another layer of negotiation behind the exportation of what Western consumers think as "authentic" ethnic cultures and fashion

(294). Abaza uses these perspectives to reveal the interactive complexity of globalization as well as the increasingly visible and influential roles of non-Western countries in the popularization of ethnic chic in the West.

Knowing that cultural borrowings or appropriation is not the only factor or agent behind the phenomena of ethnic chic in the West adds a critical lens when we do examine the various embodiments of ethnic chic in the Western cultural landscape. One signature examination of contemporary ethnic chic in the U.S. is Meenakshi Gigi Durham's (2001) study of how South Asian adornments such as nose rings and bindis are used on white female bodies. She argues that "the contemporary 'ethnic chic' preserves power hierarchies by locating the White woman as sexual object, and the Indian woman as the disembodied fetish that supports White female sexuality" (201). Durham is especially concerned with the situation that she calls "semierasure," where the bodies of Indian women are erased and replaced by white women's bodies, hence "a simultaneous visibility and invisibility" of Indian femininity (210). Such Western appropriation of Indian femininity symbols functions to (1) remove the agents (Indian women) who could challenge the essentialization of their identities from the picture; (2) make these cultural symbols ahistorical and decontextualized objects; and (3) intensify white women's sexual appeal and maintain the racialized hierarchy of female appearance by recirculating these ethnic symbols as exotic signs (212).[7] Although Durham focuses on South Asian

[7] I bracket another function or effect of "semierasure" that Durham frames as "a double alterity: the White female as sexual object, and the Asian Indian female as the intangible and disembodied fetish that supports White female sexuality" (210) because my musical examples center on the white male appropriators. Yet, this effect of double alterity, albeit probably an unwanted one by the appropriating bodies in Durham's study, happens to be a desired effect, or rather, a rationale, amongst many white male rock musicians who see themselves as alienated by the mainstream society and actively seek to incorporate non-white musical and cultural elements in their music. I elaborate on this layer of appropriating intention in more detail in the later parts of this chapter.

femininity, similar semierasure of East Asian femininity, sometimes coupled with practices of yellowface, is also common to find in the cultural memories of Western popular music. For example, Summer Kim Lee (2017) criticizes the ornamentalization of Asian femininity in Siouxsie Sioux's (of Siouxsie and the Banshees) photoshoot in kabuki makeup and kimono, which creates simultaneous visibility of invisibility of Asian femininity, by noting that for experimental white femininity, "Asian femininity becomes untethered from the racialized and gendered Asian woman's body; it is a performance contingent upon my being excluded from it as an Asian American woman" (261).[8] These photos appeared in several magazine covers, including *The Face* and *Hit Machine* (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Some early examples of what W. Anthony Sheppard (2019) refers to as "musical *japonisme*" can be found in the cover art of the early 1900s sheet music, such as Marie Hall-Brimacombe's "Little Sally-San (Of Old Japan)" (1918).[9]

Figure 2.1 February 1982 issue of *The Face* with Siouxsie on the cover. Photo by Sheila Rock.
Figure 2.2 No.4 1982 issue of *Hit Machine* with Siouxsie on the cover. Photo by Sheila Rock.

[8] For a focused study of the ornamentalism of Asian femininity, see (Cheng 2019).
[9] For the sheet music and the sheet music cover, see http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/isl/sheetmusic/isl-abh-9191.

Building on Durham and Kim's ruminations on the racialized and gendered semierasure of Asian bodies, I encourage us to think of semierasure as an instrument of ethnic chic that functions not only visually, like the above, but also sonically. Semierasure, especially the first two functions as Durham articulates, is common in popular music when the appropriating body becomes the sounding agent of exotified cultures, such as Paul Simon in *Graceland* (1986) and Talking Heads in *Naked* (1988). With the cases of Paul Simon and Talking Heads, the musicians tried to be ethnical by hiring African, African-Caribbean, and international musicians to collaborate and tour together, hence the non-Western body is not entirely removed like it is in Durham's case of South Asian adornments; some of these non-Western music collaborators also appreciated the experience and the music they were able to co-create. That said, I argue that these international collaborators still underwent a similar semierasure, rendered simultaneously visible and invisible, by virtue of the disparities of both artistic and physical geography in musical production and performances.

The disparity of artistic geography, which maintains the racialized hierarchy of creative pursuits, is captured by Lipsitz (1994):

> The main problem posed by the inter-cultural collaborations orchestrated by Paul Simon or David Byrne stems from their unwillingness to examine their own relationship to power or to allow for reciprocal subjectivities between and among cultures. By placing themselves at the center, they elide their own historical specificity as well as that of their colleagues and collaborators . . . they define delight in difference as a process organized around exotic images from overseas, with no corollary inspection of their own identities. Their escapes into postmodern multi-culturalism, however well-motivated, hide the construction of whiteness in America-its privileges evasions and contradictions. (63)

Placing the appropriating body at the center of artistic geography not only impedes reciprocal subjectivities as Lipsitz observes, but it also furthers the separation of cultural

owners from cultural symbols, allowing for an easier recirculation of these symbols as exotic signs as some kind of Third World inspiration. The latter is what concerns Durham most. Another problem from centering the appropriating body's artistic pursuits is the displacement of the cultural meanings for the cultural owners, therefore running the risk of colonizing non-Western musical materials. Several studies have scrutinized this colonizing tendency. Lipsitz (1994) calls out that "[m]odernist literature, art, and music in Western countries has consistently spectacularized difference"; and one result is the production of "colonized 'hinterlands' both inside and outside of their national boundaries" (5). For example, this happens when Paul Simon stressed, "his skill in identifying and *transforming* regional sounds for an international audience" when creating *Graceland* (as cited in Lipsitz, 57-58; emphasis added) and when Peter Gabriel introduces Armenian Doudou music in "The Feeling Begins" (1989) and African drumming in "Come Talk To Me" (1992) but only to serve his own musical ideas and regularize these sounds with Western music codes such as 4/4 meters (Taylor 1997, 41-44; Fast 2001, 101-02). Scholars have also attended to the disparity of physical geography such as the physical arrangement of musicians in a recording studio or on stage. This happens more in cases of collaboration as opposed to simply cultural borrowing, which entails the presence of non-Western musicians, a situation that Susan Fast (2001) sees as even more complicated. Through dissecting the ostensible common arrangement of performance space at the 1994 reunion concert of Led Zeppelin *Unledded* (featuring Robert Plant and Jimmy Page) amongst band players, a group of Western classical musicians, and a group of Egyptian musicians (105-07), Fast makes clear that

performance space is "territory… a geography of clearly demarcated zones that represent certain musical, cultural and aesthetic interests" (106).[10]

Considering the audiovisual and multisensory modalities of musical communication, I introduce the idea of "sonic ethnic chic" to complicate the approach to ethnic chic that prioritizes the corporeal over the audible and intangible. For example, Durham (2001) ponders over theories and possibilities of oppositional look in ethnic chic but ultimately argues that there can be no returned gaze because "no one is really there to return the gaze . . . when we consider representations of South Asian femininity in the Western media" (209) and that "[a]s long as South Asian American women are denied symbolic access to the markers of their own heritage, however, this heuristic cannot be pursued" (214). An underlying prerequisite of this argument is a human-centered epistemology of agency—the removal of the bodies of South Asian women forecloses the possibility of a returned gaze, implying that objects, in this case South Asian female adornments, no longer have or have very limited agency without their "proper" owners. I want to think beyond this anthropocentrism of ethnic chic by also considering how the nonhuman, particularly sounds, can operate as an interventionist agent returning a gaze at orientalist musicians even when the appropriated body is missing from the picture. Therefore, sonic ethnic chic is not removing investigations of human agents but to give equal weight to the role of intangible factors, such as the sonic and the affective, and to

[10] A video of the discussed performance can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vbeilE0UrQ. This cultural geographical approach is certainly not the only one to explore stage and race. There is rich scholarship addressing the performance of race on different stages in terms of both representation and self-representation. See, for example, Dorinne K. Kondo's (1997) *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*, Josephine Lee's (1998) *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*, and Nancy Yunhwa Rao's (2017) *Chinatown Opera Theater in North America*.

consider the interdependence between the embodied and the disembodied. This two-fold interrogation runs throughout this dissertation.

Cross-Racial Alliances, Wrong Alliances?

> Black music has functioned as an alluring Outside for white bohemian youth—the old notion of the Black as Other, incarnation of sexuality and the forbidden. Alienated white youth has traditionally aspired to "white nigger" status, desiring both the oppression/exclusion blacks suffer, and their symbolic 'resolution' of their problems, their victory over environment, in style and music. (Reynolds 1985)

> Long histories of avant-garde art and vanguard politics demonstrate the overwhelming failure of efforts to transform society by imagining that we can stand outside it, by seeking transcendent critiques untainted by dominant ideologies and interests. (Lipsitz 1994, 16-17)

> The Janus-faced visions of the hippie counterculture that failed to recognize its own entanglements with capitalism, bourgeois notions of the individual, and the legacies of the systemic differentials of power between individuals and institutions. (Fellezs 2014, 164)

This mini-section reviews one specific project of cross-racial affective alliances by looking at the "whitewash" of rock music as the broader context to consider the representation of Asian sounds and bodies in the last part of this chapter. Like Grossberg (1984) suggests, rock music has always functioned affectively as an undying counter-mainstream culture. Before Paul Simon and Talking Heads' turn to world music, rock music was always already deeply involved with cross-racial and cross-cultural alliances. Understanding the politics of cross-racial and cross-cultural alliances lays the ground for us to examine the continued semierasure of racially and ethnically marked bodies and sounds in popular music.

Cross-racial alliances are easy to find in popular music today but also during and after the 1960s counterculture, where popular music played a key role in capturing the

social milieu and collective psyche (Roszak [1968] 1995). They adopt different shapes and purposes. We can find such alliances in musical collaborations throughout the 1980s such as Stevie Wonder & Paul McCartney, Tina Turner & David Bowie, Ladysmith Black Mambazo & Paul Simon, Ray Charles & Billy Joel, Freddie Mercury & David Bowie, and B.B. King & U2, just to name a few. Alliances this way between white and Asian musicians in popular and rock music were scarce in comparison.[11] We can also find cross-racial alliances in musical works or aesthetics created without such collaboration and still showing a tendency of cross-racial, although often essentialist, identification, where engagements with Asian musical and cultural materials are more common. The specific kind of alliances that I would like to focus on is the ones formed through self-Otherization (Head 2003; Duncombe and Maxwell 2011; Liu 2019). In particular, white rockers identifying with the Black culture, or even identify as Black, to express the status and sensibilities of being an outsider is not uncommon. While it may seem that sonic ethnic chic is a fated complication of cross-racial alliances amongst white artists and their beloved non-white cultures, discussing such situations from the perspective of alliances would help us move beyond binary ideologies of cultural borrowing/appreciation vs. cultural appropriation, revealing the intricate networks behind

[11] An informed reader would immediately say that Freddie Mercury would be an example to discuss white-Asian musical collaboration. Although Freddie Mercury was of Parsi-Indian heritage and had his share of racism while trying to break into the circle of rock music, his personal ethnic identity was certainly not centered while being part of British and majority white rock band Queen. Yet the media representation of Mercury's racial and ethnic identity deserves a dedicated academic study, which has yet to happen, and I bracket this inquiry here as it entails a much longer investigation. However, I need to note that the whitewashing of his public image, no matter as a result of media or music industry intervention, speaks to what I would soon mention about the whitewashing of rock music in general. On another note, while it seems natural to assume that Mercury/media/Queen's publicists might have tried to downplay his ethnic origin (e.g., Clayton 2001, 205), archival materials show that printed and publicly circulated bios often clearly stated Mercury's heritage (born in Zanzibar and grew up in India). A selection of such materials can be found on this Quora page: https://qr.ae/pNakD1 (Meadows 2019). Unfortunately, I cannot find a more stable source for this.

the racial politics of rock. In addition, although the African diaspora and the Asian diaspora have their distinct history, a comparative understanding of how cross-racial alliances work in rock can also reveal some similarities of how racial Others are treated in white rock.

Calling Jimi Hendrix but also Jackson Pollock, Jesus Christ, and grandma all "nigga" in her "Rock N Roll Nigger" (1978), Patti Smith reimagined "nigger" as an identity for those social misfits and outcasts. Ultimately, Smith snarls in the chorus, "Outside of society, that's where I want to be. Outside of society, they're waitin' for me." The song conjures up the "White Negro," a trope introduced in the works of American writer Norman Mailer in the 1950s to centralize the marginality and outsider status of white hipsters, articulating such situations with the Blacks they admired. The trope did not die with the bohemians. It continued with punk, post-punk, and with new forms.[12] Self-proclaimed "the last white nigger" and "totally into black stuff" (Marsh 1976), Smith might have a better understanding and more genuine admiration of Black cultures than her peers due to her racially mixed childhood neighborhood, but her racially transcendent idealization of Black cultures leads to inevitable appropriation.[13] In an interview with *Rolling Stone*'s Dave Marsh in 1976, when talking about her fascination with Jamaican religious movement Rastafarianism, Smith claimed that "So many kids are getting into it, they're gonna have to change the rules. It's not a black thing anymore; it's

[12] Although originally a literary trope, the White Negro is often compared with the white musicians and artists who desire to affiliate themselves closely with their Black idols. See, for example, Mahon (2004, 248) and section two and three of Duncombe and Maxwell (2011).

[13] It is one of the common approaches that musicians and critics take to "defend" or argue against charges of appropriation by stressing the importance of an artist' intercultural and interracial upbringing, which to some extent bestows some "native" credentials to a white musician to compose with non-white musics, such as Smith as well as how Nancy Yunhwa Rao (2001) defends experimental musician Henry Cowell, who wrote with multiple Asian musical modes such as Chinese, Japanese, and Indian music (cf. Corbett 2020).

not even Jamaican. It belongs to *us* now" (emphasis mine). Such commentaries led to Marsh's pungent remark that these "fantasies" of Smith's were worse than the "ultimate cultural usurper" Norman Mailers and comparable to cult leader Charles Manson, "another white man who wanted to appropriate black revolution for his own purposes." Indeed, Smith's racial reimagination continued the avant-garde and hippie counterculture's penchant for non-white, non-Western cultures for inspiration and identification, just like how the hippie groups romanticized and appropriated the "the antiofficial and outlaw sensibility" of Black activists (Zimmerman 2008, 33), resulting in vague aesthetic transgression and aesthetic agendas, rather than political ones (Duncombe and Maxwell 2011, 19; Fellezs 2014, 154; 161).[14]

The infatuation with Blackness and the essentialized articulation of Black bodies with "natural" and "primitive" qualities that white America desires all conjures up orientalist fantasies that exoticize and mythologize certain racial groups, as Maureen Mahon (2004) observes:

> From Harlem's white jazz fans of the 1920s to the Beats and rock 'n' rollers of the 1950s to the blues revivalists of the 1960s to the rap fans of the 1990s, white Americans have immersed themselves in black culture, finding in this exotic arena an exhilarating way to elude the stodgy status quo (Jefferson 1973). These appropriations involved a certain amount of mythologizing and stereotyping of the emotions, sexuality, and spirituality of black people whom many whites believe embody the freedom, naturalness, and joy for life that whites had lost. Rock 'n' roll parallels these traits; it symbolizes freedom of expression, the

[14] American punk pioneers, San Francisco based band Avengers also had a similarly titled song from their first EP in 1979, called "White Nigger." The song describes a young white male workaholic who works for money and his ambition. "White nigger" is probably used to indicate a status of "work slave" as shown in lines like "Work like a dog; work like a slave. Work like a devil, and what have you made." In comparison, Lou Reed's (1978) "I Wanna Be Black" mocks the White Negro fetish by satirizing the stereotyping and romanticizing of Blackness by those who "don't want to be a fucked up, middle class, college student anymore" and instead want to have "natural rhythm" and sexual prowess and to become Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Panthers. Some speak highly of Reed's bold use of satire (e.g., Hamelman 2016), while some critics find Reed's irony does not mitigate the song's problematic language or his exaggerated live performances of Black stereotypes (see Haddon 2020, 81-82).

> rejection of mainstream white American society, and the pursuit of pleasure-especially illicit pleasures derived from sex and drugs. (205)

To many, what Margo Jefferson and Mahon observed is part of the process of how rock 'n' roll, and later rock music more generally, became white-dominated music, white sounds, and white riots (e.g., Duncombe and Tremblay 2011; Hamilton 2016). Although this process in part started with irrefutable admiration, the result is simultaneous sonic ethnic chic and whitewashing. Jack Hamilton (2016) argues that "the processes through which a musical culture rooted in interracialism came to imagine whiteness as its most basic stakes of authenticity" was driven by "[a] fundamental panic that engulfed rock and roll's emergence" that "the music's overtones of racial intermixture would threaten the social order" (6). From this perspective, it would also be easier to savor the progressive quality underneath essentializing White Negro songs like Smith's "Rock N Roll Nigger," which dauntlessly play with the "deep racial fears that inspired rock in the first place—and explode[d] into joyous cacophony" (Marsh 1976). However, despite what seemed to be admiration and sonic ethnic chic in the first place, the concomitant whitewashing gradually disarticulated Blackness from the sounds of rock to the extent that "Black rock" became an oxymoron by the 1980s and Black pop and rock musicians "cease[d] to be black in the music industry sense of the world" (Mahon 2004, 122-23, 163), woefully echoing Patti Smith's thoughts on Rastafarianism in white America that "It's not a black thing anymore . . . It belongs to us now." Together, Jefferson, Mahon, and Hamilton remind us of the imbricated effects and the borderline distinction of appreciation (from the perspective of author intent and motivation) versus appropriation (from the socioeconomic, cultural, and political perspectives).

Some have argued that with some musicians who started with benign motives and genuine musical interests, it would be inaccurate and unreasonable to simply label their practices as appropriation or even neocolonialism. For example, arguing against Oliver Lovesey's (2011) calling of bands such as the Incredible String Band and Led Zeppelin as being complicit with colonial and orientalist assumptions through their appropriation of North African music, Brian Ireland and Sharif Gemie (2019) call it "absurd" to use the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as an example of a "'passive moral complicity' in colonialism," which instead should be seen as "a measured, careful form of *innocent appropriation*, and an example of the sort of borrowing that musicians have been doing for centuries" (32; emphasis added). Many reasons were given, such as that the sitar and the East were used as "a source of counterlegitimacy to dominant Western norms"; "the oriental-inspired music of the late 1960s" never referenced India as an ex-colony; George Harrison went to India to learn and not exploit; and even that Jimmy Page and Robert Plant (of Led Zeppelin) are not responsible for the past (colonialism) (34-35). They finally suggest that instead of calling such acts exploitation, a flawed experiment in cultural translation is fairer (34).

I (Liu 2019) also have written about the counter-hegemonic power of referencing Asian musical and aesthetic materials in experimental rock musical works. However, while I admire efforts of reflection for nuances and scholarly discourses of cultural appropriation, I still find it unjustifiable to downplay the pernicious systemic impacts on minority bodies by being preoccupied with individual musicians' genuine efforts of learning another culture or pursuits of musicianship. This, in a sense, is to conflate the multilayered networks of political economy with a single lens of individual musicians'

production input. Yet I do not find this a fundamental difference amongst scholars regarding the issues of cultural neocolonialism, appropriation, or imperialism; rather, I see this more as a matter of different approaches regarding similar issues. In many cases, I am with Timothy D. Taylor (2007) in thinking that diagnosing appropriation is not particularly interesting, when compared to diagnosing the ideologies behind these musicians' practices and discourses (236-37). In a similar vein, I urge us not to conflate explorations of cultural and political impacts with examinations of author intentions and creative agency. While culture producers may start with different purposes, results and impacts can still be the same. Therefore, while this dissertation does not avoid discussing a musician's intentions and biographical factors, I consider these perspectives to complicate the contexts and my own arguments as opposed to making sweeping accusations (or "defenses") of musical and cultural appropriation. This way, I am neither siding with Ireland and Gemie nor with the idea of "the death of the author" (Barthes [1967] 1977), which too quickly discounts an author's influence in how their work is interpreted in society.

Regardless, Jefferson, Mahon, and Hamilton's reminder is an important one, serving comparative value and a comparative ground for examining the referencing, borrowing, and experimenting with Asian cultures in Western rock music and urging us to examine cross-cultural and cross-racial alliances through a critical lens. The entering into the Western consciousness and history certainly differs between African and Asian peoples, but the patterns behind these creative engagements often share great similarities, especially if we consider the similar outcomes, whereby Asian Cool became a party that

Asians weren't invited or interested in (Ahmad 2001) while "Black rock" became an oxymoron (Mahon 2004).

Raga Rock and the *Concert for Bangladesh*

More similarities between the whitewashing and the problems of cross-racial alliances between white rocker vs. African peoples (as briefly reviewed above) and white rockers vs. Asian peoples can be shown through "raga rock." Raga rock is a rock music sub-genre that is influenced by Indian traditional music as well as a label that came into being and became popular during the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s first in Britain and very quickly in Europe and the U.S. Despite the racialized social panic around Asianness, rock music in the 1960s started showing unprecedented interests in changing what rock sounded like, looked like, and felt like by engaging with Eastern philosophies, spiritualities, and religions, primarily those of India and to a lesser degree Middle Eastern, North/Northeastern African, and Southeast/East Asian ones. Ireland and Gemie (2019) describe this as a transatlantic "turn to the East" in popular music. Among the many East-West engagements during this period, the South Asian influence gained traction to the degree that it earned the name raga rock, although the label of raga rock does not necessarily guarantee authenticity. Jonathan Bellman (1997) dubs this "rock exoticism" while surveying British raga rock works such as the Kinks' "See My Friends" (1965) and "Fancy" (1966), the Beatles "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" (1965), "Love You To" from *Revolver* (1966), and "Within You Without You" from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), and the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black" (1966). These songs variously adopt "drones, harmonic stasis, flattened-seventh scale

degrees, keening vocals, hypnotic beat, Raga-like melody, and lyrics" (134). For their American counterparts, the scene also flourished, such as the Byrds' "Eight Miles High" (1966), Jim Morrison's "The End" (1967), and Steppenwolf's "Snowblind Friend" (1970). These musical works have fashioned a transatlantic raga rock scene and also an articulation between drugs, meditation, the hippie, and India, often driven by the social milieu and, to a lesser degree, musicians themselves (Bellman 1997; Ireland and Gemie 2019).

Although an "ideal" example of sonic ethnic chic, raga rock also emanates sensibilities of cross-racial alliances,[15] complicating the racial politics of sonic ethnic chic with its affective elements. The successful humanitarian aid project *Concert for Bangladesh* (originally spelled as *Concert for Bangla Desh*) in 1971 at New York City's Madison Square Garden probably embodied the pinnacle of the powerful collaboration of raga and rock. However, this concert also epitomizes some of the awkward situations of admiration-based, chic-oriented cross-racial alliances. Although the Concert could indicate how much the rock mainstream accepted traditional Indian music as its partner (Williams 1972; Ireland and Gemie 2019), I call attention to the unequal nature of this partnership. In other words, raga rock did not lend its popularity and mainstream acceptance to Indian classical music or musicians, who remained semi-erased and became symbolic partners for their racialized affective value.

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[15] While the most frequently discussed raga rock works associated with the Beatles and George Harrison exemplify a cross-racial alliance because of Harrison's close relationship to South Asia, it should be noted that raga rock also became highly commercialized and thus cross-racial solidarities were not necessary for making this type of music. Ireland and Gemie (2019) observe three loose categories in terms of why musicians adopted Eastern themes: "seekers" who seek to further understand themselves in the cosmos and thus reproduce Indian musical techniques more fully; musicians who seek to develop their musicianship; and musicians who are more commercial (20). Following this loose typology, it would be more often to find cross-racial alliances in the first category than others, while all types participate in the production of sonic ethnic chic to different degrees.

On the surface, we see Indian classical musicians Ravi Shankar (sitar), Ali Akbar Khan (sarod), Alla Rakha (tabla), and Kamala Chakravarty (tambura) sharing stage with George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and others at Madison Square Garden to raise awareness and money for millions of East Pakistani (now Bangladeshi) refugees suffering amidst the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. On the other hand, Shankar still felt the need to ask the audience for patience before they started performing as the Concert's first act. He explained while sitting with his sitar, "This [the Indian music] is the type of music that needs a little concentrated listening. And I request you to have a little patience. I know you are very impatient to hear your favorite stars who will be in the second part. . . The program . . . has a message, and this is just to make you aware of a very serious situation that is happening" (Swimmer 1972, 00:04:15 to 00:06:06). Shankar's short speech makes clear that even though the collaboration of raga and rock became popular enough to attract up to 40,000 live audiences, it did not equate with a similar acceptance and popularity of Indian classical music itself or, by extension, Indians and the diverse Indian cultures. *The Village Voice* comments that even during the passionate exchanges between Shankar and Khan, whose co-appearance was almost as rare as Harrison and Dylan, "the audience attitude was more one of toleration than interest" and their knowledge stopped at Shankar's name (Heckman 1971).

This is not to dismiss the good deeds that had come out of the Concert or the commitment the musicians had. The Concert's live album and film generated around $12 million sent to Bangladesh by 1985. The Concert "opened a new era" of rock philanthropists (Johnston 1985) and was the first major benefit concert for a humanitarian cause (UNICEF USA 2011). Following this, more benefit concerts had happened, from

similar humanitarian aid concerts such as *Concerts for the People of Kampuchea* (1979) for helping war-ravaged victims in Cambodia, *Live Aid* (1984) for relieving famine in Ethiopia, *Tibetan Freedom Concert* (1996) for supporting Tibetan independence, and *Live 8* (2005) for addressing global poverty to concerts for a variety of causes such as *No Nukes* (1979) for safe energy, *Farm Aid* (1985) for supporting American farmers, *America: A Tribute to Heroes* (2001) for helping the victims and families of the 9/11 attacks, *Live Earth* (2007) for raising environmental awareness, and the list goes on. Some of these concerts became a series of events and some hold anniversary events to continue the good deeds. The historical significance of the *Concert for Bangladesh* vis-a-vis music history and philanthropy is not impeccable but also undeniable.

The social impact notwithstanding, the awkward situation is that while co-founder and co-organizer Shankar was pleased that "overnight, everybody knew the name of Bangladesh all over the world" (The Beatles 2019, 03:49-3:55), it is the "Western savior" (Harrison in this case) that has become the face and spokesperson of this event.[16] To begin with, while the event was a joint venture of Shankar and Harrison and the idea in fact came from Shankar, the event from the very beginning had been advertised as "2 performances" (see Figure 2.3). It sent a clear message from the outset that there would be two concerts, two groups of musicians, and two separate performances, even though they played on the same stage, on the same day, on the same tickets, and that during the event, Harrison and Shankar referred to their performances as "the first part" and "the second part," as opposed to the first concert or the second concert.

[16] This is not to discount Harrison's efforts of avoiding becoming a center of attention for this event, but as my analysis shows, Harrison's intention did not change how the Concert is marketed and remembered. Quinn Moreland's (2020) *Pitchfork* review of the live album nicely highlights Harrison's humility and contribution, which I will not be replicating in here.

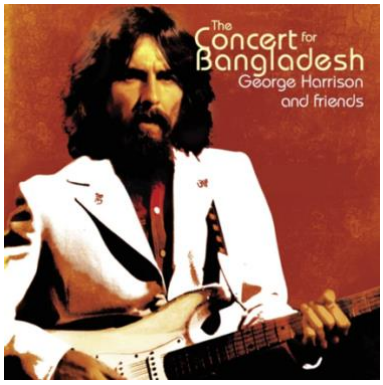
Figure 2.3 Poster outside the Madison Square Garden box office in July 1971. Credit: Wikipedia.

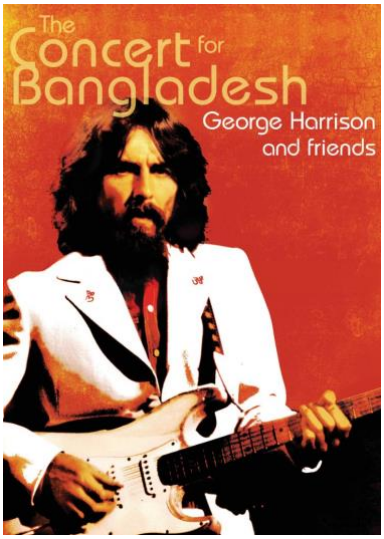
Rock is rock; raga rock is rock; but raga (and what raga represents) is always raga. Advertisements like this one raise the question of the degree to which rock had actually "accepted" their Indian musical friends as equal partners. Certainly, raga did not have to be an equal partner for this event to achieve its major goal, which was to help the suffering children in wartime. And the arrangement that the Indian musicians performed first at 2:30 P.M. as if they were warming up for the second concert might have been due to the pressure for profits coming from the management. As a result, albeit a shared goal and a shared stage, the differentiation between the Indian portion and the Western portion of the event became integral to the event's identity. That said, what Shankar represented was also critical to the success of the event, which involves "camaraderie, humility, and triumphant money-raising" (Moreland 2020).

Despite the obvious arrangement of two separate concerts and Shankar's limited stage time, it was impossible to market the Concert without him, nor with too much of him. Shankar, an Indian Bengali musician, also a mentor and friend to Harrison, represents the affective foundation of this cross-racial alliance, the legitimacy of the event, and the humanistic dedication of this group of diverse musicians. The performances were subsumed under the title of the *Concert for Bangladesh* and credited

to “George Harrison & Friends” in the later released live album (1971) and the accompanying film (1972) and the live album went on to win the 15th Grammy Award for Album of the Year. According to Harrison, Shankar’s set lasted about 45 minutes (Spizer 2005, 242), but in both live album and film formats, Shankar’s performance was seriously edited down to less than 20 minutes and ended up only one track, the second track “Bangla Dhun” within a nineteen-track, over ninety-minute album. Additionally, their full performance was never rectified even though the 2005 edition added previously unreleased content (Bob Dylan’s “Love Minus Zero/No Limits”) as a bonus track. Furthermore, besides physical erasure, including limited stage time and edited recording, the film edition makes it hard to remember why the musicians were gathering together. Except for the short introduction speech and the obvious exception of Harrison’s encore “Bangla Desh,” during which moments the film is intercut with disturbing shots of suffering and dying refugees, audiences are seldom reminded of the cause of this gathering. These brief references are soon dismissed and the message of the Concert is toned down (Pidgeon 1972). It is undisputed as to who is the main attraction of the Concert and who matters in the post-concert productions and following promotion. For commercial reasons or not, Shankar and what he represented had to (semi-)disappear in order to appear to fit the overall image of the Concert, subject to a simultaneous visibility and invisibility, a kind of semierasure, in Durham’s (2001) word.

From left to right:
Figure 2.4 1971 live album cover of the *Concert for Bangladesh* (Apple Records).
Figure 2.5 1972 film cover of the *Concert for Bangladesh* (Apple Records).





From left to right:
Figure 2.6 2005 edition live album cover of the *Concert for Bangladesh* (Apple Records).
Figure 2.7 2005 edition film cover of the *Concert for Bangladesh* (Apple Records).

Figure 2.8 iTunes banner of the 2005 edition *Concert for Bangladesh* live album.
Screenshot created November 2020. Copyright © 2020 Apple Inc.

The semierasure is repeatedly executed in the promotion of the Concert, which we may see through a comparison between the 1971 live album cover (Figure 2.4), the 1972 film cover (Figure 2.5), the 2005 edition of the live album cover (Figure 2.6), and 2005 edition film cover (Figure 2.7). We may see this comparison as an evolvement and transformation of what the Concert represents and how the face of "this historical program," in Shankar's words, changes. The cover of the 1971 edition, also the first mass production out of the event, had a simple message through a simple cover: a famished child in front of a big empty bowl at the center of the album cover; no other subjects. The 1972 film cover features George Harrison, Leon Russell, and Bob Dylan surrounding a black-and-white photo of a child, a photo taken directly from the original 1971 live album cover.

In comparison, in the 2005 versions, Harrison became the sole subject on the covers. Notably, in 2005, the George Harrison Fund for UNICEF was formed to formalize the collaboration between the Harrison family and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) to continue to help the children in Bangladesh and other places, including Brazil, India, Angola, Romania, the Horn of Africa and Burma. For the 2005 edition live album, the foundation of the Harrison Fund and the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Concert were advertised together, further claiming the central role of Harrison in this pioneering event. As seen on the right side of the iTunes banner (Figure 2.8) of the 2005 edition live album, a photo of Harrison and Dylan performing together at the Concert was chosen as the backdrop to the markers of the Harrison Fund and the anniversary of the *Concert for Bangladesh*.

Shankar's message—that "through our music, we [Shankar and others] would like you to feel the agony and also the pain and lot of sad happenings in Bangladesh and also the refugees who have come to India" (Swimmer 1972)—is lost. While Shankar's message is at least embodied through the picture of the child on the original album cover; over time, the message is semi-erased, becoming an unimpressive backdrop element and toned down just like the 17 minutes track of Shankar's performance. It is true that the Harrison Fund has continued the cause of the Concert and it makes sense to embrace the intimate connections between the two, but over time, the Concert has become a symbol of Harrison's legacy and a triumph of charity pop in the public eye—the Concert's mainstream identity now.

What is more awkward about the semierasure of Shankar and his message, also what complicates the politics of semierasure, is how the Bangladeshi side has positively received the event. The *Concert for Bangladesh* became not only a milestone in the history of Western musical philanthropy, but it has also been remembered as a notable chapter in the history of the Bangladesh Liberation War, which successfully fought for the independence of then East Pakistan and resulted in the founding of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971. The Liberation War Museum was established in 1996 in Dhaka to honor "the heroic struggle of the Bengali nation for their democratic and national rights" (The Liberation War Museum n.d.a). It is easy to tell from the website that the *Concert for Bangladesh* holds a special place as a cultural memory of the Liberation War. The drop-down menu of "Bangladesh" lists "History," "Emergence of Bangladesh," "Evolution of fundamental Principles of 1972," "Bengalis and Bengal," "Sector Commanders," as well as a dedicated page for "Concert for Bangladesh,"

suggesting that all the listed entries are critical things that one should know as to the founding of Bangladesh. One would be curious about why the Concert would hold such significance as essential knowledge of the Liberation War and the birth of a nation, even though the raised money was held for years before reaching Bangladesh due to tax complications. To be more precise, the Concert was organized after the 1970 Bhola cyclone and amidst the nine-month-long Liberation War in 1971 and amidst the Bangladesh genocide cracking down the Bengali call for independence. Within this sensitive political situation, the Concert deliberately avoided making any political engagements and instead just focused on helping the starving and dying children affected by the situation. Shankar candidly uttered at the beginning of the Concert that they were artists and not trying to get involved in any politics. This explains the widely circulated poster, where "the politics and history of the Bangladesh war have to be peeled off the poster and encapsulated in the apolitical but affective image of the starving emaciated child standing in for the Bangladeshi nation" (Mookherjee 2011b, 402).

This carefully positioned apolitical event, however, has been ardently embraced by the Museum of Liberation War as a part of the nation's cultural memories. Criticizing acts of ethnic chic and semierasure may run the risk of perpetuating the same discursive relations that one seeks to dismantle if assuming one single Western lens. Just like Egyptian designers also facilitated the popularization of Egyptian ethnic chic in the West (Abaza 2007), ethnic chic does not always put the non-West in a passive and exploited position. Hence, it is important to further consider the semierasure of Shankar and the Indian Bengali voice he represented through a transnational lens, i.e. how the cultural memory of the *Concert for Bangladesh* is portrayed and mobilized in Bangladesh.

On the webpage of "Concert for Bangladesh," although it is mentioned twice that the Concert was organized by both Harrison and Shankar when the page starts covering the Month of Giving campaign organized by the George Harrison Fund for UNICEF in 2011, the Concert is simply framed as "George Harrison's legacy" (The Liberation War Museum n.d.b). This rhetoric of removing Shankar from the legacy as a co-organizer, nevertheless, is hardly the Museum's original act. In promoting Month of Giving and the continued celebration of the Concert's anniversaries, language like "in honor of and in memory of George's philanthropic legacy" (UNICEF USA 2011), "to honor late Beatle George Harrison's legacy" (UNICEF USA 2012), and "George Harrison's groundbreaking Concert for Bangladesh" (georgeharrison.com 2015) is easily seen in the news coverage of related activities. The rhetoric is reminiscent of Patti Smith's sentiment of "It [Rastafarianism] belongs to us now" (Marsh 1976), promoting a "natural" removal of the very subjects of the legacy, even though Shankar and Harrison both were awarded UNICEF's "Child Is the Father of Man" award in 1972 for their fundraising efforts (Moreland 2020). This rhetoric aside, the only video and the only image added in the webpage are both of Harrison. Meanwhile, except for the first short paragraph that briefly introduces the Concert, the rest of the page is entirely dedicated to the Month of Giving campaign and its social impact on the emergency relief raised for children in the Horn of Africa. While it may be unexpected to see Shankar's continued semierasure in the context of Bengali national memories, which is practiced very similarly to what has been happening over the decades in Western media discourses, we cannot simply interpret this as a result of Western cultural imperialism.

The Liberation War Museum is filled with artifacts and exhibits commemorating the heroic and sacrificial acts of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. While the continued humanitarian success of the *Concert of Bangladesh* has always relied on its affective appeal to attract compassionate musicians and music lovers, the Liberation War Museum also operates with strong affective appeals. It sees itself as a museum "dedicated to all freedom loving people and to the victims of mindless atrocities and destruction committed in the name of religion, ethnicity and sovereignty" (The Liberation War Museum n.d.c). To this end, the Museum has assumed an active role in connecting the history of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war with contemporary humanitarian issues by creating an affective resonance or an "affective, global citizenship . . . based on melancholic loss and hope related to the ruptured, violent trajectory of the 1971 war" (Mookherjee 2011a, S88). Therefore, the sociopolitical value of the *Concert of Bangladesh* for the Museum does not lie in insisting on who organized it or whose legacy it is, but in the cosmopolitan humanitarian sentiments that the birth of the Bangladeshi nation created, which the Concert has helped capture. This explains the strategic significance of advertising the Month of Giving campaign on the Liberation War Museum's website, a campaign that has raised over a million U.S. dollars for the children in the Horn of Africa, part of which came from the sale of the *Concert for Bangladesh* album and film. Through the campaign, the Museum actively spreads a positive message that asserts an active role of a nation that was once perpetuated as a victim in the cosmopolitan project of humanitarianism. Thereby, the Museum helps reassert agency as a nation born under of the shadow cosmopolitan pop philanthropy by deploying the cosmopolitan humanitarian sentiments and reappropriating the continued good deeds that

have come out of the *Concert of Bangladesh* and the George Harrison Fund for UNICEF campaigns to self-present the nation of Bangladesh onto a global stage as a comrade in the fight for freedom against atrocities and other humanitarian crises.

The *Concert of Bangladesh* is a transnational example of cross-racial affective alliance, whose triumph inevitably relied on the mainstream acceptance and commercial success of the sonic ethnic chic of raga rock. Yet unlike the British counterpart, the "turn to the East" was a major shift for U.S. outlook, where musicians were "part of a broader counterculture that 'turned to the East' for religious, cultural and musical inspiration, in order to make sense of their own society's perceived barren cultural landscape and to search for inspiration for social rejuvenation" (Ireland and Gemie 2019, 7-8). However, the tendency of making cross-racial alliances via music was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. The tendency of engaging with other cultures and continually expanding cultural spectrum in fact aligns with rock music's survival mechanism as a counter-mainstream culture (Grossberg 1984). Just like music and style were used by the working-class British subcultures as means of resistance in the 1970s (Clarke et al. [1975] 2006; Hebdige [1979] 1991), the music, culture, and even people of Asia were also becoming an instrument of resistance, which occasionally relies on spiritual exploration or novelty value and occasionally relies on shared sentiments as social outsiders (such as the case with Patti Smith and Avengers). After the height of the *Concert of Bangladesh* and when the Vietnam War was winding down, the "turn to the East" became common and commercial in the early 1970s. Perhaps partially due to the fact that both the novelty and countercultural value of forming South Asian affective alliances was fading away in the Western cultural landscape, this is also the period when

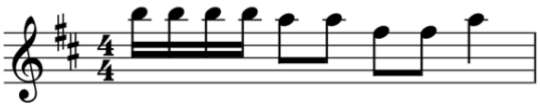
we started to see more cultural references to East and Southeast Asia in popular music. The next section continues to examine sonic ethnic chic within this contextual change with a continued emphasis on the racial politics between sounds and affects.

Disobedient Listening: Racializing Sonic Affects and the Oriental Riff

From Tin Pan Alley classic "Chinatown, My Chinatown" (Jean Schwartz and William Jerome 1910) to the novelty trio Gaylords' "Chow Mein" (1955), Buck Owen's chart-topping country single "Made in Japan" (1972), Carl Douglas' mega disco hit "Kung Fu Fighting" (1974), New York Dolls' punk rendition of "Bad Detective" (1974; a cover of the Coasters' 1964 single of the same title), progressive rock band Rush's "A Passage to Bangkok" (1976), the Vapors' new wave one-hit wonder "Turning Japanese" (1980) and Day Above Ground's notorious "Asian Girlz" (2013), with over a century's presence in Western popular music history, the oriental riff is firmly established as a musical trope with cross-genre, transhistorical elasticity for anything related to East Asia. This exotic sonic token has an origin in as early as the nineteenth century fantastical musical plays and has been popularized throughout Western mediascapes, including but not limited to operas, films, video games, and cartoons (Moon 2005; Solomon 2014). The oriental riff (alternatively, the Asian riff, Chinese riff, or Asian jingle) has become a formulaic sound of exoticism. While musicologists have produced much scholarship on musical exoticism and orientalist musical devices in Western art music (Locke 2011; Scott 2003), little attention is paid to contemporary popular music with a few exceptions focusing on early popular music (Hisama 1993; Tsou 1997; Sheppard 2001; Garrett 2004;

Lancefield 2004). It is both this research gap and an intersectional approach to the sound-affect relationship that I seek to address in this section.

Repetition is of key relevance here in terms of both musical characters and Asian racialization. The oriental riff is a cliché melody that most typically features staccato articulation and pitch repetition with occasional pentatonic hints, often used in the opening measures of a song or between the lyrics as musical ornaments to signal and construct an affectively exotic soundscape. It can vary in terms of tonality, timbre, harmonization (parallel fourths, fifths, and octaves are the most common), and the exact number of notes, but in contemporary popular music, Jamaican singer-songwriter Carl Douglas' 1974 disco hit "Kung Fu Fighting" axiomatically represents the revival of the oriental riff in popular music with its international commercial success. It also popularized a quintessential version of the oriental riff (See Example 1) that contemporary audience would find most familiar: a melody that consists of nine notes stretched out over two 2/4 or 4/4 bars and plays with three pitches. Many musical employments of the oriental riff can be simply transposed from this version, such as in "Turning Japanese" and "Young Folks" (Peter Bjorn and John 2006).



Example 2.1 The oriental riff used in "Kung Fu Fighting," transcribed from 01:07-01:09.

Both sounds (aural stereotyping) and affects (character stereotyping) have been integral to the racial stigmatization and Western imagination of Asians. From heavy accents to sound-based racial slurs like "Ching Chong," crashing gongs in films to cue the entrance of a person of Asian descent and the oriental riff, the aural has always been a

source of and witness to Asian racialization (Balance 2012; Sano-Franchini 2018; Lee 2020). Aural stereotyping like "sounding Asian" and "yellowvoice" is no less detrimental than slanting eyes or waving karate fists.[17] At the same time, the stereotyping discourse of unfeeling Asians has been established as early as the fourth and fifth century B.C.E. in the Greek philosophical representation of Asians as monotonous, emotionally stagnant, and lacking spirit through such words like those of Hippocrates and Aristotle (Okihiro 2010). The racial trope of the taciturn, robotic and unfeeling foreigner was revived in popular culture as a techno-orientalist discourse after East Asia's rapid economic growth in the 1980s (Roh, Huang, and Niu 2015). Given such a historical background, the emergence and undying popularity of the oriental riff is not without reason. It functions both sonically and affectively through a kind of multisensory performativity, wielding its reiterative power to constitute, reproduce and consolidate what Jennifer Lynn Stoever calls "the sonic color line" (Stoever 2016). Considering the oriental riff's generic affective power of exoticism and sonic feature of rhythmic and pitch repetitiveness, it is an "ideal" object for us to examine the sound-affect relationship through the lenses of race, gender, and sexuality.

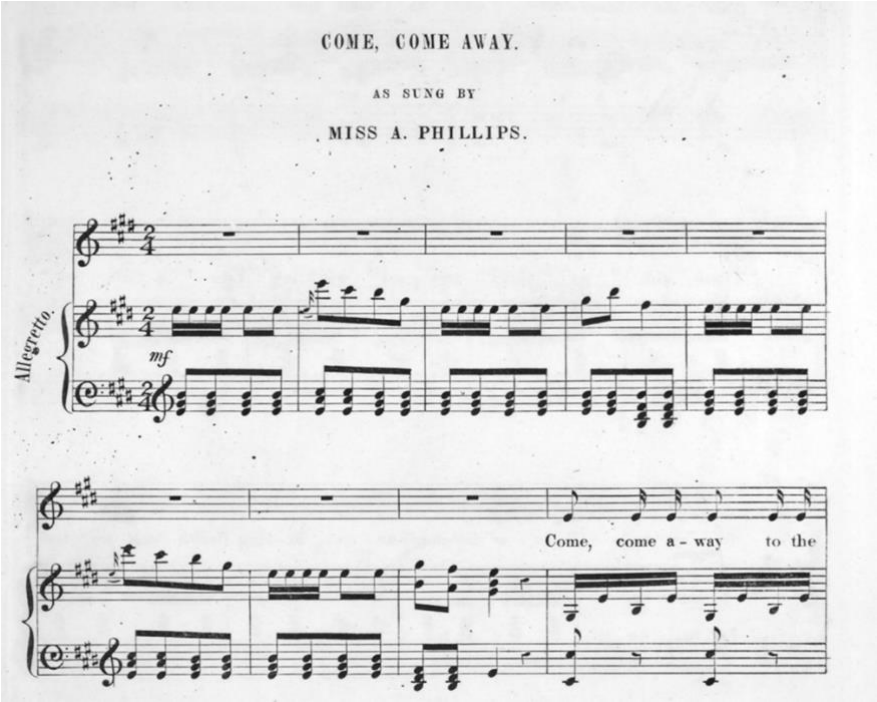
While many have examined how musical cooptation and racially charged sounds bring affects to serve and reflect the image of their Western creators, it is often ignored how affects also influence sounds and how sounds and affects are constitutive of each other. It should not come as a surprise that I need to stress that the sound affects of the oriental riff I examine in this section, including exoticism, mysticism, empowerment, pseudo-progressiveness, and eroticism, are not any "new" orientalist creations. Instead,

[17] For the idea of 'yellowvoice,' see (Lancefield 2004).

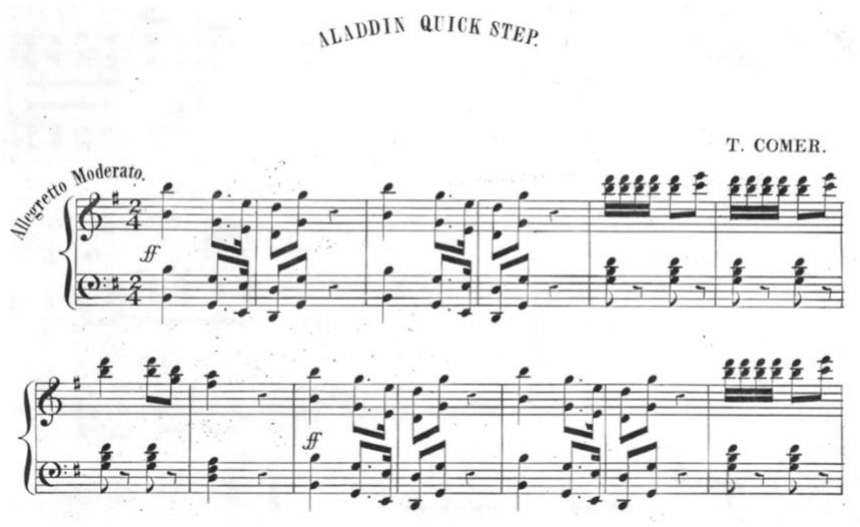
what I argue is that while the oriental riff has produced a variety of intersected and sometimes contradictory affects, these well-established sensibilities associated with the exotic orient have also distinctively inflicted the ways the oriental riff and other Asian elements sound and perform in music. In this way, not only do racialized sounds produce exotic affects, these affects also influence and operate as sounds. Due to the imbricated and contradictory trajectories of racialized sonic signifiers and affects, the oriental riff encourages us to rethink the relationship between sounds and affects as mutually constitutive through processes and challenges of Asian racialization manifested in some sophisticated musical examples. My anti-essentialist approach and emphasis on contradiction and inconsistency are in line with Christine Bacareza Balance's (2016) idea of "disobedient listening," which turns to the sonic and musical to challenge hegemonic listening and identify the limits and demands of the cultural logic of racial visibility. In what follows, I examine and compare various appearances and adaptations of the oriental riff to unpack how and why they sound and feel certain ways through "Kung Fu Fighting," "A Passage to Bangkok," "China Girl," "Asian Girlz," "Hong Kong Garden," "Fan Tan Fannie," "Japanese Boy," "Oriental Sadness" and "Turning Japanese."

The oriental riff has a history for over a century and its musical origin can be traced back to Thomas Comer (composer) and Silas S. Steele's (lyricist) fantastical musical play *The Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin or The Wonderful Lamp* produced at the Boston Museum in 1847. This is a stage adaptation of *Aladdin*, a popular story in the early nineteenth century in both Great Britain and the United States. Although no libretto of Comer and Steele's adaptation exists, we can find similar rhythmic patterns and pitch repetition in the sheet music of at least two songs of the play, "Come, Come

Away" and "Aladdin Quick Step" (See Examples 2 and 3). What now seems like an awkward combination of the Middle East and China was in fact popular in stage shows for its spectacle value, although the stories of *Aladdin* were often set in western China (Moon 2005, 23–24; Nadel 1997). Moreover, many American actors playing *Aladdin* were blackface minstrels who combined blackface and yellowface traditions (Moon 2005, 24). This orientalist custom, conflating multiple Asian and African identities, provided the larger cultural context out of which the oriental riff was born, reminding us from the outset of the fictitious nature of the trope.



Example 2.2 "Come, Come Away" (Comer and Steele 1874).
Attend to the first five measures in the treble clef.
Archive: Lester S. Levy sheet music collection, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.



Example 2.3 “Aladdin Quick Step” (Comer and Steele 1874).
Attend to the fifth to eighth measures in the treble clef.
Archive: Lester S. Levy sheet music collection, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.

The oriental riff’s affective mystique is a common construct but seldom used without other simultaneous sound affects. In Carl Douglas’ “Kung Fu Fighting” (1974), the oriental riff is introduced in the opening section and played on the keyboard emulating the timbre of a Chinese flute, which, in addition to the frequent use of the riff throughout the chorus, creates an exotic and enigmatic soundscape. Such sound affect is even clearer when we consider the surreal worldmaking of a mysterious Chinatown where everyone is a kung fu master making lightning-fast kicks. While “Kung Fu Fighting” exemplifies the musical extension of the empowering affect of cross-racial “kung fusion,”(Hisama 2005; Prashad 2001) Canadian rock band Rush not only employ the oriental riff in the opening measures of “A Passage to Bangkok” (1976) to unmistakably signal the mysterious vibe of cross-continental drug tourism, which passes the Caribbean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, they also tap into heavy metal’s habit of appropriating Eastern themes as sources of power (Walser 1993, 154; Bellman 1997; Ireland and Gemie 2019). The choice of the oriental riff, a conspicuous East Asian orientalist musical sign, to initiate a trip that has

nothing to do with East Asian cities is not unforeseen considering the epidemic association of the Chinese with pleasures of opium in popular music (Moon 2005, 121–22). Moreover, the song employs a semitone (C#) in the oriental riff (D – C# – A – C#) instead of what would be a standard version (D – C – A – C) to create an unorthodox, drug-induced, and racialized sense of power and to indicate the beginning of a much anticipated exotic trip. As audience, we can easily recognize that both songs adopt the oriental riff, but we must also attend to the different writing techniques and rearrangements used to construct their respective affectively unique soundscapes. To generalize the meanings and affects of the oriental riff simply as exoticism without attending to its affective nuances would be to give in to the essentializing tendency of such racially and ethnically musical tropes.

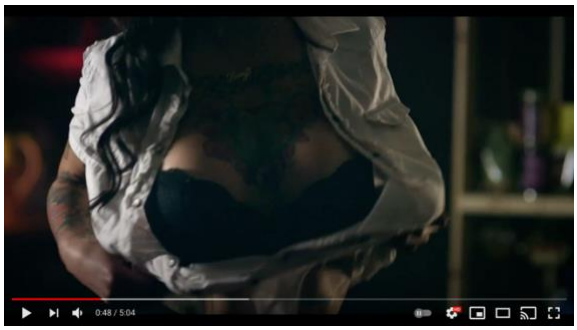
The oriental riff is also often used to create racialized erotic sensibilities. By zooming in on the seemingly harmless representation of the nameless Asian woman in John Mellencamp's "China Girl" (1982), David Bowie's "China Girl" (1983) and John Zorn's "Forbidden Fruit" (1987), Ellie M. Hisama (1993, 95) observes a neocolonialist, heterosexist "rescue fantasy" filled with romantic desires for Asian women in the 1980s popular music that she calls "Asiophilia," a sexual extension of James Clifford's (1987) cultural theory of "salvage paradigm." A modern, glissando guitar adaptation of the oriental riff (sliding between B – A – G – A) stacked with parallel fourths and followed by xylophone-like crispy sounds announces the beginning of Bowie's "China Girl." The revised riff seems to imply an interracial love story that aims to, albeit fails to, divert from the pervasive fetishistic representations of Asian women. That said, what follows this "Chop Suey guitar intro," as Karen Tongson (Forthcoming) calls it, is an "imperial

foreplay gone terribly awry," a story ending with the China Girl (played by New Zealand modal Geeling Ng) and Bowie, both fully naked, having sex while being gently lashed by the wave on the beach (See Figure 2.10). Such an ending echoes a series of Hollywood representation of white-male-Asian-female romance that serves as a metaphor for "racial harmony and intercultural understanding" (Marchetti 1993). However, the supposedly yet questionably progressive construct of interracial eroticism in "China Girl" is still limited by its underlying salvage storyline where the narrator saves the China Girl by offering her "television … eyes of blue … a man who wants to rule the world," which is accompanied by the music video's additional storyline of female liberation where the China Girl eventually rids of her makeup and traditional Chinese attire. Together, the salvage theme, Bowie's outspoken anti-racism, and the ambivalent autonomy to "shut your mouth" bestowed to the nameless China Girl add a pseudo-progressive sensibility to the erotic atmosphere. The intentionally altered yet fatally recognizable oriental riff captures the song's contradictory sensibilities of eroticism, progressiveness, and heroism as a white male savior (Keaveney 2020) from the West.

Figure 2.9 "China Girl" music video screenshot. Bowie pulling eyes back as a way to show affection. Credit: YouTube.
Figure 2.10 "China Girl" music video screenshot. Bowie and the China Girl having sex on the beach. Credit: YouTube.

In contrast, the oriental riff in American band Day Above Ground's pop single "Asian Girlz" (2013) is self-evidently one of the most outrageous adoptions in recent times. The song has caused a media firestorm and has been widely criticized as racist, fetishistic and hyper-sexualizing with obnoxious lyrics like "I love your sticky rice / Butt fucking all night … I love your creamy yellow thighs / Oh your slanted eyes."[18] The music video features Vietnamese American actress Levy Tran, who remains nameless as the fetishized Asian Girl, stripping down in front of the band members, who later all jump into her bathtub. Just like the minimum effort is used to disguise the song's Asiophilia, the oriental riff is also adopted with minimum adaptation so that nobody would mistake the sonic marker for anything else: a single unaccompanied melody (C# – B – A# – B) directly transposed from what we hear in the chorus of "Kung Fu Fighting" and played in reverb effects to create an ethereal touch. This rather standard version of the oriental riff is used throughout the song and every single time is to direct the ethnic gaze at Tran's spinning body in lingerie or close-up shots at her breasts and teeth licking (See Figures 2.12 and 2.13 for examples of when the oriental riff is used). The sensibilities of pseudo-progressiveness that would have been possible in "China Girl" are gone without a trace in "Asian Girlz." What is left instead is musical orientalism in its barest possible way.

[18] The sexualization and fetishization of Asian women is well studied. For example: (Shimizu 2007; Kim and Chung 2005; Allison 2012; Chou 2012; Nemoto 2009)



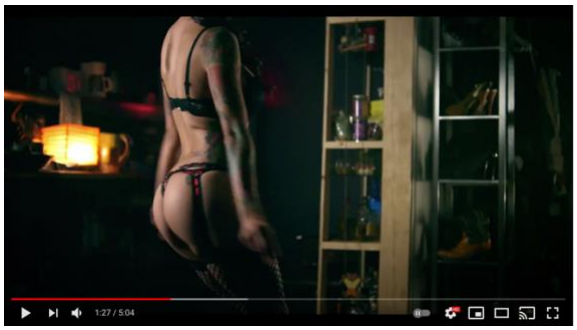


Figure 2.11 & Figure 2.12 "Asian Girlz" music video screenshots, accompanied by the oriental riff. Credit: YouTube.

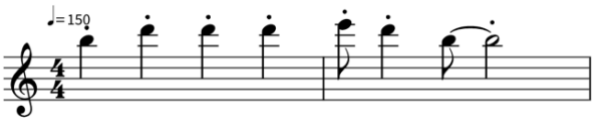
In the shadow of the modernist ethnic gaze that treats ethnic Others as inferior and in need of salvation (C. R. Taylor 1998, 63–79; Durham 2001; Lipsitz 1994, 4–5), the postwar milieu and cross-cultural collaborations in countercultural and avant-garde circles between the 1960s and 1980s injected the ethnic gaze with a refreshing, though not new, sensibility of pseudo-progressiveness. In other words, each political conjuncture decides the changing meanings of its oriental Others. For instance, with regards to the representations of Japan in American popular culture, while japonisme suggested an elite status for some white Americans in the late nineteenth century amidst rapid economic growth, the anti-Japanese sentiments became prevalent during World War II in wartime pop songs and Japanese brutality and atrocities were frequently portrayed in Hollywood and US propaganda films (Sheppard 2001; 2019, 54). In the postwar time of the 1960s, popular culture became less explicitly political, providing some space for counterculture to shape its own relationship with the Other by getting involved with Eastern philosophies and cultures.[19] However, counterculture's "newfound" musical affective alliance with the non-West was only pseudo-progressive in that it paralleled both a

[19] Although the oriental riff has a very limited presence in the 1960s and most often used in conjunction with East Asian themes, this decade witnessed an unprecedented popular musical interest in Indian and South Asian music. There, too, are common exoticized sonic signifiers in this kind of musical practices. See the following for a more detailed examination: (Bellman 1997; Ireland and Gemie 2019).

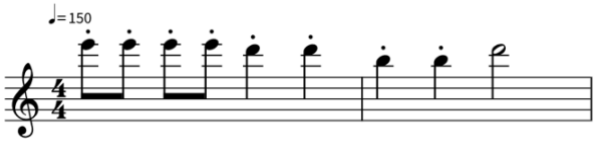
normative romanticizing use of the Other and the politics of US-Vietnamese relations whereby America practiced a neocolonialist agenda (Zimmerman 2008, 62–64). This might be epitomized by the case of the unprecedently successful benefit concert, *Concert for Bangladesh*, co-organized by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar. Cross-racial, humanitarian projects like this inevitably reproduced the neocolonialist discourses of Western salvation and Eastern (in this case Bangladesh/then-East Pakistan) poor refugees (Mookherjee 2011b). Such political and musical trajectory lent its pseudo-progressive sensibilities to an array of practices of musical exoticism.

Another pseudo-progressive, humanitarianism-gone-wrong example is English postpunk band Siouxsie and the Banshees‘s “Hong Kong Garden” (1978). Against the backdrop of the Rock Against Racism movement in the UK, anti-racist voices were growing exponentially in all pop music genres. Although vocalist Siouxsie expressed their indifference to the movement, their “Hong Kong Garden” has a clear anti-racist behind-the-scene story about how Siouxsie was disgusted by the racist customers at a takeaway named Hong Kong Garden when she was growing up (Clerk 2008). However, the lyrics are as careless and problematic as they can be, suggesting that Japanese currency yen is somehow used at a Chinese takeaway in southeast London and describing the workers with lyrics like “Slanted eyes meet a new sunrise / A race of bodies small in size.” In this ambivalent anti-racist song, a line of notes curiously resembling the oriental riff begins the song in staccato with xylophone-like timbre, which is recognized as an “echoic ‘oriental’ guitar figure” in *Sounds* (Silverton 1978). While the opening melody might not instantly conjure up a quintessential oriental riff, with a little rearrangement we can see that the melody can be easily converted into a quintessential oriental riff using the

exact same three pitches (See Examples 4 and 5). What makes this formulation of the oriental riff distinct from many others, though, is its more dominant role in the song. The melody of the riff is also the base melody of the verses, which is one of the rare occasions where the riff assumes more of a constitutive role than solely functioning as decorative insertions. This more in-depth musical engagement, as some have argued, can still be problematic because it exemplifies a kind of neocolonization (T. D. Taylor 1997, 41–44; Fast 2001, 101–2).



Example 2.4 “Hong Kong Garden” intro, transcribed from 00:00-00:03.



Example 2.5 “Hong Kong Garden” intro converted into a more standard oriental riff.

From progressive rock to postpunk, the oriental riff has witnessed this “newfound” affective alliance with East Asian and to a lesser degree Southeast Asian peoples through its various appearances. By virtue of such political and artistic legacies, it is expected to find critics like Charles Shaar Murray in a 1984 issue of *New Musical Express* applauding Bowie for his controversial “China Girl” by pointing out the song’s political nature and citing the general prejudice against pop stars’ political interventions in defense of Bowie, calling out that “the political activities and statements of pop stars are generally devalued by the general received notion of entertainers as privileged cranks and eccentrics.” Some may notice the parallel between the hyperbolic portrayal of the stereotypical Chinese woman and the parody of the oriental riff to suggest that the song’s

overall artificiality as to representation could all be Bowie's creative devices for articulating a genuine interracial relationship (Waldrep 2015). The pseudo-communist-soldier persona of the China Girl in the music video also projects some political progressiveness in a historical moment still fraught with Cold War tensions. However, just like what Murray suggests, "China Girl" is Bowie's political statement, which, as Hisama (1993, 91) observes, is at the expense of the pursued China Girl and relies on an "implicit hierarchical nature of otherness invites seemingly innocuous practices of representation that amount to (often unknowing) strategies of domination through appropriation." In short, a disobedient listening through a multimodal discursive approach to "China Girl" reveals not only the mutually constitutive relationship of its sounds (the rearranged oriental riff) and affects (ambiguously progressive erotic sensibilities) but also how unintended affects (neocolonialist sensibilities) continue to rewrite the meanings of the original sounds long after the completion of a song or a performance.

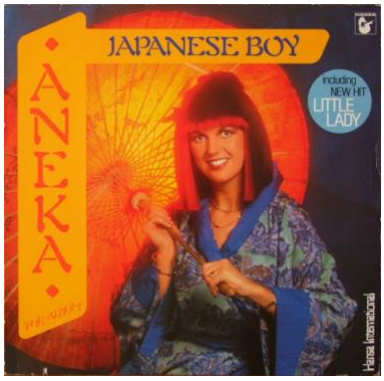
Sonic eroticism is anything but shocking. Through films like *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) and *Flower Drum Song* (1961) and against the backdrop of less restricted US immigration policies for Asian immigration since World War II, 1960s Hollywood showed a cinematic affection for the exotic "Oriental Lotus Blossom" (Cheng 2001, 49–51). In the 1961 film adaptation of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's Broadway musical *Flower Drum Song* (dir. Henry Koster), Nancy Kwan's rendition of "Fan Tan Fannie" puts her in an overexposed position through a provocative outfit that resembles Chinese traditional dress qipao and a hone-shaped hat on the stage of a nightclub. With several cymbal hits (possibly imitating gong hits), the performance starts.

Notably, two phrases of the oriental riff are used to introduce Kwan's first lyric (See Figure 2.13) and the riff repeats thrice during Kwan's outro scene, where she keeps looking back to return a gaze. Each riff iteration is always transposed higher (respectively, G – A# and G – C – G), suggesting a cheerful sentiment of "Fan Tan Fannie," which is animated by Kwan's saucy and witty performance. Here, exoticism, eroticism, and lighthearted, innocent yet sexually suggestive sensibilities reveal some of the most conspicuous aspects of the song's affective construct. The contradictoriness speaks directly to an unequal racial politics of desire deeply embedded in the gender and sexual representation of Asian women and women of color in general (Bhabha 1983; Koshy 2004).

Figure 2.13 Film *Flower Drum Song* (dir. Henry Koster) screenshot at 00:14 (Production company: Hunter-Fields Productions; Distributed by Universal), Kwan performing "Fan Tan Fannie" following the oriental riff.

Similarly bound up with interracial romantic longings, some popular songs that engage with the oriental riff reveal another common racialized affect, sentimentalism. Besides musical devices such as reverberating melodies that resemble the rippling water and occasional gong hits, Scottish singer Aneka's 1981 hit single "Japanese Boy" also inserts the oriental riff in between the lyrics of the second versus. The song has a simple narrative about the narrator's frustration about her missing lover, the nameless Japanese

Boy, who left without a word. Inserted after the narrator expresses that "people ask about him every day," the oriental riff reinforces Aneka's frustration. However, the disco genre of the song dictates that such sentiments would not engender a version of the riff that is, for example, like the opening of the English rock group Hollies' "Oriental Sadness" (1966), which features slowly descending pitches to construct a sentimentalist soundscape. Different from the common use that puts oriental riffs in the opening to interpellate the ethnic gaze, this disco hit beatmatches the tempo of the riff and thus assimilates it to be a more compatible sonic decoration, complemented by ample other orientalist elements, including Aneka's yellowface performance (See Figures 2.15 and 2.16). Notably, although the oriental riff created in "Oriental Sadness" may not instantly conjure up the variations that most people are familiar with, the version in "Japanese Boy" interestingly shares three of the five notes used to create this riff. Moreover, conversely, "Oriental Sadness" creates a "saddened" oriental riff to introduce the female protagonist of the song, who very much resembles the China Girl in John Mellencamp's "China Girl" (1982), who lacks her own opinion, distrusts an Asian-Caucasian interracial romantic relationship and would fade away without the (white) narrator's love. Both "Japanese Boy" and "Oriental Sadness" adopt oriental riffs in ways that downplay the riff's instant interpellation of exotic subjects to give way to amplify a sense of "genuine" frustration.



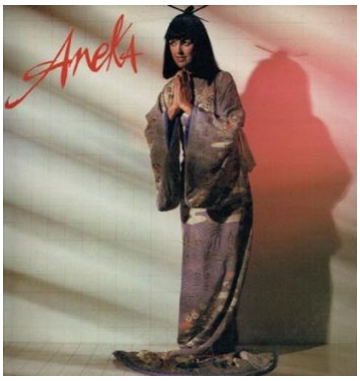


Figure 2.14 & Figure 2.15 Aneka's album covers of *Japanese Boy* (Hansa Records), for Europe and UK markets, respectively.

Figure 2.16 EP cover of the Vapors' *Turning* Japanese (1980) (EMI Music Publishing Ltd. Liberty/United Records (UK) Ltd.)

Lastly, I want to dive into another musical example in regard to sonic sentimentalism: English punk/postpunk band the Vapors' MTV mega hit "Turning Japanese" released in 1980, a new wave classic that has firmly established the sound of the oriental riff in youth culture. The song is widely believed to be a euphemism for masturbation and "turning Japanese" to be a facial expression during orgasm, although the songwriter/vocalist (David Fenton) has long denied this interpretation and disclosed that the song is about post-breakup angst and the repeated phrase "I think I'm turning Japanese" indicates the heartbroken narrator losing their mind and thus turning into a different person. It appears that the choice of "Japanese" as the subject is rather random and, as Fenton notes, the song could have been "Portuguese, Lebanese, anything that fit

with that phrase. It had nothing to do with the Japanese" (Kim 2012). The penchant for metaphors and words play continues the name of the album that includes this single, *New Clear Days* (1980), which is a wordplay implying "nuclear days," tying into the 1970s musical trend of engaging with the theme of nuclear power (Titus and Simich 1990). The arbitrary engagement with "Japanese" explains the song's rather dull and standard, thus unmistakable, use of the oriental riff in the opening measures, which is based on three of the chorus chords (G, F, and D) and doubled at the octave on a gently distorted electric guitar. While the riff is used to construct a generic (ethnic) Otherness to express the narrator's intense sentiments of missing a long-gone lover, the affective exoticism well-entrenched in the sonic trope has complicated this sound-affect relationship. Given the anti-Asian and anti-immigrant sentiments in Thatcherite UK and the perpetuation of asexualization and feminization in the Western representations of East Asian men, it is likely that postpunk youth culture borrowed such asexual aura in a song about a romantic relationship to express counter-hegemonic sensibilities and unruly sentimentalities, which in part explicates the dominant recognition of the song as a masturbation anthem. Through this process, the oriental riff is rearticulated with pseudo-progressive sensibilities and radical sentimentalities by virtue of the hegemonic logic of Asian male asexuality.

What further complicates this sound-affect relationship is the continual, transhistorical recontextualization of the song. In contemporary media culture, this one-hit wonder continues to articulate the sonic trope of the oriental riff and its racial capital through its many popular covers and film appearances. For example, the 1984 hit teen film *Sixteen Candles* features a supporting character Long Duk Dong, an exchange Asian

male student with a heavy accent who typifies the representational trope of geeky and asexual Asian men (Ono and Pham 2009, 71; Shimizu 2012, 111-122). We can hear the oriental riff intro of "Turning Japanese" in a scene to accompany the arrival of Dong's luxury car to drop off Samantha (whose family Dong stays with) and then Dong asks not to wait up as he drives away with a female friend, suggesting they are spending the night together. The film itself is not scant of orientalist sonic signifiers. The oriental riff as a sonic Othering device functions similarly to the crashing gong used liberally throughout the film in Dong's scenes. However, more than an ethnic marker, the oriental riff, just like the song "Turning Japanese" itself, also cues the perverse hyper-heterosexuality of Dong when we hear Samantha laments how Dong quickly finds somebody (the female friend in the car) fresh off the boat while she is still single. If the oriental riff still at all produces any sentimentalism, it would be enacted through the feelings of the ethnic gaze's white subjects, that is, Samantha in this case. More often, "Turning Japanese" is covered entirely for the exotic value of Japanese culture, such as Kirsten Dunst's cover for a London's Tate Modern exhibition called *Pop Life: Art in A Material World* in 2009, featuring herself dressing up as an anime schoolgirl character in a bright blue wig and cavorting around Tokyo.

Exotic musical gestures invite the ethnic gaze, aestheticizing processes of Asian racialization, and ethnic differences. As shown above, the adoptions and variations of the oriental riff in popular music abound. Different from raga rock and the "turn to the East" in the 1960s, which was largely concerned with exploring South Asian and North African musics, spiritual search, and producing authentic experiences (McClary 2000; Ireland and Gemie 2019), the turn to the Far East in the 1970s and 1980s has been markedly more

superficial and commercially minded. Musical exoticism, however, with a history of frequently confusing cultural elements, is a question less of authenticity than its function (Dahlhaus 1989, 302; Sheppard 2019; Scott 1998). The oriental riff and an actual gong sound do not make much difference as exotic signifiers. The degree of genuine musical representation is perhaps a question less interesting and also less socio-politically important than its constitutive power of perpetuating "Asianness" as something alien. Therefore, we may better approach the sonic constructs of the exotic as sound affects, through which we shall focus on the shifting, ambivalent and generative affective power and experiences associated with the function of the oriental riff across time and space.

Through disobedient listening, my examination complicates the sound-affect relationship of the oriental riff and reveals its internal contradictoriness as an exotifying sonic phrase. Focusing on inconsistency and contradiction reveals the interstices of the sonic phrase's signifying practices and is more likely to avoid replicating orientalist discourses while studying them.[20] Thus, disobedient listening also leads us to better address the disobedient playing of the oriental riff by those who are often its signified exotic bodies. For example, the original punk soundtrack to experimental comedic short film *Shut Up White Boy* (dir. Vũ T. Thu Hà) prominently reappropriates the oriental riff to signpost the narrative diversion to satirizing Asiophilia through a series of creative revenge on a "fucking yellow fever jerk."[21] Biracial Korean American musician Michelle Zauner's indie single "Everybody Wants to Love You" (2016) features a playful intro riff that hauntingly reminds of us the commonplace use of the oriental riff in popular music.

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[20] Matthew Head (2003) has cautioned us about the tendency of replicating orientalist discourses.
[21] The soundtrack is created by a temporary punk band under the name of the Drag-On Ladies, which caricatures the Asian dragon lady stereotype. See Chapter 5 for a case study on the film, the band, and the soundtrack.

Korean American comedian Margaret Cho also calls out how the oriental riff and other racist routines were used in a college cheerleading tournament.[22]

There are also cases where the oriental riff is not used in explicitly counter-hegemonic ways and sometimes predominantly circulated in East Asia. For the Chinese audience, the oriental riff is perhaps more known as a video game melody and is still not widely recognized. The commercial success of the *Kung Fu Panda* franchise along with its revival of "Kung Fu Fighting," including its Chinese version, has helped make the melody more familiar to the Chinese audience. In Taiwanese popular music, there are a few notable examples that sampled the melody, including MC Hotdog's "Han Liu Lai Xi" (trans. "Korean Wave Invasion" 2001) (Schweig 2016), Shan-Wei Chang's "He Quan" (trans. "Crane Style Boxing" 2003) and Cyndi Wang's "Jie Mao Wan Wan" (trans. "Curved Eyelashes" 2005). Another one is "Xing Zuo" (trans. "Astrology" 2007) by Leehom Wang, an American musician but also a mega pop star in East Asia, who is known for his musicianship of fusing Western popular genres with traditional Chinese music. All these cases would require further examination in their respective contexts. Elastically employed at the intersections of various affective tendencies and intensities across time, genres, and geopolitical contexts, the oriental riff transcends the boundaries of sonic ethnic chic/kitsch/camp and continues to offer transhistorical, transcultural, and transnational insights into the changing relationship of sounds and affects.

[22] This can be found in Cho's 1996 comedy CD *Drunk with Power*. The reference is at the end of the track "Asian-Americans – Racists."

Final Notes

Both sounds and affects have been integral to the reproduction of the inscrutable Asian. This chapter demonstrates that orientalist rock mobilizes a combination of sonic, affective, and cultural strategies pandering to their penchant for counter-hegemonic and (pseudo-)progressive positionalities through building cross-racial affective alliances. I argue that this tendency has repackaged musical orientalism as a countercultural strategy, where Asianness is fossilized as an apolitical vessel to deliver messages often intended to be culturally and politically progressive. An empty signifier, indeed. As a result, practices entangled with orientalist rock often further the inscrutability of Asian bodies as political agents, making autonomous Asians and rock music an oxymoronic, incomprehensible combination. Similar to the whitewash of rock music, which involves "a certain amount of mythologizing and stereotyping of the emotions, sexuality, and spirituality of black people whom many whites believe embody the freedom, naturalness, and joy for life that whites had lost" (Mahon 2004, 205), the Asian sonic ethnic chic also pushes Asian bodies to the periphery, functioning more affectively as nameless inspirations or enticements than in any concrete terms.

Musing upon the increasing media discourse of "Asian Cool cast British Asianess" about the 1990s British dance music scene, exemplified by the mainstream reception of "Asian Underground" DJ Talvin Singh, Ahmad (2001) notes that Asian Cool implies "a certain backwardness; an unstated but assumed failure to participate in youth cultures of the 1970s and 1980s" (Ahmad 2001, 78). What is damaging behind such discursive logic of Asian Cool and Asian ethnic chic in general is a way of forgetting and a way of erasing. In the domestic contexts of the U.S. and the U.K., the 1970s and 1980s

were seeing more Asian immigrants than ever and growing political participation of Asians and Asian immigrants (Omi 1991; Sabin 2002). While struggling to claim space in the mainstream cultural landscape, Asian American women have assumed a variety of roles in the music industry and underground scenes since as early as the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as in the Chinatown and Little Tokyo of Los Angeles (See Chapter 3) and the first all-female rock band Fanny hailing from Sacramento, California (See Chapter 5). Within the discursive trajectory of popular musical orientalism, executing creative and political agency comes with great challenges, one of which is to avoid celebrating racial otherness with naivety and "degrading themselves [Asian intellectuals' and artists'] with multicultural exoticism and feeding their bodies and cultures to the gluttonous mainstream beast" (Ahmad 2001, 84). This proves to be a constant struggle for the women rock musicians and influencers studied in the following chapters. Articulating at the intersections of orientalist rock, the representation of Asians and Asian Americans, and the cultural myth of Asian American apoliticism, this chapter provides historical and contextual knowledge for the following chapters to look at how Asian American women rock musicians and influencers variously negotiate the sonic and affective strategies ingrained in orientalist rock.

Chapter 3:

Inscrutable Asian Fury:
Bad Punks of L.A. Chinatown and Little Tokyo

Introduction

> Several years after her [Esther Wong's] death in 2005, many journalists and musicians tried to discredit her work in propelling the countless careers of bands including X, the Alley Cats, the Go-Gos, the Police, Oingo Boingo, the Plimsouls, and Guns 'n' Roses in the late 70s–early 80s. She was a great business woman who had the foresight to operate outside of her comfort zone and forever changed the landscape of the LA music scene.
>
> – Doris Ho-Kane (@17.21women 2019)
> Founder of Instagram archive *17.21 Women*

> For all their anti-conformity politics, says Ngo, the punks "didn't recognize the ways that their racism, their orientalism, were going into how they imagined her [Esther Wong's] character and her policies. They were somehow astonished that if they came in and destroyed her restaurant, she might not want them back."
>
> – Fiona I.B. Ngô
> Interview with *Topic* (Coleman 2019)

This chapter is interested in theorizing "bad punk" as a racialized and affective construct through examining how Asian America performs and offers different definitions of bad punk. My inspiration for theorizing bad punk comes from similar two-word combinations used by scholars, activists, and artists when discussing Asian presences in different cultural industries, such as when scholar Eve Oishi (2000) talks about "Bad Asians" in film, when musician Charlene Kaye (2016) talks about "Bad Perms" and pop music, when David "C-Diddy" Jung wielded "Asian Fury" and won the U.S.'s first air guitar world championship, and when filmmaker Salima Koroma (2016) documents "Bad Rap" and Asians in hip hop. These catchphrases all speak to the complexity and contradictoriness of being Asian in various ways. Oishi (2000) refers to Bad Asians as in "badass" Asians and "Bad as in anyone who does not covet white

patriarchal approval; anyone who challenges racism, class oppression, sexism, homophobia; anyone who talks candidly about sex and desire"; therefore, a Bad Asian is "any Asian American who makes noise, acts nasty, or in any way flouts the expectations of racist stereotype" (221). Following this, I want to consider a particular group of Bad Asians: Bad Asians in the punk rock business. I call them "bad punks," bad as in unfit and badass.

Some may find bad punk an oxymoron and ask what makes the add-on "bad" necessary to punk because punk is always already bad (both as in badass and in bad DIY quality). Yet talking about bad punks as a particular group of Bad Asians reveals the racial politics of punk by unfolding how being Asian, oftentimes unapologetically Asian, makes certain individuals "unfit" to be punk or to be authentic punk. The embarrassing reality seems to be that Asian punks can only stay punk insofar as they stay quiet and comply with orientalist codes of conduct. The degree to which the punk community does not extend its anti-conformity to its Asian members reveals the naturalized racial politics of punk that still sees Asians as the well-assimilated model minority, even as punks. What also makes bad punk a particularly interesting lens is the skewed racial agency of fury, violent tendency, and outsider pride associated with punk performances, discourses, and sensibilities. When examining the audience trashing of the iconic punk venue Madame Wong's, which was owned by Chinese immigrant couple Esther Wong and George Wong and was located in Los Angeles's multiracial and multiethnic Chinatown in 1978, Fiona I.B. Ngô (2012) notes that the incident reveals a problem of access to punk violence and that the Chinese-immigrant owned venues and immigrant businesses alike were the first casualties of such violence, easy to attack, especially when they invite

you (performers and customers) in (223). Ngô's offers a witted examination of the intersection of punk violence, war, immigration, and the imperial imagination permeating the entire social milieu of late 1970s U.S. While Ngô positions the venue owners as "non-punk immigrants," the punk violence against whom became a catalyst of community building, this chapter offers a reinterpretation of Madame Wong's and two other iconic locations of the same period in Los Angeles, Hong Kong Café and Atomic Café, by approaching the proprietors as "punk immigrants"—punk promoters and influencers who happen to be immigrants.[23]

The early California punk scene is now a significant cultural memory. Music infrastructures, such as venues and eclectic hangouts, are both important imprints of such memory, also generating their own strand of cultural imprints. These locations would appear in the history books of punk, documentaries, and autobiographies and sometimes written in songs. For instance, Hong Kong Café appears in Penelope Spheeris's documentary about L.A.'s punk rock scene *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981); Atomic Café appears in the Descendents' "Kabuki Girl" (1982) and the said kabuki girl is most certainly Nancy Sekizawa, owner of the Atomic Café who in the mid-1970s renovated the Café and turned it into a punk hangout; and Keith Morris (of Black Flag) composed an essay entitled "Gin Ling Way"—the street in Chinatown where you could find both Madame Wong's and Hong Kong Café—and included in his 2016 memoir *My Damage The Story of a Punk Rock Survivor*. In the broader California punk scene, more

[23] "Immigrant" here is used in a broad sense that includes different generations. The main subjects discussed in this chapter are of different generations and of different East Asian nationalities. For example, Esther and George Wong migrated to the United States from Shanghai, China in 1949 to flee the communist takeover; Nancy Sekizawa (a.k.a. Atomic Nancy) is a third-generation Japanese American, whose mother (Ito Nishi) was detained in an internment camp during the World War II. I use "immigrant business" frequently in the chapter as a way to refer to Chinese- and Japanese-owned businesses concentrated in L.A.'s Chinatown and Little Tokyo, regardless of generation.

Asian restaurants played a key role in facilitating the burgeoning punk culture and community. Besides L.A.'s Madame Wong's (as well as the second location in Santa Monica, Madame Wong's West), Hong Kong Café, and Atomic Café, Sacramento's China Wagon and Kin's Coloma also hosted their fair amount of punk rock and new wave gigs in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Additionally, San Francisco had Filipino restaurant and nightclub Mabuhay Gardens (or simply the Mab), which is hailed as "Rock on Broadway" and hosted shows by the likes of the Ramones, the Dead Kennedys, and Patti Smith from circa. 1976–1987.[24] Mindaugis Bagdon's short concert film *Louder Faster Shorter* (1978) has recorded the benefit performances of the Avengers, Dils, Mutants, Sleepers, and UXA for striking Kentucky coal miners at the Mabuhay Gardens, March 20 and 21, 1978. These cultural discourses, however, only offer limited snippets as to how Chinatown and Little Tokyo are represented and remembered and all from other people's perspectives. In a way, while reinterpreting the discourses and cultural imprints of punk immigrant businesses, this chapter aims to reclaim the cultural memory of the nascent West Coast punk scene for Asian America.

In particular, I consider how punk immigrants performed and reflected the idea of bad punk and their influence in community building, as opposed to a relatively passive approach only seeing them as victims of punk violence. While the perpetuated trope of model minority promotes racialized discourses of deference and repressiveness, expressing anger and rage defies this racial fiction (Balance 2012). Sydney Hutchinson (2016) borrows the catchphrase "Asian fury" from C-Diddy (David Jung's stage name

[24] Both Hong Kong Café and The Mab are owned by Asian immigrants and their punk show business was primarily run by professional punk promoters. This is different from the cases with Madame Wong's and Atomic Café, which were first approached by professional punk promoters but soon took over the main role in their punk business.

that stands for “Chink Daddy”) and examines how various Asian American air guitarists mobilize and negotiate their racial and gender identities through the construct of Asian fury. Asian fury, according to Hutchinson’s study that extends beyond C-Diddy’s performance, is a body-centered counter-orientalist performative strategy that satirizes and shreds gendered and racialized imaginaries of Asianness while re-appropriating the racialized and gendered meanings of rock. Building on the idea of Asian fury, this chapter demonstrates how Asian fury is performed and constructed in some of less attended furious Asians, namely, Asian American punk rock promoters who do not often get the spotlight as performers would. To do this, I give special attention on two unapologetically bad-tempered and ill-mannered angry Asian women behind the scene: Esther Wong (Madame Wong’s owner) and Nancy Sekizawa (a.k.a. Atomic Nancy; Atomic Café owner). The reason behind these choices is one unity between the two subjects: When facing racialized violence, these angry Asian women’s response is unaccommodating anger. Therefore, in order to examine the counter-hegemonic messages disseminated by these angry Asians, it is necessary to understand the political and historical significance of being angry for Asians in the U.S. After a survey on angry Asian cultural productions in the first section, the following dives into the case study of the early L.A. punk. Through examining the inscrutability of Esther Wong as a punk influencer, I reveal Asian immigrant bad punks’ often simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible critical role for the early L.A. punk. Next, by offering alternative perspectives countering mainstream Asian immigrant discourses and the Orientalist discourses around Esther Wong and Atomic Nancy, I offer insights into how we may make the punk community and the Asian immigrant community understand each other

better. Through these alternative perspectives, I argue for the cultural and political significance of the indelible punk sensibilities of Asian bad punks.

Angry Asians: Producing Asian Fury

"If you were active on forum boards or Asian Avenue in the early aughts, chances are you had more than your fair share of friends with a screen-name that included the words 'angry' and 'Asian' in some combination; maybe you did, yourself," writes Jenn Fang (2014), creator of *Reappropriate*, a blog dedicated to Asian American feminism, politics, and popular culture, recollecting the early Asian American blogsphere. Indeed, while Asian fury—as manifested in angry Asian girls, angry Asian women, and similar combinations of anger and Asian identities—might be less explored as academic analytical frameworks, angry Asians have assumed a fundamental role in documenting and producing Asian anger in response to the racial violence and discrimination against people of Asian descent, putting unequivocal counter-expressions out there to debunk the myth that Asians are meek and politically indifferent.

There have been many media and cultural footprints of Asian fury and angry Asian women artist-activists. Yellow Rage, a spoken word duo consisted of Michelle Myers and Catzie Vilayphonh, turns poetry into a raging machine that slams stereotypes and misappropriation of Asian women through their swear words loaded jams and performances. "So what, you tried dim sum, and den some on the menu. So what, you a fan of Lucy Liu. So what, you read *The Joy Luck Club*, too. That makes you an expert on how I should look? Fuck you! What the fuck do you know about being Asian?" Myers and Vilayphonh (2002) in T-shirts that read "Orientalize This—BAM" and

"BACDAFUCUP ASIAPHILE"[25] weaponize Asian fury to the maximum with their aggressive bodily and discursive performance on the stage of television series *Def Poetry Jam*. Another Asian American spoken word collective I Was Born With Two Tongues also touches on the cultural taboo of being angry, peevish, and grumbling in their pieces "ALAG" and "Excuse Me, ameriKa" from *Broken Speak* (2002). Margaret Cho, who never shies away from "joking" about rape, race, sexuality, and LGBTQ matters in her stand-up comedy and music, credits rage as her inspirational and sustaining source of art, saying that "My rage is really keeping me alive. My rage is my art" (Gibson 2015). Cho led a social media campaign in 2015 with the hashtag #12DaysofRage to help form a platform for rape survivors to speak out and debuted her single "(I Want To) Kill My Rapist." Ali Wong also wields the power of words throughout her fearless and unabashed comedian career, earning praises that capture her unpredictable style such as one that calls her "savagely funny, shockingly raunchy, fiercely intelligent and delightfully unhinged" (Dunlevy 2017). These angry Asian women have defied the racial fiction of model minority through the power of "split tongue," to borrow Michelle Myers and Catzie Vilayphonh's powerful metaphor of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

In a sense, Asian Americans have been angry from the outset when "Asian American" was born as a political identity out of the Asian fury amidst the Civil Rights Movement. Renee Tajima-Peña (2020), filmmaker and Professor of Asian American Studies at UCLA, calls herself a "recovering angry Asian girl" and a "real life Angry

[25] BACDAFUCUP, read as "back the fuck up", probably draws the cultural influence from hardcore rap group Onyx's debut album entitled *Bacdafucup* (1993). "ASIAPHILE," related to "Asiaphilia" and "Yellow Fever," describes white males' sexual interests in Asian women or general interests in Asia in fetishistic ways. Ellie Hisama (1993) dubs this "Asiophilia" in her examination of the construct of Asian women in popular music.

Little Asian Girl" while talking about her recent PBS documentary series *Asian Americans* (2020) that traces the epic Asian American history over the span of 150 years. Tajima-Peña also co-directed the angry documentary film *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1987) about the murder of 27-year-old Chinese American engineer Vincent Chin by two white male automobile workers in 1982 Detroit. They mistook Chin as Japanese and fatally attacked him while accusing him of the decline of Detroit's auto business, and although they pled guilty to manslaughter, they never served time in prison and denied it was a hate crime. The film documents angry women like Chin's mother Lily Chin and journalist-activist Helen Zia through the camera of two angry filmmakers (Renee Tajima-Peña and Christine Choy). It also documents the anger that was sparked amongst and united the diverse Asian communities to fight against racial injustice in the 1980s, which transformed previously separated ethnic groups into a politically and socially impactful community (Zia 2001). The legacy of the event lives on through various Asian American cultural productions in the present day. Besides documentaries, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1987) and *Vincent Who?* (2009), for example, rap group Model Minority (Grand Master Chu, D-One, and Inglish) produced a song entitled "Vincent Chin" upon the 29th anniversary of the death of Chin in 2011; San Francisco based hardcore metal band Say Bok Gwai released "Revenge of Vincent Chin" (2017) with their album *Chink In The Armor* (猴王再現);[26] and as of the end of 2020, Helen Zia is producing a TV series on this landmark civil rights case. These cultural productions are a great reminder of a past that is still relevant today, alongside renewed anti-Asian sentiment amidst the COVID-19

[26] The irony of the album title also reflects in the official Cantonese translation "猴王再现," meaning "the monkey king reappears," a translation that likens the monkey king, a symbol of power and anarchy, to "chink in the armor."

pandemic, which is fueled by President Trump's framing of the coronavirus as "Chinese virus." Debuting the docuseries *Asian Americans* in 2020, Tajima-Peña (2020) notes that "Telling our own story today matters more than ever."

By "Angry Little Asian Girl," Tajima-Peña here is referring to the character and animated cartoon created by Korean American artist Lela Lee, *Angry Little Asian Girl* (ALAG), in 1994 as an angry response to the stereotypical depictions of women of color in cartoons and popular culture. Lee also created a spin-off online comic strip published on her website under an umbrella title *Angry Little Girls* (ALG) in 2000, which expands to focus on girls of different backgrounds and as of January 2021 Lee is still updating this work. ALAG and ALG feature an angry Korean American girl Kim, a foulmouthed, undiplomatic, and outspoken elementary-school girl who confronts stereotypical assumptions and behavior with her anger. When one of the angry little girls Wanda asks Kim, "Do you consider yourself as Asian or American?" "Neither. I'm just angry," responded Kim (Lee 2005). An animated TV series adaptation of *Angry Little Asian Girl* was released in 2014 through Mnet, with Lee voicing Kim and Margaret Cho voicing Kim's mother.

Figure 3.1 Angry Little Asian Girl Pin. Copyright © 2021, Angry Little Girls, Inc.
Photo source: ALAG's merchandise website https://angrylittlegirls.com/.

In an entry about this Lela Lee's, titled "Angry Asian Girl," in *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia*, Stella Oh (2014) notes that the cartoon explores how "a group of girls, including Kim, deal with racial stereotypes, gender expectations, sexism, depression, and most of all, *fitting in*" (40; emphasis mine). When dealing with "fitting in," which entails assimilation to varying degrees, Kim's answer is unabashed anger. Instead of racial melancholia, the angry little Asian girl's response to how well she is "fitting in" (are you Asian or American?) is Asian fury. Scholars like Elaine Kim have noted the series as empowering for Asian American women because outward emotions such as anger are traditionally discouraged in their cultures and non-expected in the larger society (Oh 2014; Cheng 2019, xi; Trazo and Kim 2019, 117). Jenn Fang (2014) praises that "ALAG is everything that Asian American women were not perceived as, and everything we actually are. She is loud, profane, and irrever[e]nt; but, also, at moments, capable of profound sadness and self-reflection over her anger. ALAG is both a caricature of the angry Asian American woman, and a humanization of us: one that reflects the seething rage that we all feel at finding ourselves in a constructed box that would have us be meek, invisible, and unassuming." Fang's remark touches on the self-reflexive counter-performance of the anger of the ALAG, which through Lee's worldmaking is possible for us to witness.

Cambodian American artist Anida Yoeu Ali reimagines herself as the Angry Little Asian Girl in "ALAG" in the signature album *Broken Speak* (2002) as part of the Asian American spoken word collective I Was Born With Two Tongues. Like Margaret Cho, Ali's rendition also plays with the empowerment of imaginative violence; she narrates on the recording in response to the taunts by the white boys waving kung fu fists,

"I wish I pulled out my secret samurai sword and chopped off their heads, kicked them clear into the sewer drain, stand there with a serene smile and watched their little heads roll and roll away." In a similar ALAG spirit, more recently, then Colgate University student Talitha Angelica (Angel) Acaylar Trazo (2017) has created a graphic novel titled *Where are you from?: Short stories about being Asian in America,* which illustrates counter-stories of Asian/American college students on a predominantly white campus. In a critical reflexive essay about the racial microaggression illustrated in the counter-stories, including one professor repeatedly saying Woohee's name wrong even after correction and another professor assuming Angel's English language abilities, Angel Trazo and Woohee Kim (2019) dubbed themselves (or their characters in the graphic novel) "two angry Asian girls." The similar moniker "angry [little] Asian girls" used by Lela Lee and Angel Trazo is likely a coincidence, but the realization of the subversive power of being angry for Asian/American women and Asians in general is not. In addition, when we talk about angry Asian girls, we cannot forget to mention punk zines such as *Bamboo Girl*, *Slant*, and *Chop Suey Spex* (See Chapter 5).

While discussing angry Asian girls/women, one may also think of angry Asian men and the *Angry Asian Man* blog and associated social media presence, founded by Phil Yu, who is also Korean American, in 2001. In 2015, Yu teamed up with ISAtv and cohost Jenny Yang and created a talk show called *Angry Asian America* (2015).[27] Yu also produced an angry podcast named *Sound and Fury: The Angry Asian Podcast* (2012-

[27] ISAtv is part of International Secret Agents (ISA), a platform founded by Wong Fu Productions and music group Far East Movement for empowering the Asian Pacific American community and celebrating APA youth culture. ISAtv is not only interested in "angry Asians" but also "funny Asians" and a whole spectrum of APA experiences. For example, ISAtv also produced a show called *Asians, That's Funny* (2016) with comedian Sierra Katow.

2017), which features Asian American cultural producers and artists from all walks of life on the show. “The idea of an angry Asian anything is kind of an affront to people's general perceptions of Asians in America. I think a lot of time we get pegged as very subservient, docile, passive. You know we are often painted as the model minority,” says Yu (2013) about the idea behind the name of the blog. This venture does not exclusively focus on the experiences of Asian men but unquestionably addresses many issues in this aspect. Asian men, too, have been subject to gendered, racial stereotypes of being effeminate and asexual. However, instead of creating an entirely oppositional image that is simply hypermasculine, the blog creates an intermediate space allowing for dynamic embodiments of Asian fury to collide, among other things, through the use of the kung fu action figure (See Figure 3.2) in their website frontpage, Quick Kick, a fictional character from *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* (1982-).

Figure 3.2 Quick Kick from *G.I. Joe.* Screenshot of
the frontpage of the Asian Angry Man blog via http://angryasianman.com/.

Through invoking martial artist Bruce Lee and signaling Yu as an action figure collector, the *Angry Asian Man* offers alternative Asian masculinity that avoids aligning the reimagination of Asian male sexuality with the dominant Black and white racial binary by colliding Bruce Lee’s ambiguous performance of masculinity and stereotypical media representations of nerd collectors as failed masculinity (Nishime 2017). By converting

academic knowledge often only accessible to certain groups of people into vernacular language, Asian American cultural producers can be seen as cultural activists, whether they knowingly plan so or not (Lopez 2014).

All the above angry Asian American cultural producers and activists used their anger to produce art that explicitly and implicitly challenges stereotypes of being Asian. Lori Kido Lopez (2014) argues similarly by concluding that one of the ways that anger functions for Asian American bloggers is through working as "productive emotion," which leads to creative outputs and actions that are both entertaining and dynamic (427).[28] At this point, what becomes clear about Asian fury when applied across cultural fields is its political and liberatory capital as a satirized racial trope. In this way, we can understand the angry and furious Asian girl as the angry "Bad Asian": an assertive and uncompromising Asian girl or woman—a counter-figure of racialized mainstream images and expectations of Asian women, who are neither the submissive China doll/Geisha girl nor the controlling dragon lady, confronting white heteropatriarchal oppression with fury and audacity often in non-sexual or perversely sexual ways.

However, different from Asian American cultural productions, which provide means and space for self-expression and creative counter-narratives, a similar kind of

[28] In her study of the Asian American blogosphere, Lopez (2014) also discusses "destructive anger" in order to better understand the emotional toll on these activist bloggers and the unpaid affective labor involved in maintaining, and eventually quitting, their blogs. While this perspective is particularly germane to the examination of activist blogging, I am somewhat uncomfortable with the selection of the interview quotes in the section discussing "Destructive Anger." Although the author states that "When asked about the negative or difficult aspects of blogging, a number of frustrations resonated across nearly all of the bloggers" (431), all the selected quotes are from female bloggers, namely, Jen Wang (from *Disgrasian*), Carmen Sognovi (from *Racialicious*), and MissMel (from *Fighting 44s*) out of the fifteen bloggers interviewed for the study. And when discussing anger as productive emotion, only one female blogger's thoughts are provided (Jen Wang's). This way of selecting and presenting quotations disproportionately marks Asian fury as if less productive and more destructive for female bloggers. While this presentation of the study result can be absolutely unintentional, it does speak to the gender dimension of being angry Asians and thus worth mentioning in the footnote.

autonomy was not often acknowledged for Esther Wong or Atomic Nancy, whose stories were often told from their punk "colleagues"' perspectives and musical creations. For instance, for Brendan Mullen, founder of another popular L.A. punk rock club The Masque, Nancy reinventing herself as Atomic Nancy was to "court" more punk customers; moreover, it was "at the urging of" Greenstein (Mullen and Spitz 2013). In the mouth of these storytellers, the immigrant owners' contribution to the L.A. punk history and their cultural agency as punk influencers are often dismissed or inscrutable, whose image is thus often tethered to puppeteers merely following the guidance of the business savvy Paul Greenstein, who approached these restaurants with the idea of promoting punk. However, as cultural memory theorists remind us of the fluid nature and perpetual process of cultural memory (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 2), we can reinterpret those discourses in favor of a restorative approach to the cultural history of punk. With this goal in mind, the rest of the chapter offers an alternative punk historiography through the lens of three seminal punk locations in L.A. Chinatown and Little Tokyo that were active in the formative years of the L.A. punk scene, the late 1970s and early 1980s: Madame Wong's, Atomic Café, and Hong Kong Café with an emphasis on the angry Asian women behind them.

Remembering "Chinatown Punk Wars": Dragon Ladies, or Racialized Inscrutability?

> The Chinatown Punk Wars were racial: Esther Wong was often referred to as the Dragon Lady who only cared about the bottom line, whereas Barry Seidel of Hong Kong Café was cast as the liberal, open-minded punk rock advocate.
>
> – Doris Ho-Kane (@17.21women 2019)
> Founder of Instagram archive *17.21 Women*

The fragmented stories about these locations are often limited and repeatedly through an Orientalist lens that rendered them inscrutable. For example, Esther Wong, owner of Madame Wong's, was often dubbed a "Dragon Lady" by media commenters, in zines, and amongst the punk circle due to her strict booking rules that favored less aggressive new wave-oriented bands in the later years. *Los Angeles Times* had run a two-page feature on Esther Wong with the blatant headline "Dragon Lady or Patron of L.A. Rock?" to discuss her business and treatment of bands (Mendelssohn 1980). The article includes interviews with a former business partner Paul Greenstein and musicians who worked with her, overall using their words against Wong's claims of her good intention of helping the bands. In summary, "Esther Wong didn't seem the type to become a patron of the rock arts," noted in another *Los Angeles Times* coverage of L.A.'s club scene (Cromelin 1979). Both articles go as far as bringing up Wong's upbringing and education in Shanghai as if this further justifies her disqualification as a genuine rock patron. "Patron of L.A. Rock" or not, for many, Wong's management seemed both illiberal and irrational (Ngô 2012), rendering a figure as *Melody Maker* writer Mark Williams (1979) described that is "diminutive (and, of course, inscrutable)." A closer look at Williams' commentary reveals that he attributed the cause of Wong's inscrutability to her strict booking policy that favored "the increasing number of wimpish pop-rock bands emerging in the wake of the Cars and the Knack." The add-on "wimpish" gives away the source of Wong's inscrutability for Williams, namely, his inability to interpret a plain business decision to avoid frequent property damage. Similarly, the "Dragon Lady or Patron of L.A. Rock?" article also seems to be fixated on the inscrutable Wong, making its only enlarged block quote about how mysterious and illogical Wong's actions were for

Greenstein as "her actions often lack manifest rhyme or reason." Neither *L.A. Times* commentators nor Greenstein was able to fathom Wong's booking policy as a logical business decision. Instead, Wong was mystified as a dragon lady, making enigmatic decisions and difficult to collaborate.

Figure 3.3 Esther Wong. Photo by Iris Schneider. *Los Angeles Times* (1980).

The kind of actions Greenstein was referring to turns out to be Wong's decision to stop booking punk bands with women singers or players, a decision allegedly made after a club fight during the Alley Cats' set at Madame Wong's, a trio featuring female bass player Dianne Chai (See Figure 3.4. See more about Chai in Chapter 5). Nicky Beat and Paul Greenstein also mentioned a few similar chaotic episodes during the sets of the Bags and X at Wong's (Mullen and Spitz 2013, 176-77).[29] Alice Bag (2011) of the Bags recounts in her memoir how the frisky audience and the damage to the club caused Wong to stop booking "bands with girls in them" (311). In response to *Los Angeles Times*'s framing of Wong as "Godmother of Punk" when reporting on her passing away (Oliver 2005), Bag (2005) responded in her blog that "Madame Wong may have been the

[29] I was unable to find any direct source from Wong herself to verify to what extent the policy was factually in effect, but it is safe to say that the policy was not inclusive and also that Wong was strict about booking punk bands that have female players/singers in them. It is worth re-addressing here that the point is not to overly concern about the actuality of Wong's policy but the problematics behind the interpretation of this widely condemned, and in fact inconsistent, policy within the punk community and commentators.

Godmother of Power Pop or the Nanny of New Wave, but she was no friend to punk rock." While Bag was right to condemn the hype of labels like "Godmother of Punk" and point out Wong's change of heart about punk acts at her venues, Bag's accounts also echo many discourses about Wong and her business, functioning both to essentialize Wong's policy as simply and entirely a sexist and illiberal decision and to erase the early years when Wong was still booking punk acts. That said, Bag (2005) did not erase some of the female musicians who did perform at Wong's by noting that "with the exception of Martha Davis and the Motels, who drew a somewhat milder audience than we did." However, this is as far as the story goes—that there were some exceptions and that was it.

Figure 3.4 Dianne Chai, bassist of the Alley Cats, playing at the Hong Kong Café in 1979. Photo by Louis Jacinto. Source: Coleman's (2019) *Topic* article.

It is no secret that Wong disliked the excessive violence and energy happening at her club (e.g., Farren 1981), yet the dominant interpretation of this dislike became highly centered around Wong that it gradually became a personal attack that gravitated toward an imagined inscrutability of an Asian body. My interest is not to "defend" Wong as a genuine punk patron or a "friend to punk rock" but to attune to how Wong became antithetical to punk alongside the erasure and Orientalizing of immigrant business owners perpetuated through the ostensibly liberal discourses of punk rock. Wong's judgment about women punks was no doubt loaded with bias, but many stories conveniently left

out other female-fronted or -involved bands that factually played at Madame Wong's and her other venue Madame Wong's West in Santa Monica, such as the Motels, the Bangles, and the Go-Go's. Again, instead of being seen as a business decision to protect property by billing less aggressive new wave acts, Wong's policy, and herself, was marked as illiberal in the eyes of punks due to her decision both to isolate women punks and support commercial new wave bands (Ngô 2012, 221). Punk rage against consumerism quickly made Wong a surrogate for these common enemies. Such one-dimensional reading constructed Wong as a consumerist, money-driven businesswoman, falsely erasing the fact that unknown, noncommercial, unsigned bands played at Wong's venues all the time, including after the former business partner Greenstein left.[30] Consequently, Wong's wanting of a peaceful business was dismissed as demanding and illogical, which marked immigrants' fights and yearning for peace as "undemocratic." Because of the general sentiment around Wong, Brendan Mullen would go as far as calling the trashing of Wong's place "most thought deservedly" in the liner notes of the Bags' 2007 compilation vinyl *All Bagged Up: The Bags 1977–1980* (as cited in Ngô 2012, 223). Such sentiment also fueled the fictitious literary representation of Wong as "nothing to do with punk" and unable to "tell the difference between one band to another" (Mora 2019, 41). Wong's inscrutability as manifested above in the eyes of many punks, fellow punk promoters, and storytellers of punk rock somehow justified the rhetorical and actual violence done to herself and her club, leaving unattended the punk audience who caused the actual

[30] Greenstein first approached George and Esther Wong about the idea of booking punk floorshows at their restaurant in 1978. See interviews of both musicians and Wong in Mendelssohn's (1980) *Los Angeles Times* article. Wong talked about selecting and supporting unknown bands to get more exposure in order to help them get signed by music labels and the interviewed musicians talked about (rather, complained about) Wong billing them to perform with other unknown bands many times.

violence (Ngô 2012, 220 and 223). This way, Wong and her business became a canvas to paint and reflect others' ideas and to perform racialized and gendered violence, a mechanism conjuring up an ancient device of Orientalism.

After Hong Kong Café opened in 1979, which primarily booked punk acts, especially those banned by Madame Wong's, the two venues were hence widely described as business rivals (e.g., Snowden 1990 in *Los Angeles Times*). Yet similarly through a lens of Orientalist rhetoric, this situation was also often described as "Chinatown Punk Wars" and "Wonton Wars": *Slash* (1979) designates this as "the Battle of the Clubs in Chinatown"; *Melody Maker* calls this "Battle of the Tongs" (Williams 1979); A *Los Angeles Times* article describes this as "A Skirmish in Chinatown" (McKenna 1979, N95); A *Trouser Press* headline calls Madame Wong's business "The Los Angeles Hustle" while remarking the opening of the Hong Kong Café across from Wong's as the beginning of "the now-infamous WonTon Wars" **(**Mora and Krepack 1980). Brendan Mullen characterizes this as a "which-side-are-you-on dichotomy" situation between punk and new wave: "Are you punk (self-taught, self-contained DIY) or new wave (musically comprised of shitty theoretical pop songs drenched with three-part harmony la-la's supported by major-label hype)?" (Mullen and Spitz 2013, 177).[31] The war hype notwithstanding, the arbitrary division between punk and new wave makes the framing of punk wars a less meaningful battle. For example, Mullen once suggested that L.A. punk vanguards such as X and the Alley Cats—Hong Kong Café regulars—

[31] While Mullen noted in the same conversation that "Somebody ran a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* called 'The Chinatown Punk Wars'" (177), I was not able to find the said article in the archive at ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times. My guess is that Mullen might have been referring to a 1979 headline "Popline: A Skirmish in Chinatown" from *Los Angeles Times* and penned by journalist Kristine McKenna.

were more pop than punk (2007, 322). No matter one agrees with Mullen or not, it would be unfair to identify the late 1970s L.A. punk rock by any single distinctive musical style and like glam rock, it is perhaps easier to characterize punk by its fashion, ethos, and performance elements (Keister 2016, 159).

Figure 3.5 Hong Kong Café from the outside. Source: Wikipedia.

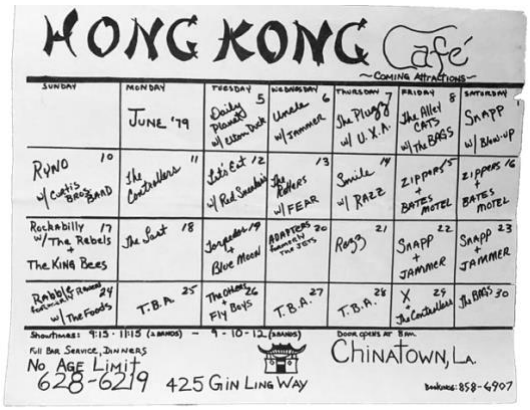

Figure 3.6 Show calendar featuring bands playing at the Hong Kong Café almost every night from June 1979. Source: Source: Coleman's (2019) *Topic* article.

What we may question then is the motive for constructing such punk "wars" and the need for violence and more importantly, who the causalities are. Ngô (2012) contextualizes the rhetoric and tropes of wars of the L.A. punk scene used to describe immigrant owners and business, suggesting that the actual wars happening in Southeast Asia, the role of immigration, and imperial imagination all lend meaning "for this racially and sexually diverse punk scene to imagine itself as resistant through (sometimes

simultaneous) affiliation with and disassociation from the state, military, and acts of capitalist violence" (205). In particular, she argues that while "non-punk refugees, immigrants, and people of color that shared punks' intimate and public spaces, lent the scene a sense of credibility from the bottom up. . . punks could also repeat the language of the state and the justifications of liberal capital in pathologizing poverty, immigrants, and people of color as a means to demonstrate punk outsiderness" (204-05). While both these immigrant business owners and bands were fighting in this "war," as Ngô reminds us, immigrant businesses like Madame Wong's and predominately Chicano art space Vex in East L.A. were the first causality, where the actual violence (the trashing) happened (223). This violence is also political violence in that it did not simply signal punk rebellion; it also functioned as a policing project aligned with the state, disciplining immigrants, refugees, queers, and people of color (234). This alignment, albeit almost certainly unwillingly on the part of the punk audience, is particularly conspicuous by the police indifference to the tumult and noise at Madame Wong's as noticed by Al Flipside in 1979, co-owner of long-run punk fanzine *Flipside* (1979-1989) (as cited in Ngô 2012, 223-24). Ngô's argument shows both the potential and limits of cross-racial and cross-cultural alliances formed around a shared sensibility of outsiderness. This strategic recreation, or rather re-affirmation, of an outsider identity is not anything new to many L.A. punks who appropriate the "authentic" lifestyle and image of street-smart kids pride themselves on being a "white minority" (one may think of Black Flag's song of the same title), a move that Daniel S. Traber (2001) describes as "voluntarist self-exile" (31).

Esther Wong was certainly not the only woman in music who got labeled with this racist moniker of dragon lady. Yoko Ono, often blamed for breaking up the Beatles

and as a bad influence for John Lennon, is also a notable "dragon lady" popularized in mass media. Two days after the assassination of Lennon in December 1980, *Los Angeles Times* has run an overview on Ono with the headline "Lennon's Widow: Ono: Dragon Lady or Love Goddess?" The coverage quotes criticism such as ones calling Ono a "Japanese witch [who] has made him crazy and he's gone bananas" and "an emasculating female, a dabbler in art and music, more concerned with her own self-expression than with Lennon's musical development." Here, a mesmerizing and ambitious femme fatale whose seductive power is inseparable from her Japanese identity is conjured, an embodiment of both new yellow peril (Jeon 2012) and Asian dragon lady (Bryan-Wilson 2003). While Ono's and Wong's articulations to the dragon lady mythmaking are different in blatant ways, they both experience antipathy from the very field they work in, i.e. the anti-punk sentiment toward Wong and the anti-avant-gardist sentiment toward Ono. Joseph Jonghyun Jeon (2012) reminds us that such hatred involved more than just personal dislike; thus, to deconstruct the hating of Ono needs to consider multiple imbricated contexts, including the then-ongoing war in Vietnam, Asian communism and Cold War politics, the economic growth of Asia, and how these affected U.S.-Asia relations (147). Fiona I.B. Ngô (2012) has convincingly unfolded the relevance of these perspectives in her essay "Punk in the Shadow of War" when examining the hatred toward Esther Wong.

In particular, Jeon makes an interesting observation that the expression of the hatred toward Ono often focused on her avant-garde aesthetics with little direct reference to her racial identity. He argues that "[t]alking about Ono's avant-gardism became a way of circumscribing Asianness" (147) and that "the anti-avant-garde sentiment toward

Yoko Ono stabilizes the transgressiveness of the avant-garde and re-affirms borders, yet elides any racial implications" (157). It would fair to say that behind the focused attention on Ono's aesthetics is a colorblindness politics in the world of the avant-garde. Ono's case offers great comparative value for the reexamination of Wong's racialized and gendered accusation of being a dragon lady when we compare the "talking about Ono's avant-gardism" with the preoccupation with Wong's inscrutable and illiberal management tangible in media and fellow punk discourses. Talking about Wong's ineligibility and hostility as a punk promoter became a way of circumscribing her Asianness, indeed, policing her Asianness, in the name of defending and negotiating the border and transgressiveness of punk rock.

Both Esther Wong and Atomic Nancy were subject to the filtering of the entrenched idea of dragon lady, a trope that seemed to justify the racialized and gendered violence at punk wars while spectacularizing them as additional attractions to the venues. While Nancy Sekizawa, or simply Atomic Nancy, did not literally get called a "dragon lady" as far as my research goes, she did not escape an Orientalist gaze. Cultural theorist Josh Kun's (2003) recount of the Atomic Café conjures up the popularized rhetoric of punk wars in Chinatown, calling the Café a place "[r]un by an *army* of Japanese American waitresses in short skirts, dagger earrings, and sky-high jet-black hair streaked with electric blue" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, a snippet of the Orientalist discourse around the Atomic café is unmistakable in the Descendents's single "Kabuki Girl" (1982), where we can hear lyrics such as "I'm going to the atomic café / You're a mystery to me, Kabuki girl / … / Your face is white, your hair is black / You'll probably stab me in the back / But that's the chance I'm gonna take." The persona created for

Nancy, Kabuki girl, speaks to a dominant racially essentializing popular music discourse, which we can find in many hit songs that adopt an "ethnicity/nationality + girl[s]" formula, including The Rolling Stones' "Indian Girl" (1980), David Bowie's "China Girl" (1983), Joy's "Japanese Girls" (1986), and BZN's "Cambodian Girl" (1990). In here, Nancy becomes a "Kabuki girl" who is mysterious and dangerous and who might stab you in the back, yet like a dragon lady, she is irresistible.

On the flip side, instead of an Orientalized warzone lens filtering the multicultural intersections in L.A. Chinatown and Little Tokyo, Nancy herself exemplifies an alternative perspective that is much needed in a recently released documentary about this iconic diner, *Atomic Café: The Noisiest Corner in J-Town* (dir. Boch and Nakamura 2020), saying that "You've got your women in the kimonos versus guys sitting in another booth with spike hair and earrings and studs. It was beautiful to me" (Boch and Nakamura 2020). Nancy's take on the cultural scene at her diner captures a vital role that the diner served as a subaltern public sphere for otherwise never intersecting communities, a role that Madame Wong's and Hong Kong Café similarly served. Such alternative perspectives shine the spotlight on the resilience of immigrants and their leadership in an unlikely subcultural community, which often get sidelined or misinterpreted through mouth-to-mouth rumors, media hype, or cross-cultural insensitivity.

As my above review of the mainstream memories and discourses around Madame Wong's, Hong Kong Café, and Atomic Café shows, the cultural memory of the L.A. punk of this period is deeply intertwined with the racial, gender, and immigration politics and the politics of punk authenticity. Following this, the rest of the chapter aims to

highlight much-needed alternative perspectives to re-interpret the roles of Esther Wong (and Madame Wong's), Atomic Nancy (and Atomic Café), and Hong Kong Café for the nascent West Coast punk scene. I ponder: How do we make of the above discourses in ways that debunk the inscrutability of Asian immigrants and their often simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible critical role for the early L.A. punk? And how can we make punk and Asian immigrant and refugee communities understand each other better? I will offer a few alternative perspectives countering mainstream Asian immigrant discourses and Orientalist musical discourses by re-interpreting Wong and Nancy as punk prototypes of "Angry Asian girls." These alternative perspectives, I argue, all lead to indelible punk sensibilities.

Re-Politicizing Angry Asian Women: Asian Fury and Punk Anti-Sociality

My interest in reinterpreting Esther Wong (of Madame Wong's) and Atomic Nancy (of Atomic Café) through a punk lens stems from their unaccommodating anger, a critical element to the sensibilities of punk rock but often unraveled in skewed and limited ways. Although doing so would shed some light on punk intersectionality, I do not hope to redefine punk. After all, "Defining punk is like trying to nail Jello to the wall: you might be able to do it for a moment, but it won't stick" (Wolf 2007, 1). Of course, neither do I intend to hint at all that Wong was ever a punk rocker or a punk enthusiast who would play some three chords herself on a guitar for entertainment, but this should not hinder us from reinterpreting her story through an intersectional, restorative punk lens. My efforts of reinterpretation should not be seen as trying to demarcate what punk means/does/operates; rather, I am trying to grasp one of the infinite ways that punk ethos

or punk sensibilities could be used as a critical tool for the bodies they have wronged at many points.

Although on the surface, Angry Asian women like Esther Wong would be an ideal embodiment of punk or an ally as a punk promoter, the controversy around Wong's "membership" and "eligibility" in the punk community unfolds the polysemy and problematics of the punk subculture. Behind the media hypes like "Godmother of punk" and "Chinatown punk wars" are the negotiation of what fits to be punk, a debate that is evident in the condemnation of Esther Wong's widely perceived illiberal and incomprehensible policies. Such discourses have positioned Wong as a person of capitalist business savvy as opposed to a genuine punk promoter. "Non-punk immigrants" like Wong also served as a counter point for punks to disassociate with and differentiate from (Ngô 2012, 205). As discussed above, punks and fellow punk promoters' inability to see Wong as a punk figure or a friend to punk was inseparable from an imbricated racial, gendered, transnational, and local politics of punk authenticity and has produced racial and gendered violence. Therefore, reinterpreting Wong and Madame Wong's through a punk lens is conducive to a restorative picture of the early L.A. punk community. Similarly, while reinterpreting "dragon lady" Wong's anger and fury, I comparatively consider how we may rethink Nancy as a punk force through an intersectional lens.

Exploring the theoretical and hermeneutic possibilities of anger and fury for understanding Asian American subjectivities can offer refreshing perspectives, particularly given the seminal frameworks that often center around mourning, loss, and racial melancholia (e.g., Eng and Han 2000; Cheng 2001). Some have explored the

limitations of this frame and argued for the theoretical possibilities of alternative affective lenses, such as envy (Diaz 2006) and humor (Meerzon 2019), when we move away from racial melancholia. Central to the ideas of loss, mourning, and racial melancholia is a failure of assimilation: a failed "dream of perfection," "identificatory disorders" (Cheng 2001, 72), and a "suspended assimilation into mainstream culture" (Eng and Han 2000, 672). An Asian American fury framework instead prioritizes an unapologetic, non-assimilating approach. We can think of bad punk as a result of Asian American fury meeting punk, such as when ill-tempered Esther Wong met L.A. punk. Wong became a bad punk when she was deemed unfit to be a punk (friend) because she refused to remain as a casualty of punk violence, a decision undoubtedly resulting in problematic decisions. Moving away from the preoccupation with such supposedly illiberal consequences, I instead reexamine how Wong's uncompromising managing style and intolerance of unsolicited violence both conjure up and complicate punk sensibilities. Through this, we may find a few clues as to the racial politics of (bad) punk, punk violence, and punk affect and sensibilities as intersected with Asian American subjectivities and immigration history.

One of the ways to reinterpret the dragon lady discourses around Wong from a punk lens is to re-examine Wong's unapologetic, non-assimilating, and unaccommodating fury and eclectic performance of antisociality that lent her such designation as a dragon lady. The dragon lady and the docile lotus blossom are two mainstream stereotypes used to portray Asian/American women in popular culture (Davé 2014). With its print media origin in as early as 1936 *Chicago Tribune*'s comic strip *Terry and the Pirates*, the dragon lady discourse is a contested legacy of wars,

colonialism, foreign policy, and capitalism (such as bride buying). The dragon lady is a glamorous, mysterious, overbearing, and sexually manipulative character with cruel behavior; a term that is now commonly used to describe powerful Asian/American women (Davé 2014, 860). Described as "[p]eevish, willful and vindictive" and "physically as unprepossessing as they come" (Mendelssohn 1980), Wong getting labeled as a dragon lady certainly reflects the connotative changes of the trope in the late 1970s. On the other hand, what is different about the dragon lady stereotype from other gendered stereotypes is its racial dimension. A subversive reading of the dragon lady requires us to rethink fury and sexuality as racial capital and to reconsider the powerful angry Asian woman image. While the angry Asian girl became an empowering trope in the 1990s and the Angry Asian Man blog rejuvenated the angry Asian trope in the 2000s, Nancy and Esther were practicing the sentiment far before any of this in the 1970s.

Looking at Montreal's independent rock scene, Geoff Stahl (2004) points out the differentiation and association between a music scene's material "hard infrastructures" and affective "soft infrastructures," noting that "the use of the scene's hard infrastructure has a reciprocal relationship to the textures associated with its soft infrastructure, and that the affective dimension of the scene reinforces its structural aspects (and vice versa)" (56). This two-fold framework requires us to broaden our examination to consider both of a music infrastructure's institutional and affective dimensions and problematize the complex interplay in ways otherwise dismissed as irrelevant. It is a particularly useful lens for reinterpreting Madame Wong's and Atomic Café because it warns us of the conflation of the material and the affective of a music infrastructure by suggesting a lag, an intermediate space between the two dimensions, where anomalies and discrepancies—

what does not seem to contribute to the predominant articulation between the two aspects—may open up spaces for alternative narratives.

In the cultural memory of L.A. punk, Esther Wong and the institution she represented are a symbol of anomaly that has questionable allegiance to the punk rock community, a diagnose largely made on the material level of hard infrastructure and driven by the community's dissatisfaction with Wong's discontinued support of aggressive punk acts. However, the fact that post-1979 Madame Wong's (when Wong changed her booking policy) functioned as a spatial resource (hard infrastructure) mainly for new wave musicians does not necessarily dissolve its punk affective dimension so fundamentally established as one of the first venues open to punk rock. What I shall argue is that Wong, even in the post-1979 era, performed Asian fury in ways that intimately evoked punk sensibilities, an aspect of Wong's persona that was widely denied and scorned upon due to her nonconforming image as an immigrant businesswoman and as a punk influencer and that Wong's controversial, "inscrutable" performance of punk sensibilities in turn have challenged the boundaries of racial politics of punk violence and punk rage.

One can easily find that many bands in a random L.A. punk playlist or a documentary have played at Wong's clubs. The cultural significance of Madame Wong's is palpable in *Trans-Oceanic Trouser Press*' commentary that nominates it as the gateway to the world stage of rock 'n' roll: "Los Angeles has come to represent the last frontier, the manifest destiny for the great rock 'n' roll dream. Today, Madame Wong's and the Whisky; tomorrow, the world" (Mora and Benjamin 1980). While the Masque held up the Hollywood side of L.A. scene, Madame Wong's is said to have "truly

launched the circuit" and led to the springing up of rock venues all over L.A. from Chinatown and Santa Monica to San Fernando Valley and Orange County (Mora and Benjamin 1980). The montage opening of music video television show *Hollywood Heartbeat* (1980-81) showcases Madame Wong's as one of "the world's most famous night clubs and stages in the world" (deputay 2016). While Paul Greenstein helped jump start the conversion of the restaurant into an iconic punk venue in 1978 when Wong expressed little interest in this music, she soon became the main force behind this music infrastructure in 1979, coinciding with Greenstein leaving and the Hong Kong Café opening. More than a steppingstone to bigger stages, Esther Wong played an active role in shaping what the world would later describe as the sound of early L.A. punk and new wave.

Behind peevish Esther Wong and Atomic Nancy are two subcultural gatekeepers of the canonical sound of the early L.A. punk and new wave. Different from angry original content creators such as Asian American bloggers, filmmakers, musicians, and other cultural producers, Wong and Nancy performed a veritable role of music curator. The famous punk Jukebox (See Figures 3.7), probably the only punk jukebox in the community at the time, of the Atomic Café not only attracted punks from all over the place; it also became an actual tool of curating the soundscape of L.A. punk. Not only would Nancy collect records from local record stores to play on the jukebox, she would also receive records from local and overseas bands fighting for a spot on the jukebox (Nancy in Kim 2016). The Go-Go's named their band after the Atomic Café's "Go Go Chicken" dish. And the posters used to renovate the Café (See Figure 3.7) that Nancy collected from all over the world also facilitated some uncanny musical exchanges

amongst artists and patrons. These days, Nancy would still spin those same records as a DJ to remind people of the now-demolished L.A. art space.

Figure 3.7 Inside the Atomic Café. The Jukebox in the bottom right photo.
Photo source: Kitazawa's (2015) *KCET* article.

On the other hand, while Nancy channeled the inner "angry Asian woman" into pounding the taiko she has been playing over the years (Nancy in Kim 2016), Wong's affective performance of punk sensibilities has not so much to do with punk rock music itself but much with her unaccommodating, antisocial fury performed consistently throughout her management of her clubs. Her position as a music curator became possible because she dared to challenge an established taste system much captured and orchestrated by Greenstein, even though his history-making business proposal had

resuscitated Madame Wong's during an economic downturn of Chinatown. Similar to radio programmers, playlist curators, and music journalists (Bonini and Gandini 2019), booking agents become gatekeepers to a scene when they develop and implement a consistent philosophy on what music plays at their venues, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Gallan 2012). Much as a productive emotion (Lopez 2014), Asian fury was a generative force and part of a consistent philosophy behind the curatorial work Wong did with carloads of tapes that she would receive every week and she proudly made it known that she would personally listen to each one of them so she wouldn't miss another Motel or another 20/20 (Mendelssohn 1980).

"I'm not like other clubs, thinking, 'Oh, I'll book this big group and make a lot of money.' No, I am the one who brings in the little band from nowhere, like the Bus Boys," said Wong in an interview with *Los Angeles Times*' John Mendelssohn (1980). Quite contrary to the widespread consumerist and commercialist assumption that Wong "betrayed" punk by booking mainstream pop-oriented new wave acts, Wong would say no to managers calling from England and Germany, insisting on hearing tapes before booking bands (Mendelssohn 1980). In fact, Greenstein, although never really hired, left in part due to Wong's tantrums and that bands gradually circumvented him and turned to Wong for the chance to play a residency (Mullen and Spitz 2013, 177). Living quite up to Greenstein's testimony, Wong changed her mind about auditioning tapes in her car because her bad temper had caused her trouble with the police when she could not help but throwing bad tapes out of her car window (Mendelssohn 1980). Yet storytellers of Wong's stories often struggled to understand the continuity between Asian fury and punk sensibilities. Instead, these storytellers are akin to ill-equipped ethnographers researching

minoritarian subjects without sufficient understanding of their modes of self-narratives, who also largely play the role of the gatekeepers of the cultural memory of these immigrant businesses. Subsequently, gatekeepers alike have conveniently dismissed the productive outcomes derived from Wong's angry management and the struggling artists who got to perform and make ends meet by virtue of the audition of Esther Wong, quickly labeling irritable Wong as inhospitable and ill-fitted to punk rock and equating her management with mysterious manifestations of a dragon lady. This articulation dispels the political agency of Asian fury, rendering it nothing but another enactment of the inscrutability and inhospitality so frustratingly entangled with Asian Americanness.

Nonetheless, violence and rage aren't radical in themselves (Edelman 2006, 822). Rage, fury, and bad temper themselves do not warrant or signify resistance and oppositionality, not even when imbricated with punk sensibilities. Violence is a changing product of historical, temporal, and geographical specificities (e.g., Ngô 2012; Miller 2020). This is particularly true if we consider the vexing ambivalence of punk's political leanings and how punk has long been used as sonic violence by the far-right and the alt-right (see Sabin 2002; Siblo [2011] 2016; Raposo and Bestley 2020). Therefore, essentializing violence and deviant affects as radical would be problematic, as I have discussed in the previous section regarding how punk violence reproduced racialized and gendered violence via immigrant bodies.

To untangle how Asian fury is a radical affect and how it performs punk sensibilities, we may further inquire how Asian fury may weaponize the antisocial thesis of punk spirit. There are many forms of antisociality. "Dyke anger, anticolonial despair, racial rage, counterhegemonic violence, punk pugilism—these are the bleak and angry

territories of the antisocial turn," remarks Jack Halberstam (2011, 110) on the rich potential of antisociality as a knot of transdisciplinary articulation. While many have explored queer theory's antirelational and antisocial thesis (e.g., Edelman 2004; Caserio et al. 2006) and its intersection with punk studies (e.g., Nyong'o 2008; Halberstam 2011; James 2013; Muñoz 2013; Wiedlack 2015), this thesis and its political significance in relation to Asian American experiences have seldomly garnered scholarly attention.

Most prominently, performances of subversive antisociality defy the "compulsory sociability" expected of minoritarian subjects to be legible, amicable, and sociable subjects (Lee 2019, 29; see also Huang 2018). Summer Kim Lee (2019) critiques the compulsory sociability and relationality expected of Asian Americans through what she calls "Asian American asociality": "a mode of racial performativity that navigates the processes by which Asian Americans have been racially figured as a problem for and of sociality, as assimilated yet socially isolated, unrelatable subjects" (29). Positioning Asian American asociality as a mode of racial performativity available for productive reappropriation as opposed to a racial stereotype in itself presents a critique of racialized knowledge of sociability. Notably, this racial performativity is re-enacted through terms of not just assimilation but also accommodation, fixating Asian American subjectivity as willing and able to fit in, as "solutions" to established racial discourses (Lee 2019, 34). Problematizing the negative connotation of Asian American asociality, the reenactments of staying in by singer-songwriter Mitski in "Your Best American Girl" (2016) and writer Ocean Vuong in poem "Ode to Masturbation" (2016), self, and solitude offer a critique of the compulsory sociality saddling the minoritarian subject, through which they find pleasure and contest recognizable forms of relationality and sociality (Lee 2019). As a

form of antisociality, Asian American asociality has the potential to form intimate alliances with punk sensibilities through their common resistance to the interpellation from the nation-state to behave as legible, relatable, and disciplined subjects.

If Mitski (whose affective performance of sentimentalism will be discussed further in the next chapter) and Vuong transform antisociality into a critical tool of the racial politics of accommodation through the nonencounter, Asian fury does so through the encounter of moments of non-accommodation and non-assimilation. Perhaps the best example comes from Wong's refusal to accommodate to the rubrics of punk—as an aesthetic, as an attitude, as a community, as sensibilities, and as many other things—in terms of anarchist punk sensibilities and punk (un)sustainability.[32] On the one hand, punk sensibilities give off a transhistorical spirit of disobedience and deviance (Brown, Deer, and Nyong'o 2013), unruly pleasure (Shoemaker 2010), and senses of anarchy and self-sufficiency (such as through circulating fanzines and equipment-sharing). On the other hand, these "rules" did not necessarily apply in the pocket universe sprawling out the multiethnic centers of L.A., treated with and mediated by the Asian fury often unrecognizable as a racially legible subjectivity. One may find these rule-breaking moments on the stage of Madame Wong's when the Ramones' set was abruptly interrupted by Wong after finding out the words written on the bathroom walls and insisting that they cleaned up the walls in the middle of a show (Cromelin 1979, M65).

[32] Here I am thinking of one of the key punk words, "no future," which one may find references in lyrics and as a punk label. Although the keyword is well articulated with the early British punk scene due to the imminent doom and gloom felt by average teenagers in Margaret Thatcher U.K. alongside high unemployment rate, social violence, and social fragmentation (see Worley 2017), this abject situation can be similarly felt amongst the Los Angeles punks in an economic downturn, the post-Vietnam War juncture, nuclear panic, and in one of the nation's most diverse regions. Here I use (un)sustainability because I see punk's no future paradigm, nonetheless, as a mechanism for punk to sustain, which as decades of punk culture show has already happened. By wanting no future, there is a future of punk. (Un)sustainability means to emphasize the self-contradiction of punk's no future sensibility.

One may also find these rule-breaking moments over the table at the Atomic Café when Nancy did not bother to accommodate any patrons by jumping on the counter and over their plate to reach customers (Nancy in Huang 2013) all the while being in Kabuki makeup with the side of her head shaved with the words “Fuck You” (Zen Sekizawa in Sekizawa and Sekizawa 2018).

Figure 3.8 Atomic Nancy at the Atomic Café.
Photo source: Kitazawa’s (2015) *KCET* article.

While Wong and Nancy’s enactments of Asian fury reminded us of the fictitiousness of the punk utopia of unruly pleasure and disobedient without the support (and disruption) of music infrastructures, these enactments also constituted the same sensibilities that they sought to problematize. By refusing to accommodate to some of the punk expectations, they conjure up indelible punk sensibilities of non-accommodation and non-assimilation, expanding the formulations of punk and becoming a version of punk unruliness and anarchy in themselves.

On a macro level, the need for repositioning the immigrant bodies behind a burgeoning punk scene as punk influencers countering a binary framework that frames them as “non-punk immigrants” also comes from beyond a focus on individual influencers. Not existing in isolation, Madame Wong’s and other Asian immigrants

owned music infrastructures on a collective level have created contact zones for otherwise unrelated subcultures and demographics, extending punk's transculturality (see Marcus 1989/2009) by providing spaces of both conflicts and alliances. These venues supported and incubated a growing underground punk scene as a subaltern public sphere where not only white male rockers but also women, queers, and ethnic minorities could rock the same stage and form affective alliances. Lawrence Grossberg (1984) proposes the concept of affective alliances to describe a fundamental way that the power of rock music functions affectively. This affective power, however, does not operate without material bases. Transcultural subcultural contact zones like the multiracial, multi-ethnic, and often poor and immigrant-and-refugee-populated space of Chinatown and Little Tokyo are a natural habitat for minorities and societal outsiders to form affective alliances. Much like Stahl's (2004) call for differentiating hard and soft music infrastructures, knowing that affective alliances do not always align with the main affective role of a hard infrastructure (music venues) opens up spaces for examining how varied bodies are able to perform otherwise disjointed sensibilities together as affective allies. In other words, Esther Wong was able to perform punk sensibilities without necessarily align her clubs to support aggressive punk acts.

On a micro level, like Nancy's much-needed view that captures the cross-cultural dialogues made possible by the punk hangout Atomic Café, we can understand the cultural significance of ambiguously punk clubs like post-1979 Madame Wong's through its role as an unusual knot, providing a reference for punks and non-punks to compare with each other. The articulation of collective scene identities does not derive from any individual live music venue, but hard or soft infrastructures are part of broader

infrastructures of a scene where scene activity happens (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 105). By attending to their historical and geographical distinctiveness, music infrastructures are fundamental to the unity of a pluralist music scene (Straw 1991). This is even more so in the pre-digitalization age. As a reference and a contact zone, Madame Wong's helped stabilize the symbolic meanings of competing and similar infrastructures in ways that contrast or reflect the collective scene. Both Madame Wong's and Hong Kong Café were able to serve a diverse customer base as day-time restaurants and night-time gig venues. Similarly functioning as a contact zone and cultural magnet, the iconic punk hangout Atomic Café was also a place for all, gathering from kids and families in the community to world-class artists from East L.A. and tattooed thugs. The place also facilitated the early experimental rock days of the musicians who later formed world-renowned fusionist jazz band Hiroshima, in which Nancy used to be their lead singer when she was still in high school. As part of a collective scene, the conflicts between these Asian immigrants owned venues, imagined or factual, were fundamental to the meaning making of L.A. punk, valorizing the very meaning of punk vs. new wave that has dominated the discourses around the "Chinatown Punk Wars."

Final Notes

Until this point in this chapter, I have been arguing for re-interpreting the immigrant business owners of the late 1970s L.A. punk venues in Chinatown and J-Town as punk influencers and its significance for both the Asian community and the very meanings of punk. While I have discussed how a myopic view of Asian/Asian American bodies and subjectivities limited the anti-institutional project of punk rock and replicated the very systemic discrimination against minority bodies that punks seek to dismantle, it

is not to say that a knowledge deficiency of the intersectional politics of race and gender is the only explanation behind many punks' antagonistic attitude toward the Asian immigrants intimately involved within the punk scene. As I try to make sense of this antagonism toward Asian fury as unfit to be punk, two additional points specific to the context of L.A. punk are worth pointing out, which can further unravel the racialized antagonism against as well as the political significance of Asian bad punks.

First, the pocket universe established at punk Chinatown subverted recognizable formulations of punk anarchy. Even though anarchism is famously associated with British punk, it is a recurring theme for global punks, and it is axiomatic that each has their own takes on punk anarchism (see Avery-Natale 2016; Bennett, Peterson, and Gosling 2004; Dunn 2012; Wiedlack 2015). L.A. local punks like the Bags shrugged off the idea of anarchy that is popularized by British punk by proclaiming that "We don't need the English / With their boring songs of anarchy" in their single "We Don't Need The English" (1978). Nevertheless, anarchism was still a prominent lifestyle of punks on the West Coast. Notably, the lifestyle was consolidated by the infamous punk community formed at the Canterbury Apartments, an apartment complex in Hollywood resided by many punks but also shared by many immigrants and people of color who were not part of this punk community. Despite much disdain of the British idea of anarchy, to Alice Bag (2011) of the Bags and likely many other punks sharing the living space with them, the Canterbury had "an atmosphere of almost complete anarchy" (281). As Bag writes in more detail, the "almost complete anarchy" comes from the landlord's slack management, including ignoring any transgressive behaviors of these punk tenants as long as the rent was paid. No other rules applied there. However, the same liberty did not

extend to the nonpunk residents. The Canterbury was a co-habitat for punks, South Asian immigrants, the poor, and people of color, which became a natural, yet un-coequal, environment for the punks here to reinforce their outsider identity by appropriating the established narratives of race and poverty (Ngô 2012). Hanging out in local youth houses and squats and with other anarcho-punks often has more influence on how punks perceive anarchy and anti-hierarchism than any well-documented academic ideas about anarchy (Dunn 2012). The Canterbury as the living and socializing space for many L.A. punks deeply informed a commonly established understanding of how anarcho-punk works in a local scene.

The multiethnic and poor and immigrant populated L.A. Chinatown in many ways had a similar cultural and racial and ethnic fabric as that of the Canterbury's. However, it did not resemble the Canterbury's "atmosphere of almost complete anarchy." Adopting an intersectional approach to the punk life at the Canterbury, it becomes obvious that the so-called anarchy was built upon exploiting the silencing and the very identity of other minoritarian bodies living in the same space. In contrast, punk Chinatown, as spearheaded by Esther Wong, was anything but expected when it comes to co-habiting with punks. By maintaining a music infrastructure with a series of "inscrutable" rules, Wong refused a similar fate, refusing to accommodate a punk lifestyle and a romanticized perception of anarchy by being a hospitable punk promoter. In doing so, while Wong expanded punk sensibilities to be inclusive of immigrant everyday life and performed her own version of anarchy, established punk sensibilities and lifestyles failed to recognize so. Not allowed a similar degree of liberty and a similar anarchist atmosphere given at the Canterbury, L.A. punks' antagonism toward Madame Wong's is expected.

Closely related to the complications of anarcho-punk, a second reason behind the antagonism toward and the failure to understand what I call immigrant punk sensibilities as "authentic" lies in a sustainable futurity rendered possible through the pocket universe established via these immigrant punk businesses. In particular, Madame Wong's and Hong Kong Café established a structure, more important, a futurity sustainable yet entangled with capitalism and consumerism—a futurity that anarchist and nihilist punks would disdain in many ways. Just like anarchism, the "no future" cynic sensibility (Curran 2015) is a recurring punk theme. Certainly, not all punks are anarchists and not all anarcho-punks are anti-futurity, but Alice Bag (2011) definitely captured a "no future" atmosphere that was at least characteristic of the local context of early L.A., sharing a recollection that "We lived our lives completely in the moment, with little concern for the future" (281). This indifference to the future, albeit not the sole punk sensibility, was a dominant one in this scene. The punk culture both lacks and thrives upon a lack of unity. Anarcho-punks do not have a single, unified idea for the ideal society and the future, nor do they need a unified movement (Dunn 2012, 215-216). While this leads to a focus instead on the local level and on the everyday life for solutions, punk Chinatown clearly had its own consensus for the ideas of anarchy and punk futurity often disparate for societies as a whole. Subsequently, when the local consensus lacks certain cultural competence, it hinders a true embrace of the polysemy and internal diversity of the punk rock movement.

Although in spirit, anarcho-punk is always anti-institutional; in everyday life, the political resistance of anarcho-punk can take many forms. The punk culture is full of contradictions, through which it may find consistency. Just like Patti Smith finds an

affective unity between punk and queer through her radical reimagination of a sustainable queer futurity countering an established queer discourse of death drive towards a non-reproductive society (Nyong'o 2008), Esther Wong's efforts of maintaining a locally sustainable infrastructure that was both beneficial to punks and immigrant businesses could be seen as finding an affective everyday unity between being punk and being Asian. Instead of consumerist pursuers, these immigrant businesses are better seen as finding solutions in their daily life with punk sensibilities to a failing Chinatown. Thus, instead of simplifying this as a binary question about capitalist futurity, I suggest that we step out of this dichotomy. Similar to DIY record labels (Dunn 2012), punk Chinatown and Little Tokyo never became an enduring part of any national or global music circle in spite of their often-celebrated name as the center of L.A. punk. In here, underground punks finally found a stage and unaccommodating Asian fury became a crucial strategy sustaining both this punk stage and the many peoples aggregated here.

While Wong's booking preference of power pop and alternative punk has been widely dismissed as a betrayal of punk and a concession to consumerism, I argue that it provides an intersectional lens to multiply our understanding of the embodiments of both punk sensibilities and immigrant resilience. In the 1970s, after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which reversed decades of exclusionist policies for Asian immigrants, Chinatown was no longer the first choice for Asian immigrants to live and patronize. With the declining business, instead of seeing Hong Kong Café and Madame Wong's as engaging a "Chinatown punk war," I see them as a group of immigrants leveraging this war to survive, and through which they influenced the sounds of punk and new wave. What I advocate here, then, is that we can arrive at an understanding that both

L.A. punk practitioners like the Bags and immigrant punk influencers like Esther Wong are punk, but differently punk, and that this understanding matters for both the ever-changing, diverse punk community and the diverse Asian immigrant and Asian American community. Rather than a non-sustainable "no future," Asian fury could seem to offer a concrete reimagination of punk futurity.

Looking back at this too-often forgotten perspective of American punk history, even though there have been too many racially-charged ignorant and biased moments, I remain hopeful for the near future to come because more cultural imprints directed by and accentuating Asian Americans are coming along. Besides the 2020 short documentary film about the Atomic Café, Nancy Sekizawa's daughter Zen Sekizawa is considering making a full-length documentary. Topic Studios announced in 2019 that Korean-Chinese American musician and actress Awkwafina is going to star and produce a feature film about Chinatown restaurants and the seminal West Coast punk music scene. As of 2021, Christy Shigekawa, Hong Kong Café owner Bill Hong's great-niece, has been working on a documentary about Hong Kong Café. Moreover, in the present day, Hong Kong Café has taken on a key role in connecting Chinatown community activism and the punk rock community through the ongoing *Save Music in Chinatown* concert series. Organized by Martin Wong, co-founder of Asian punk zine *Giant Robot*, this series gathers L.A. punk lifers and legends, such as Alice Bag, the Alley Cats, and the Dils, to come back to Chinatown and play benefit shows at the original Hong Kong Café location to help the underfunded music program of the Castelar Elementary in Chinatown. As part of the fundraising activities, Wong also organized a series of all-ages DIY punk rock matinee fundraisers, making Hong Kong Café one of the rare community

centers that mentor younger generations to use punk rock as an activist tool. Now active members of this scene, the Linda Lindas (Bela, Lucia, Eloise, Mila), a punk band started by Wong's daughter and nieces, is already making politically engaged original music, such as "VOTE!" (2020), made to encourage voting for the 2020 election. The music video features a group of Asian American musicians, artists, and allies, including Atomic Café's Nancy Sekizawa and her daughter Zen Sekizawa, Sasami Ashworth, Dengue Fever's Senon Williams, Kicking Giant's Tae Won Yu, and Emily's Sassy Lime's Wendy Yao, Amy Yao, and Emily Ryan. This chapter is primarily a historical inquiry, but it gestures towards the present and the future. When more Asian American-centered cultural productions about this history become available, we shall better reclaim this cultural memory for Asian America.

Chapter 4:

Gentle Rebels:
Diaspora Sensibilities and Ghostly Performances

Introduction

> So you don't see many Asians who are into activism, much less the creative and performance aspect of it… I have all these white friends whose family showed them rock music, which is a pathway into other forms of white American cultural and hegemonic capital. *Meanwhile, we Asians are just here trying not to die*, which is not fertile ground for expression and learning about the arts, and the big picture use of arts towards community and co-liberation.
>
> — Tri M. Vo (Vo and trang 2019; emphasis mine)

> We're straddling these two worlds and trying to figure out our sense of home, our identity, who we are, our history, accepting it, and changing to move forward. Right now, I see this as a moment of light.
>
> — Bochan Huy (Barber 2014)

One of the fundamental questions I wrestle within this dissertation is how Asian American musicians provide alternate forms of musical activism. The propelling force behind this question is my perplexity of the depoliticization, or the apolitical myth, of Asian American bodies and how this extends to the creative fields of life. I am perplexed by the tendency of unwillingness to politicize or radicalize Asian American acts, by both mainstream media and sometimes artists themselves. The reasons are complex, of course, but when I was attending an event of *Reimagine*'s Art Responders series last year, the musical guest, singer-songwriter Treya Lam, a queer Taiwanese adoptee to a mainland Chinese American couple, offered a perspective that helped me understand why the society may not (be able to) see some acts as radical. "I think that there is a tendency to believe that when someone is becoming radicalized or is doing a radical act that it is an action that's on the fringe, but when I use it I'm using it in the sense that finding a place of belonging within a system that was designed to reject me is a radical act," says Lam

(Reimagine 2020). Lam's remarks illuminate a less explored aspect of radical acts: acts that address everyday needs and mundane aspects of our life; acts that do not adopt hegemonic forms of radical expressions, or radical sounds, in the context of my inquiry. Such acts would touch on universal topics, such as grief, loss, love, loneliness, and "finding a place of belonging," thus not always explicitly political, or hegemonically political. Particularly important to my dissertation then is the project of radicalizing the gentle acts and sounds of Asian American women rock musicians.

Radicalizing gentle and non-hegemonically political acts is especially relevant and politically significant for Asian Americans who have been sidestepped as outsiders of the American political landscape and as a deferential model minority. Against such a historical backdrop, many artists have recognized and mobilized the soft and gentle qualities of their sound-based work to challenge the very lenses that see these qualities as timid and weak. Chinese American singer-songwriter MILCK (Connie K. Lim), adept at writing anthemic ballads, has been addressing her followers as "gentle rebels," by which the title of this chapter is inspired. Multidisciplinary poet Christy NaMee Eriksen, known as a "tender powerhouse," blends the acoustic guitar, storytelling, and narratives of her experiences as an adoptee in works like "You Bring Out the Korean Adoptee in Me" (2016) and "I Can't Wait to Be an Old Asian American Woman" (2018). Michelle Zauner named her second Japanese Breakfast album *Soft Sounds from Another Planet* (2017), where she croons about her Korean heritage ("Diving Woman") and being a woman guitarist ("Boyish"). Multi-talented actor Margaret Cho is also deft at contrasting her standard folky music style with violent lyricism and visual storytelling, such as in her first studio album *Cho Dependent* (2010).

Recognizing the gentle power of Asian America makes us rethink, for example, SASAMI's (a.k.a. Sasami Ashworth) redefining hypnotic sounds (different from the garage sounds she made as the synth player in Cherry Glazerr), drenching in her one-lyrical-line song "Turned Out I Was Everyone" (2019) as well as her "Morning Comes" (2019), which features Sasami's grandmother in the music video for a tutorial of making kimchi; Asobi Seksu's signature "sensitive feminine music" fueled with aggressive, noisy psychedelic sounds (Chikudate in Totiyapungprasert 2012) with Yuki Chikudate vocalizing in both Japanese and English in *Fluorescence* (2011); Jay Som's (a.k.a. Melina Duterte) lushly layered, nostalgic 2019 album *Anak Ko*, whose title is an endearing phrase that Duterte's mother always addresses her by, meaning "my child" in Tagalog, one of the native dialects in the Philippines; or Mitski's sentimental love song "Your Best American Girl" (2016), which turns to the racial performance of Asian American asociality to critique "the compulsory sociability and relatability demanded of minoritarian subjects to go out, come out, and be out" (Lee 2019, 29). While these musical works are stylistically and thematically different, none of them shy away from showing vulnerabilities and affection towards what the American society at large would label as Other. These musicians' tendency of turning inwards, instead of outwards to enact most commonly practiced forms of activism, such as street protests and community mobilization, allows them the overdue peace and space to negotiate a normative sense of belonging. "It's a quiet longing," says Laura Mam (Lisbon 2020), a second-generation Cambodian American musician, recollecting how she longed for something of their own through music. And they do so often through mediated intimacies enabled by transnational, cross-generational dialogues. For Mam, Lam, and many others, this

normative and often “quiet longing” for something of their own, within a system designed to reject them as radical acts, makes them the “gentle rebels” I am interested in radicalizing in this chapter.

However, expressing vulnerabilities and sentimentalities is not encouraged in many Asian immigrant households. While many tend to think of this as a cultural taboo, it is often ignored how the diasporic and immigration experiences mediate the execution of cultural taboos. Tri M. Vo’s remarks, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, reflect on why there have not been many Asians in creative and cultural activism from her perspective as a Vietnamese American gender-nonconforming, jungle-punk musician. Her words ring true for many children or grandchildren of Asian immigrants who migrated to the U.S. to restart their life in a system that’s not designed to make this easy: they grow up in households where there often is a strong mentality of “we Asians are just here trying not to die” (Vo and trang 2019). As a person who grew up frequently being told that doing music wouldn’t feed me, I can relate. I got my first guitar when I was fifteen years old after spending months saving up the lunch money for it. A 50 bucks acoustic guitar of a brand one would not care to remember. I hid it under the bed and only practiced when my parents were not home. The mentality that music is not meant for me and that my priority is to stay alive (not by means of art, of course) was real. Vocalizing vulnerabilities thus was neither needed nor encouraged. My perspective as a Chinese person growing up in mainland China during the 1990s, whose parents and grandparents have lived through decades of international and domestic political turmoil, helps me further connect with Vo’s life-and-death sentiment about Asian American experiences. I see this sentiment concerned as much with postwar, postcolonial, post-authoritarian, and

diasporic mentalities as with the pressing issues of social class stratification. Furthermore, inflicted by transnational displacement, for the early immigrant families who migrated to the U.S. during much of the political turmoil in Southeast Asia from the 1960s to the 1980s or before 1952 when Asian immigrants were still denied citizenship as racially ineligible, the same mentality can still be strong even if they were from well-off families in the homeland.[33] With the double mediation of homeland cultural habits and state-sanctioned violence, there are no such simple things as Asian cultural taboos. These are American cultural taboos.

Despite being gentle rebels, many do not shy away from more directly infusing their musical works with political messages. For example, MILCK has been actively raising awareness of issues like Asian American women's mental health. She wrote "Quiet" (2017) as a personal healing exercise from surviving anorexia and sexual and domestic abuse. "Quiet" became heralded as the anthem of the Women's March after a flashmob performance by the #ICantKeepQuiet choir at the Washington D.C. march was unexpectedly captured and went viral. Vietnamese American folk rock musician Thao Nguyen, frontwoman of Thao & The Get Down Stay Down, has made music to motivate electoral participation for the 2016 and 2020 elections. Her 2016 "Before You Vote" made before the election describes her disbelief in a state of frenzy by considering Donald Trump's candidacy. This creation was cathartic and satirical with lyrics like "Tiny-minded man of few syllables and a temper" and "I lie awake. Oh my god no. No fucking way." Her 2020 creation "Ballad to the Ballot" changes the focus to the fellow

[33] See, for example, the case with Esther Wong in Chapter 3, who allegedly came from a wealthy family in Shanghai before fleeing way from the communist takeover to the U.S., and the case with Laura Mam (which explored in more detail later in this chapter), whose mother was from an elite class. For more, see (Mam 2010; Libson 2020).

Vietnamese Americans and sends out "a fabulous reminder from the queen of voting, that you, you are the chance to change the future." The musical project is a collaboration with the Vietnamese American Progressive Association (PIVOT) and Downtown for Democracy (D4D). The nostalgic and karaoke style music video, directed by Linda Mai Green, attributes to and intensively engages with her Vietnamese heritage, catering to the older generations and young immigrants with Nguyen vocalizing bilingually.

Vulnerabilities and emotional honesty, therefore, are doubly radical Asian affects. As young Asian American writer Aline Dolinh (2017) remarks about Mitski (a.k.a. Mitski Miyawaki), Thao Nguyen, and Michelle Zauner, "these artists' 2016 releases are revolutionary in the way they lay bare the latent anxieties of the Asian-American experience—alienation, loneliness, a constant wrestling with identity. . . that kind of emotional honesty feels radical." Considering the particularities and radical meanings of this kind of emotional honesty for an Asian American audience, while it is worth noting that struggles around issues like identity, loneliness, love, and family are universal and thus these Asian American musicians' musical works have great potential of cross-cultural solidarity, it is equally important not to *universalize* such musical discourses and musical affects (read: erase their historicity and particularities) for non-Asian audiences. With this in mind, the rest of the chapter first attends to the cross-generational intimacies that have informed the creative works of two Cambodian American fusionist musicians, Laura Mam and Bochan Huy, both of whom were born to refugee parents. I show that through such musical engagements, they manage to explore a normative sense of belonging and challenge the limited narratives around refugees with music.[34] Then, the

[34] The Music of Asian America Research Center will release a podcast entitled *Who Is An Immigrant?* in June 2021. The podcast is dedicated to enriching the narratives of immigrants through the music and life

chapter proceeds to a close reading of the music video of Japanese Breakfast's "Everybody Wants to Love You" (EWLY) (2016) as a ghostly performance of diaspora sensibilities.

Reclaiming Voices, Cambodian Rock, and Cross-Generational Intimacies

Before the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, which soon depleted the country's arts and cultures in an attempt to reshape the society, Cambodia had a robust psychedelic rock scene, which thrived after the end of French colonization in the 1950s. Laura Mam and Bochan Huy, two Cambodian American musicians born to refugee parents both have sought to revive the long-lost Cambodian sounds of the 1960s and early 1970s by recreating old Cambodian songs with their own twist. In 2010, Laura Mam and her former rock band the Like Me's created a cover of Pan Ron's "Sva Rom Monkiss" ("Monkey Dance Monkey"), one of the very few women singer-songwriters active back then, also one of the fallen artists during the Khmer Rouge.[35] The cover song preserves much of the original melody and rhythms. "It's a cover your grandmother could still dance to, even if the American voice and electrified beats might give her pause, at first," comments an NPR *Code Switch* article by Gregory Barber (2014). The cover rendition,

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stories of Asian American musicians. One episode is made around refugee experiences. This resource will offer more personal narratives and oral histories useful for researchers interested in the intersection of refugee experiences and popular music. I am the co-interviewer, with Dr. Eric Hung, in this episode for the segment concerning Bochan Huy, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American musician.

[35] The decision of covering original Khmer music is also important. During the Khmer Rouge, free-minded musicians were targeted and their music erased. The Cambodian music industry stopped producing original music and what was available on the radio at the time was karaoke-style cover songs. "There was no pride in that kind of music for me," Mam (Lisbon 2020) recounts why she decided to remake "Sva Rom Monkiss." Therefore, the pre-war original music has been very important for the Cambodian diaspora, a sentiment that Bochan Huy (Kalantari 2013) also notices. Given this history, Mam, now a big pop star in Cambodia, got involved with the Cambodian Original Music Movement, seeking to change the contemporary copycat music culture and compete with the popularity of Kpop and American pop in the shadow of war and Khmer Rouge's totalitarian cultural panic.

sung in the original Khmer lyrics about a young woman in the 1960s being amused by the body movements of a young man doing the twist, is certainly created with this goal in mind. The music video switches between the party scenes of the Khmer New Year celebration in both 2010 San Jose, California and 1966 Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where Laura's mother Thida was from. With Mam performing the song for the crowds in both times and spaces, the narrative shows that the mom in the present time starts to understand her seemingly not-Khmer-enough American daughter as she recollects her past in pre-war Cambodia.

As the narrative suggests, the goal of this musical project is to end "the silence between the young and old Cambodian generations," writes Mam (LauraMamMusic 2010) on the song's YouTube page, "In my belief, it is about time that we make that small but necessary effort to understand ourselves by understanding each other. . . may their [Cambodian musicians of the 60s] spirit live on in all of us and may they bless us with the ability to express ourselves once again." Bochan Huy also senses that now is "a moment of light" to end the silence between the two generations (Barber 2014). The need to express themselves again is caused by the silencing of both war and restarting a life in a country as "perpetual foreigners." One of the direct results is the loss of the ability for the children of Cambodian refugees, like Mam and Huy, to speak the Khmer language. Mam speaks of Cambodian Americans of her generation, they "don't speak the language, don't—they don't know anything about our culture because our parents don't want to talk about it" (Mam 2010) and that their parents did not want them to grow up having an accent (Mam in TEDx Talks 2018). However, they were both blessed by a music loving

family where they grew up watching their fathers performing music. Music gave them one of the rare opportunities to practice the language and the culture.

For Huy, the silencing also speaks to the cultural collision of her bicultural Cambodian American background. Her father, Chhan Huy (CH hereafter), had never stopped playing and making music. Even when their family was staying at a refugee camp in Thailand before moving to California in 1981, CH always had a guitar with him and volunteered to teach music at the camp (Huy 2021). Working as an accountant in the U.S., CH was the center of a Cambodian American musical community, always hosting gatherings and performing. Huy eventually joined her father's band, performing at a variety of community events, from weddings to birthday parties. However, while she sang covers of many American and Cambodian classic rock songs as the lead singer on stage, off stage, she always got "hushed" by her parents for being the loud one, talking about things that she "may be beaten up" for, something that she could not understand as a 1.5 generation Cambodian American (Huy 2021). This silencing and self-policing echo Vo's sentiment that "we Asians are just here trying not to die" (Vo and trang 2019) as well as the need for the ability to express themselves once again. Moreover, after her first solo album, *Full Moon Monday* (2011), an album dedicated to her father, who passed away from liver cancer in 2006, Huy got backlash from both the Cambodian and Cambodian American communities.

Although *Full Moon Monday* (2011) has earned praises for it captures the diverse Cambodian American experiences while being simultaneously loyal and different from its Khmer influences (Q 2011), she has also been told that her music does not sound Cambodian. In an attempt to close the gap between the first and second generation of

Cambodian refugees and to capture a hybrid sound more closely aligned with the taste and upbringing of young Cambodian Americans, the album blends classic Cambodian rock sounds with hip hop and soul, a more radical remake compared to Mam's "Sva Rom Monkiss," which largely remains a dance rock cover. The hybrid style is epitomized by Huy's rendition of the well-known pre-Khmer Rouge singer Ros Sereysothea's "Chnam Oun 16" ("I am 16"), a song sung at almost every Cambodian event where Huy performed in her father's band. However, these Khmer classics are "always sung the exact same way" (Barber 2014). Additionally, as Huy (2020) ruminates herself, the facts that she has darker skin, she uses images potentially triggering painful memories of war in the music video of "Chnam Oun 16," and that her singing differs from the high-pitch, angelic vocal style typically heard in Cambodian female singers are all the reasons why she became the black sheep. For the conventional ears of Cambodian and Cambodian American listeners, Huy's remake of "Chnam Oun 16" sounds both un-Cambodian and un-woman. "I want to be an agent of change. . . I want to break trends; I want to challenge the expectations of what a Cambodian female artist is," Huy (Q 2011) told the Cambodian Alliance for the Arts in 2011. In a way, she succeeded, although the price was high. Looking back at her musical journey today, when Cambodian American musicians have a much bigger stage than ten years ago, Huy (2020) says that her work was ahead of her time.

Huy's musical journey from the time involved in her father's band to her solo career has witnessed the evolvement of the Cambodian American musical scene and the central role of music in recreating Cambodian cultural institutions through the hands and voices of the first- and second-generation Cambodian exiles (Speelman 2019; Seng

2016). Through recreating Chhan Huy's and pre-Khmer Rouge music, Mam and Huy have found a way to express themselves as a generation straddling two worlds while reclaiming the voices for the older generations that did not have the platform or the musical politics allowing them to do so. Recreating the music of the Cambodian diaspora and recounting this history also unravel two critical points. One is that Cambodian America has always had a musical voice, a rock music one, since the late 1970s and early 1980s. This inexorably contrasts the concurrent trends of Asian sonic ethnic chic in the mainstream Western musical landscape and thus debunks the Orientalist discourse of Asian Cool that assumes the failure of Asians in participating in this culture (Ahmad 2001). Another critical intervention this case study offers is that far from a lens of assimilation, the continued practice and revival of Cambodian rock music have always sought to serve the community as opposed to adapting their ways for a spot in the mainstream music industry. Huy admits that performing rock music with her father empowered her, and despite the hardships of starting a new life, CH told Huy since she was a kid that she could be anything because they have survived genocide and war (Huy 2020). This seemingly quintessential you-can-be-anything American dream narrative has struck me. For outsiders, it might seem that Huy, who has been following her instinctive, otherwise reckless, fusionist musical ventures, is an example of cultural assimilation. However, an alternative approach to U.S. centrism reveals that the relocation to the U.S. was not necessarily the cradle of empowerment for young Cambodian Americans. It is having survived genocide and Cambodian music, a medium of intergenerational memories, that empower the 1.5- and second-generation Cambodian Americans

(Speelman 2019). Subverting the tiring Western savior trope, this narrative is more of a Cambodian (American) dream than a (colorblind) American dream.

The project of reclaiming voices is not just about finding ways to end the cross-generational silence around Cambodia's history and refugee experiences, it is also about finding ways to make sense of the silence and to articulate cross-generational intimacies. To do so, not only do these musicians make cover songs of the 1960s Cambodian psychedelic rock to bridge the generation gap and conjure up idealized images of Cambodia (Hung 2015), they also do so through negotiating acceptance and rejection for a sense of belonging without a map, a sentiment expressed in Mam's "Refugee" (circa 2011) and "Cambodian Simplicity" (2009) and Huy's "Love Me" (2011). Considering the cross-generational intimacies that often inform the creative works that many 1.5- and second-generation Asian American musicians make to engage diasporic sensibilities and quest for lost voices and cultural roots, I propose a creative combination of José Esteban Muñoz's (1999) disidentification theory and Avery Gordon's ([1997] 2008) haunting theory to account for some hauntingly disidentificatory ways that the performance of diaspora sensibilities reimagines Asian American life and femininities.

I propose to consider performances of diaspora sensibilities a kind of ghostly performances. What I call a ghostly performance is concerned with Avery Gordon's ([1997] 2008) creative intervention of haunting as a method of social analysis to study the intricate lingering impact of ghostly matters from the past on the present. Derrida (1994) develops hauntology to describe how Marxism continues to haunt Western societies even after its so-called failure. It refers to a status that something is neither present nor absent. Gordon ([1997] 2008) develops haunting as a way of knowing and a method of

knowledge production, “forcing a confrontation, forking the future and the past” (xvii). A ghostly performance is thus where ghostly matters are mobilized in “confrontational moments”:

> when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. (xvi)

As Gordon suggests, confrontational moments force us to confront and expose the interstitial state of objects, subjects, feelings, and conditions. The interstitiality that transgresses and reconfigures the geographical and temporal borders of nation, culture, and Eurocentric discourses of progression is important for understanding the diverse experiences of diaspora sensibilities as critical double consciousness (Dayal 1996, 48, 53).

The worldmaking of a performance of diaspora sensibilities is a cultural public sphere, through which social norms are contested and reimagined. A cultural public sphere reveals the imbricated relations between the political, the public, and the personal as contested through affective (aesthetic and emotional) communications (McGuigan 2010, 15). Correspondingly, considering the worldmaking of a performance of diaspora sensibilities as a cultural public sphere foregrounds two dimensions of Gordon’s ([1997] 2008) hauntology theory: the psychological and the sociopolitical states. The emphasis on affective capacities enables the psychological reach of cultural production. Meanwhile, the articulation of the political, the public, and the personal shows the inner-network of acts of haunting even when they happen chiefly in the sociopolitical state. Meanwhile, what is crucial about cultural public spheres for minoritarian subjects is the creative space offered for negotiating one’s position in capacious and flexible ways that non-cultural

publics may not allow. One of the ways to negotiate is through imagination and disputation (McGuigan 2010, 16), where confrontational moments and hauntology are commonly practiced.

The idea that imagination and disputation may cause a temporal and spatial disjunction with the present, a condition important for Muñoz's theorization of disidentification. With disjunction, Muñoz (1999) believes, queer of color performances construct future-oriented visions and coterminous temporality of the present and the future. These future-oriented visions and the coterminous temporality can be thought through disidentifications, which Muñoz (1999) identifies as

> a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. Disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformatting of self within the social. It is a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification. (97)

Disidentification offers a method to identify specific moments of imagination and disputation, i.e. moments of temporal and spatial disjunction. The most distinct example of the co-existing nature of imagination and disputation of the EWLY universe is the persona of the Korean woman orchestrated by Zauner. As she intrudes into the everyday field of American life in a hanbok, such as a bar, a basketball court, and a convenience store. These everyday fields serve as the locale for Gordon's ([1997] 2008) "confrontational moments" (xvi). When performers don't perform in ways they are supposed to perform, when they don't operate objects in ways they are supposed to operate, when they don't mobilize feelings in ways they are supposed to feel, they resist and disidentify with "the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology" (Muñoz 97). The above dialogue between Gordon, Muñoz, and McGuigan reveals some

of the theoretical common ground. This common ground offers fruitful perspectives to examine the ghostly performance of diaspora sensibilities in Japanese Breakfast's EWLY for its various moments of interstitiality, confrontation, imagination, and negotiation.

Reclaiming Objects, Diaspora Sensibilities, and Korean American Futurities[36]

> Neither mere flesh nor mere thing, the yellow woman, straddling the person-thing divide, applies tremendous pressures on politically treasured notions of agency, feminist enfleshment, and human ontology.
>
> — Anne Anlin Cheng (2019, 14)
> *Ornamentalism*

> I found myself trying to learn more about cooking, and dwelling on these parts of Korean culture, as a way to reconnect with my identity and also the memory of my mom.
>
> — Michelle Zauner
> Interview with *Catapult*'s Noah Cho (2019)

Through calculating Asian women's ambivalent relations to subject- and object-hood, Anne Anlin Cheng articulates a racial theory of being that empowers the anomaly of "the yellow woman" by accentuating the haunting effects of this manufactured identity on multiple political notions that modern Western societies have much celebrated. "Orientalism is a critique, ornamentalism a theory of being," writes Cheng, "The latter, for me, names the perihumanity of Asiatic femininity, a peculiar state of being produced out of the fusion between 'thingliness' and 'personness'" (18). Due to the entanglements of Asiatic identities with objects, things, and ornaments, Cheng calls for "a conceptual paradigm that can accommodate the deeper, stranger, more intricate, and more ineffable (con)fusion between thingness and personness instantiated by Asiatic femininity and its

[36] I have published a commentary (Liu 2018) and a short essay (Liu 2020) about EWLY. These works have helped me establish the theoretical framework and the silhouette of my arguments in this section. My case study here in this section expands on these previous publications.

unpredictable object life" (14). Following this conceptual approach to Asian femininities that goes beyond the paradigm of seeing Asian women predominantly as victims of object(ification)s, this section considers the performance of Michelle Zauner in the music video of Japanese Breakfast's single "Everybody Wants to Love You" (EWLY) (2016) as a ghostly performance, empowered by the peculiar person-thing doubleness of Asian women. In particular, I analyze this performance as a site for identifying the confrontational moments and haunting effects of the objected-oriented diaspora sensibilities performed by Zauner.

EWLY is an affectionate song with an airy, jubilant tone that Zauner wrote about her relationship with a woman, where Zauner envisions getting married and talks to her lover about simple little things in a romantic relationship, such as waking up together and having breakfast in bed. Zauner originally wrote EWLY in 2009 with Birthday Girlz, a now-defunct band Zauner and two friends started in Oregon. Zauner sped the song up and rewrote it with a new arrangement, a guitar solo, and new chords for her Japanese Breakfast's debut album *Psychopomp* (2016). The EWLY music video, however, does not focus on this queer relationship, with a few scenes of exceptions where Zauner appears to be hanging out with a woman lover. Instead, the music video tells more of a celebration of the Korean heritage, an exploration of the Korean identity, and more subtly, a commemoration for the late mother of Michelle Zauner, the biracial, Jewish, Korean American frontwoman of this shoegaze-inspired, experimental indie rock/pop band based in Philadelphia. The music video, directed by Zauner and frequent collaborator Adam Kolodny, challenges the stereotype of docile Asian American women and juxtaposes this view with what Zauner actually does in Philadelphia as an Asian

musician in a white indie music scene (Zauner in Rither 2018). It features the persona that I call the Korean woman orchestrated by Zauner, singing in a restroom cubicle, eating a Dunkin Donuts sandwich, shotgunning a beer, shredding an electric guitar on the hood of a truck, riding a motorcycle with her queer lover, and partying with a crowd all in the traditional Korean attire hanbok that used to belong to her late mother. The story ends with Zauner waking up on a bench with a hangover and fleeing from the scene, conjuring up a journey of self-discovery, self-healing, and self-liberation through multiple sites and scenes of everyday life.

Object theory departs from objects and matters to rediscover identity and experience. While deconstructing such a ghostly performance of diaspora sensibilities, I adopt an object-oriented approach as a focused entry point in my analysis of disidentificatory ghostly performances. This is not only because this approach designates a more focused scope with regard to applying Gordon's hauntology ([1997] 2008) and Muñoz's (1999) disidentification theory, it also taps into the less attended object-oriented approach to ontology (Bogost 2012; Harman 2009) and its overlooked relationship with racialization, which is much explored in Asian American and critical race studies (Shomura 2020). My object-oriented approach follows new materialism because it is not about debating the ontology of Asian American experiences as fundamentally object-based. Instead, it is more about reorienting our attention towards the formation and operation of objecthood, and about how this reorientation reveals and reconfigures the vexed articulation between Asian American experiences and racialized objectification. Moreover, while diaspora as, or not as, an object of study has been a contested topic (Axel 1996; Cho 2007), the objects of the diaspora have been less studied. In sum, my

oriented-object approach aligns particularly well with politically engaged frameworks such as Jane Bennett's (2010) vital materialism and Eunjung Kim's (2015) ethics of objects.

Taking an object-oriented approach in inquiring about Asian American identities could be paradoxically intervening because "Asian Americans have been excluded, exploited, and treated as capital because they have been more closely associated with nonhuman objects than to human subjects" (Shomura 2020). Furthermore, this objectification is doubly articulated onto the bodies of Asian American women due to the Orientalist conflations of Asia as feminine (Huang 2018, 187). Therefore, applying object theory in the case of EWLY requires special attention to the interplay between subject- and object-hood and the line between objecthood and objectification. To avoid the risk of objectification when exploring the objecthood of ghostly matters, I avoid approaching objects as defining Asian American experiences by attending to both the haunting effects of objects and how subjects mobilize such haunting effects in their performance. From a new materialist perspective, it is also important to disassociate problems of objectification from exploration of objecthood (Kim 2015) while excavating the worldmaking abilities of objects (Bennett 2010). For peoples in the diaspora, it means that objects are affective and nostalgic vessels, such as toys, food, family photos, attire, and personal items (Oum 2005), where traumas of displacement can be stored and rehearsed (Turan 2010, 54).

For 1.5 generation Asian Americans who grow up having a limited connection with the homeland, objects of the diaspora often have a cross-generational touch through their parents. For Zauner, the most personal diaspora object in the performance of EWLY

is the hanbok she wears throughout the different scenes of the music video, an authentic hanbok that her late mom had worn to her wedding in South Korea. In addition to attire, for Zauner, and for many others, food is also a very personal and unique object of the Korean diaspora, something that does not have to be physically mediated by a history of separation and can be learned, made, and consumed by the displaced body. On a personal level, cooking and eating Korean food is a natural way of connecting with her Korean heritage and of grieving for her mother, who has passed away from cancer. As Zauner says, "There's a wordless connection [through food]" (Cho 2019). Although my case study does not revolve around food, neither does it conduct a biographic study on Zauner, knowing the importance and specificities of food as an object of the diaspora reveals the distressing fact that for many post-first-generation immigrants, objects of the diaspora are often mediated and lacking a direct personal touch. But it also reveals that diaspora sensibilities can be learned and re-learned through knowledge searches and engagements with previously unconnected things.

Similar to Bochan Huy, whose father's passing motivated her to honor her father's and her own cultural legacy through a remake of an original Khmer rock song "Hello Hi," written by her late father in 1987 Denver, Zauner's mother's death also marked a significant turn of her musical trajectory. The diagnose of her mother's terminal cancer necessitated a journey to "reclaim the gifts of taste, language, and history her mother had given her" (Zauner 2021). Both Zauner and Huy have dedicated musical works to their late parents and created album cover art using family photos (See Figures 4.1 and 4.2). A little different from Huy and Laura Mam, who choose to engage what Huy (2020) would call the "Cambodian rock sound" in their musical ventures, Zauner

does so also through food and donning her mother's hanbok. The sonic engagements with her Korean roots reveal in other ways, such as the soundbite of her mother repeating "괜찮아," meaning "It is okay," over the phone at the end of the instrumental track "Psychopomp" (2016). The approaches that these musicians take to engage and (re)connect with their cultural heritage, variously embody a diaspora-mediated queer temporality that displaces hegemonic narratives of futurities and assimilation, which prescribe the fate of minority cultural heritages either through the lens of erasure or the lens of cosmopolitanism, by re-inscribing historicity and specificities to visualize their visions of Asian Americana.

Figure 4.1 Bochan Huy and her father. EP album cover of *Hello Hi* (2014) by Bochan Huy (Bochan Music).
Figure 4.2 Zauner's mother on the left. Album cover of *Psychopomp* (2016) by Japanese Breakfast (Yellow K Records).

What is revealing from a racialized person-thing relationship is what Christopher Bush (2007) calls "the ethnicity of things": things can have ethnicities, an identification that hinges on the articulation that "thingliness can be constituted in ways analogous and related to structures of racialization" (85). This object-oriented approach can expose the artificial nature of the affinity between Asian bodies and certain objects, which confesses a naturalized racial order of signification. One way to disrupt this chain of signification is

to excavate the haunting objects that disidentify with the norms of the present, that conjure up what the present wants to be done. This "something-to-be-done" characteristic is critical to acts of haunting (Gordon [1997] 2008, xvii). I propose to call this kind of disruptive performances "disidentificatory ghostly performances," connecting the embodied objects with Gordon's disembodied ghosts through the lens of Muñoz's disidentificatory reading. The impact of disidentificatory ghostly performances is two-fold: first exposing the artificial affinity of raced bodies and certain objects and then suggesting alternative ways of knowing.

In what follows, I expand upon two objects of the Korean diaspora, or two ghostly matters/haunting objects: the manicured nails and the hanbok. The first has a diasporic personal touch for Zauner and the second does not. My attention to these two things also stems from the exotification of traditional-Asian-attire-wearing bodies and manicured nails in the American popular culture. My analysis uncovers two particular haunting effects: the conjuring-up of the Korean diaspora and the troubling of everyday post-racial America. I contend that Zauner operates these haunting objects to embody the "something-to-be-done" characteristic by curating a series of uncompromising and confrontational moments, where the perpetuated affinity between Koreanness/Asianness and anomaly is instantiated and simultaneously unsettled in multiple snippets of the mundane post-racial, post-globalization world. By defying the objectification of Asian bodies with objects of the diaspora and refusing to assimilate into the American nightlife, Zauner's Korean woman persona haunts a multiculturalist post-racial America that fails to recognize the specificities and historicity of Korean America and performs an alternative reality, where "Korean things" and Asian femininities are neither objects of

fetish, nor products of disposable labor. Disidentificatory ghostly performance therefore, I suggest, thrives on confrontations between the past and the present while gesturing toward the futurities of alternative Americas. Mobilizing the critical lenses of disidentification and ghostly performance, finally, I argue that disidentificatory ghostly performances have great potential for envisioning a better politics of performing and representing Asian bodies through reclaiming objects of the diaspora and the ghostly play of haunting objects/ghostly matters.

What Can the Korean Woman (Not) Do with those Nails and in that Hanbok?

> In this (apparently) very versatile piece of clothing, she [Zauner] smokes, sings karaoke, rides motorcycles, plays a killer guitar solo… and much more. Is there anything you can't do in a hanbok?
>
> — Li-Wei Chu (2018)
> *From the Intercom* review

> "[Society] looks at Asian-American women as these docile sorts of stereotypes. I wanted to juxtapose [how] everyone sees me as this kind of Asian token in this very white indie scene with what I actually do in Philly.
>
> — Michelle Zauner
> *Vogue* interview (Rither 2018)

The authentic hanbok that Zauner wears throughout the music video might be the single most powerful haunting object in the story. With Zauner dressing in the hanbok while navigating the nightlife, it becomes a mediated, transhistorical experience for both Zauner and her mother. Just like how Zauner describes her intense feelings of having to learn to cook the very Korean food jatjuk that her mother had in her last few days, "I almost felt like I was my mother" (Cho 2019). A ghostly journey, we could call it. The hanbok becomes a ghostly matter that haunts both the Orientalist gaze and the Zauner in grief. This journey could be seen as a process of dealing with personal loss, a process of

"reckoning with ghosts" (Gordon [1997] 2008, 190). The division between the personal and the public, the historical and the present cease to exist as linear and clear-cut forces. The important role of ghosts in the performance is to historicize the persona of the Korean woman, giving it cross-generational and transhistorical elasticity, which is also a strategy for minoritarian performers to resist "the pull of reductive multicultural pluralism" (Muñoz 1999, 147). These ghostly matters haunt a pluralist multiculturalist post-racial America that refuses to see the specificities and historicity of raced bodies and objects.

The Korean woman in an authentic hanbok, coupled with other objects of Korean roots, such as a traditional hairdo and seemingly exotic makeup, may invite the Orientalist gaze or the assumption that Zauner is self-commodifying and self-fetishizing Korean culture, risking what Cheng calls "Oriental female objectification," which operates through "the lenses of commodity and sexual fetishism" (14). However, she fails to do any of these. The ways Zauner acts in the hanbok demonstrates a self-negotiation with her Korean identity through disidentificatory sensibilities with racial fetishism. For example, in various scenes, the Korean woman appears to be drunk in a bar, gorging a sandwich, shotgunning a beer, smoking in a restroom cubicle, messing with strangers in a basketball court, rocking an electric guitar on a truck, and falling asleep on a bench in public (See Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Some may describe what she does as abnormal, discomforting, or even disgusting for a body in a traditional Korean garment usually worn on formal occasions. This way, the Korean woman not only subverts her traditional Koreanness but also disidentifies with what the Asian fetish wants with Asian bodies—either as the obedient, well-behaved model minority or the hypersexualized dragon lady

(Hsu 2015; Shimizu 2007). Zauner's performance foregrounds the sentimental, the messy, the frenetic, the aggressive, and the carnivalesque as essential qualities and sensibilities of the Korean woman. These rarely visible configurations of Asian femininities speak to the normalized public erasure of "unwanted" sides of Asian bodies.

Figure 4.3 EWLY music video screenshot. Zauner smoking in a bathroom cubicle at a bar. Source: YouTube.

Figure 4.4 EWLY music video screenshot. Zauner shotgunning a bear. Source: YouTube.

Wavering public disappearance and erasure is a crucial haunting effect. The public disappearance is an "organized system of repression" and a "state-sponsored procedure for producing ghosts to harrowingly haunt a population into submission" (Gordon [1997] 2008, 72, 115). While the journey of EWLY evolves through ups and downs, the Korean woman does not maintain the ephemeral joy and takes offense at the people and surroundings now and then, such as at an arcade in the bar, at some basketball players, or at the audience and the camera operator. The ever-present disaffection and the conflicts

substantiate a theory of "positive perversity," through which Asian American women claim the representation of their sexuality and desires (Shimizu 2007), engendering a strong and disidentificatory visibility of the ghostly matters operated by the Korean woman. The disidentification is enacted by the arrival of the Korean woman, a body that disorients how things are arranged and reveals the whiteness that otherwise functions as a habit and a background (Ahmed 2007, 149, 163). The confrontational performances of the encounters between Zauner and others cast a critique of the racial politics of erasure by turning state-sponsored disappearing into confrontational moments in an everyday post-racial world.

What is also integral to Zauner's antagonistic performance of wavering public disappearing and failure of "Oriental female objectification" is a gentle employment of punk strategy of negativity through an aesthetic of radical nihilism mediated by performing objects. For example, in addition to the traditional hairdo that goes with her makeup, Zauner also wears a nose ring and does not care about the loosened hairdo; in addition to partying with a crowd, she crowd surfs in the hanbok at the party as if in a rock concert. Having fronted the Philadelphia-based indie-punk band Little Big League from 2011 to 2014 before this project, Zauner understands punk symbolism. By relying on established cultural symbols of Koreanness and simultaneously reorienting these symbols by meshing them with cultural routines of punk rock, the Korean woman flouts the order of things in the predominantly white indie rock scene. Furthermore, instead of doing justice by trying to "reorder things in their proper place" like an archivist adding things or rearranging things in an archive (Nguyen 2015, 14), the Korean woman is less interested in prescribing purposes or orders than allowing confrontational moments to

happen while moving the body across a series of loosely connected everyday moments. All these, in addition to her aggressive, impolite body language, allude to a negative punk aesthetic that Muñoz (2013) describes as an energy "as chaotic, as creating a life without rhyme or reason, as quintessentially self-destructive" (97). What lies in the heart of this punk dystopia is the desire for "something else," something "strangely utopian while simultaneously dystopian," and something "not the present time or place" (Muñoz 2013, 98). But unlike the white Los Angeles early punk scene, though more diverse than the mainstream scene, that Muñoz is concerned with, EWLY's desire for impossible time and place reimagines a conterminously utopian and dystopian alternative America through a mediatized performance of "race riots" (Nguyen 2012).

On the other hand, the manicured nails have also conjured up the recent memories of the gendered histories of the Korean diaspora. In addition to the hanbok, the manicured fingernails are also a major operating force reminiscent of Korean American immigration history alongside the racialized labor relations that have marked Korean bodies as an anomaly. With "Japanese Breakfast" being written on the screen in neon pink with some dazzling effects, the music video begins in a warm tone. The story begins with Zauner selecting EWLY with her finger on a karaoke operation screen, the first of many shots on her carefully manicured and styled nails, decorated with transparent nail extensions, glittering ornaments, and a few fine chains hanging. As stated earlier, the manicured fingernails are an object of the Korean diaspora that lacks a personal touch for Zauner, but it does not hinder us from critically examining its value as a diasporic object through historical and contextual knowledge searches. These nails evoke the nail salon business in the U.S. that heavily depended on immigrant labor. Korean women immigrants have

made significant economic contributions through the manicure business. Different from Los Angeles, where nail salons have been predominantly Vietnamese and Chinese owned, Korean women immigrants in the 1980s were the first ones to open nail salons in New York City and led to the rapid growth of the business (Kang 2010, 51). The definite presence of the long, bedazzled acrylic nails in the performance of EWLY encourages the audience to think of the internal diversity of the labor issues Asian women immigrants have faced, a gateway towards the less explored territory of the intersection of Korean immigration history and the manicure business.

Moreover, these fingernails haunt post-racial and post-globalization America by revealing and subverting the invisible, normalized racial and ethnic nature of the labor and objects associated with fingernails' cosmetic treatment. Ghostly matters inform "a method of knowledge production and a way of writing that could represent the damage and the haunting of the historical alternatives" (Gordon [1997] 2008, xvii). They function as a reminder of the damage that seems forgotten or normalized in modern societies and as an alternative embodiment of what modern societies could have become. In the universe of EWLY, the fingernails become a forceful ghostly matter by reminding us of the damage done to Korean bodies by fixing them as disposable service performers instead of customers. The nail salon business as performed by immigrant labor has been a business of "buying and selling of deference and attentiveness," where white customers come to exercise their privilege while not wanting anything associated with Koreanness or Otherness (Kang 2010, 134). However, as a haunting force, the fingernails in EWLY subvert such labor relations by acting as a versatile agent operating varied objects, such

as a karaoke machine, cigarettes, a sandwich, a Fender Stratocaster, and a can of beer (See Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

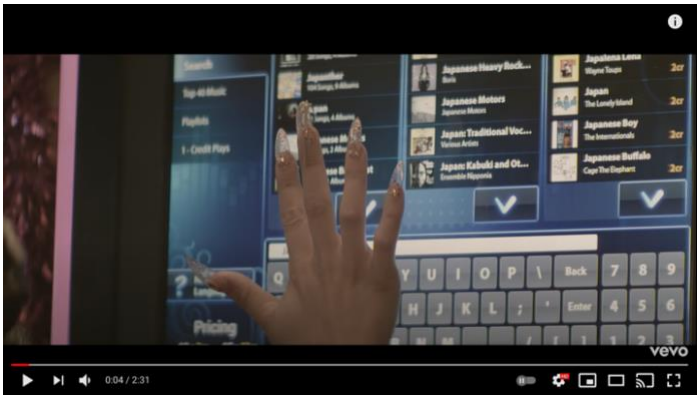

Figure 4.5 EWLY music video screenshot. Zauner selecting "EWLY" on a karaoke machine. Source: YouTube.

Figure 4.6 EWLY music video screenshot. Zauner making a hand gesture known as "the sign of the horns," or "hand-horns," popular in rock music. Source: YouTube.

The scene where Zauner, casually meshing the hanbok with a pair of Nike slide sandals, shreds a guitar solo on the hood of a big rig truck is particularly symbolically meaningful. The ever-present long, bedazzled nails appear especially counterproductive for the practical needs of playing the guitar, not to mention a guitar solo that entails fingertip precision. However, Zauner's guitar solo enactment appears effortless without any trace of being hampered from rocking her Fender Strat. As she plucks out the notes and strums the chords, the camera closes in without the fear of showing this contradiction. Almost in an aesthetic style of camp, the guitar solo performance does not

avoid revealing the hyperbolic and the contradictory and instead thrives on these confrontational elements. If guitar solos are assertions of the Western ego (Fast 2001, 104), "nailing" a guitar solo with objects and bodies of the diaspora thus places the Orientalized subjects as the conqueror of the Western ego, subverting the discourse of Western saviors and culture preservers that has been established over centuries in Western societies (See Chapter 2). However, the unabashed moments revealing the illusion of effortlessly playing a guitar solo in those extended nails announce the actual intention, which is not to actually want to colonize a Western instrument in a completely counter-identificatory way but to call for the recognition of the fabricated racial relations normalized in everyday, post-racial America, its labor issues, and the white indie music scene. Through moving the manicured nails across various scenes, an alternative labor relation and an alternative America are formed, where not only is the laborer-customer relation reformulated, the racially marked body also strategically de-Others the objects of the diaspora as an intimate part of American life.

The alternative labor relation is not entirely without roots outside the worldmaking of EWLY. As revealed in Japanese Breakfast's Instagram (@jbrekkie), Zauner's look was styled by the nail artist Celeste Marie Welch from the DnA Salon based in Philadelphia, an artist who appears to be a non-Asian, likely Caucasian female. This is a snippet of a field that is now a glocalized industry, whose racial and gender makeup is more diverse. It is increasingly easier to see non-Asian and non-female nail salon workers, among whom white nail salon workers outnumbered any other non-Asian racial/ethnic groups (Sharma et al. 2018, 23). This change has turned many practices in the nail salon business in the U.S. into artistic training and pursuits. Working at a nail

salon in many places is no longer a sign of lower social classes or low-wage racialized labor. That said, the stereotyping images of Asian nail salons and ebullient Asian workers with broken English and strong accents are still prevalent sources of entertainment in popular culture. See, for example, comedian Anjelah Johnson's viral stand-up comedy cut on "Nail Salon" and social media influencer/comedian Jasmin Brown (@watchjazzy) recycles the same act in a 2019 Instagram skit video for her over a million followers. Both comedians perform in yellowvoice for comedic effects from the standpoint of Vietnamese nail salon workers and both deny accusations of racism.[37] This way, EWLY's alternative worldmaking is not merely reflecting the changing makeup of an industry; it also calls out the societal tendency of forgetting and normalizing the damage of histories. To be haunted, as Gordon ([1997] 2008) explains, is to be "tied to historical and social effects" (190). The ghostly matters of the manicure industry haunt its increasingly diverse workers, artists, consumers, and businesspeople of the prescription of racialized labor divisions, consumer relations, and the historical and social effects inflicted on Othered bodies. Performing with the manicured nails, Zauner challenges today's multicultural manicure culture by mobilizing the oppositional, transhistorical identity of a Korean woman.

This case study suggests seeing the disidentificatory ghostly performance of the Korean woman as an artistic incarnation of her lived alienating experience. As Zauner lives through what looks like a typical Friday night in an American town, the journey represents conterminous space that interrogates both the present and the past. When the

[37] The fact that both comedians are non-white and non-Asian women of color, Johnson of Mexican and Native American descent and Brown born to a Jamaican father and Trinidadian mother, adds more nuances to the racialized labor issues in question. I bracket this question for now.

ghostly matters move through public spaces – when she drinks in a bar, walks down the street, and parties with a crowd – the Korean woman neither conforms to what she is expected to do in a hanbok nor does she fully assimilate into this American nightlife. Derrida (1994) argues that haunting, repression, and hegemony are structurally interlocked and that "[h]aunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" because "[h]egemony still organizes the repression" (46). This is why the creative capacity of disidentificatory performances is crucial for acts of haunting and historically repressed groups of people. Connecting the future-oriented performative mode of disidentification and the forking of the past and the present by ghostly performances, disidentificatory ghostly performances enable not only people of color but also particularly diasporic populations of color to challenge the racial chains of signification and to orchestrate future-oriented visions, where time is of the most compassion and at its utmost capacity.

Final Notes

This chapter thus far explores how a range of contemporary alternative and indie rock musicians engage with their cultural roots to negotiate a normative sense of belonging in ways that do not necessarily conjure up hegemonic shapes and sounds of activism. Instead, they dance a little, grieve a little, sing about making kimchi and finding love, and commemorate what they have lost with some creativity. Almost all the Asian American musicians I have interviewed have had a stage in their life, when they were young, where they hated being Asian and just wanted to be like everyone else (not necessarily white). This is one part of a long journey of reconciliation and identification. The wise Katie Tupper (2021)—a classical vocalist, Korean adoptee, and active activist

serving the Asian adoptee community—has aptly summarized this journey as "a life of bargaining with grief," which for her engenders stages of denial, anger, coming to terms with the self, acceptance, and finally, forgiveness. While everyone's journey is certainly unique, what Tupper helps lay bare here is a nonlinear progression for an Asian person's identity formation—an Asian queer temporality, I dub.

The artistic creations inspired by turning towards relearning one's roots thus enable ghostly performances of temporal anomalies. Russell C. Leong (1989) speaks of poetry as a type of ghostly performance, writing that "Because I wanted to relearn—and relive—the stirrings of an Asian American generation, I sought out its poetry. For poetry, like a hammer, can nail down the times" (165). While a person picks up and renounces various identities throughout the journey of life, it is certainly less common for one to do so with their racial and ethnic identity. For Asian Americans, this is often not simply about learning some forgotten family histories when one feels nostalgic. I am thinking from the perspective of 1.5- and second-generation Asian American adults in the current time. For them, relearning cultural heritage can feel like taking a 101 course that you should have finished a long time ago. The common turn towards relearning one's heritage as a reaction to loss thus seems more than a universal practice of grieving to me. Therefore, I maintain that the radicalization of the gentle acts of turning inwards, commonly practiced in contemporary Asian American arts and cultures, can offer so much for decentering the whiteness and the hegemonic ways of listening and feeling.

Chapter 5:

Musical Movements Revisited:
Asian, Queer, and Rock 'n' Roll

Introduction: Relearning to Remember Rock

In Lucy O'Brien's (1996) *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop*, the pioneering queercore band Tribe 8 is carelessly described as a band "fired by punk and Riot Grrrl" and the queercore punk movement becomes a sub-movement of riot grrrl (265) when queercore neither begin in the U.S. nor a sub-movement of riot grrrl. In an essay about musical feminism, Tribe 8 and Spitboy are casually thrown out with unmistakable riot grrrl classics Bikini Kill and Bratmobile as examples of riot grrrl's rejection of commercial music publishing (Coulombe 1999, 259). Spitboy is a hardcore punk band founded by Chicana musician Michelle Cruz Gonzales in 1990 before riot grrrl happened and the band has been very vocal about not being a riot grrrl band. There are more disappointing and disheartening examples from popular media that made minimum effort to do basic fact-checking.

I began researching for this chapter with a "simple" goal of putting Asian women back into the historical narrative about American rock music and musical movements, particularly with regards to three of the most well-known underground musical movements: women's music, queercore, and riot grrrl. These three movements are still ever-present but their active days span over the decades of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a long period of very limited knowledge, documentation, and representation of Asian women in popular music except for when they are being written about by others (See Chapter 2). However, more and more often, I found that while there have always been

Asian women critical to the development of these now-canonized musical counter-discourses, seeing them through these frameworks may not be the most productive way to understand the particularities of their music and activism.

While reclaiming the rightful place of women of color musicians within countercultural spaces is an important project, I find it equally urgent to call out the issue of subsuming minoritarian bodies into the archives and media discourses about these musical movements as if their inclusion makes these revolutionary spaces (more) exclusive. This act becomes a matter of eating the Other's Other—a kind of triple erasure at the intersection of being women, of color, and on the fringe of a fringe—when these bodies are improperly placed. Moreover, for example, while we may find Asian American zines such as Lala Endara's zine *Chop Suey Spex* and Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan's zine *Bamboo Girl* as part of the genealogy of queer-feminist punk (Wiedlack 2015) and find mixed-race guitarist Leslie Shixiu Mah of Tribe 8 as part of the narrative about queercore, riot grrrl, and feminist performance (Shoemaker 2010; Nault 2018), these texts and bodies have never been examined alongside a genealogy of Asian American women's rock and punk music. We have yet to explore how would these minor objects would help us sketch the silhouette of an Asian American musical movement.

"What would a politics look like that didn't require recognizing another's pain as similar to one's own? What if we didn't need to have that sense of likeness to act on others' behalf" (Nguyen 2016)? This is a challenging quest and illuminates a common limitation in the ways we imagine and conceive politics, one that relies on recognizing a common ground in each other's fight. I started finding my tendency to understand Asian American rock alongside already established trajectories and vocabularies a limited

approach as if finding a common ground between Asian American rock and established rock narratives would validate my arguments about the cultural and political significance of the former; as if latching on some trendy subjects in the history of rock and musical movements would help make my examples in discussion more valuable. Again, how would these minor objects help us sketch the silhouette of an Asian American musical movement, we have yet to explore.

Eventually, therefore, what this chapter embarks is *not* a journey of finding Asian American women rockers within women's music, queercore, and riot grrrl but on the fringe of, outside of, and between these musical counter-discourses. The ultimate objective of this chapter therefore is to connect the dots of many one-woman riots, obscurely documented in the pre-Internet age, as a contribution to historicize an Asian American musical movement and the idea of Asian women who rock. My method of doing this can be called "turning to fringes of fringes." It means that I will discuss, for example, June Millington as a supportive guitarist the early women's music movement, Dianne Chai in the L.A.'s early punk movement, Janis Tanaka between women's music and riot grrrl, A.S.F. before queercore was a thing, Tribe 8 as inaccurately lumped with riot grrrl, Lucy Stoners as accidentally creating the first all-Asian queer women punk band, and the DragOn Ladies on the fringe of angry women in rock and cathartic art. All the Asian American women rockers discussed in this chapter are queer-identified with the likely exceptions of Dianne Chai and Janis Tanaka. Before finding and reorienting Asian American fringes of fringes, this chapter will first offer a critique of riot grrrl as an example of the institutionalization and perpetuation of fringes of fringes.

Fringes of Fringes, or Another Way to Conceive Musical Movement

From *The Lost Women of Rock Music* (Reddington [2007] 2012), *She's a Rebel* (Gaar 2002), and *Angry Women in Rock* (Juno 1996) to "Looking for Race in Punk" (Nguyen 1998) and "Finding Asian America in Popular Music" (Wang 2001), this kind of recuperative effort is common to find in the music scholarship that seeks to rewrite the dominant narrative about the histories of popular music, which often marginalizes and erases women, queer, and of color musicians. This type of venture necessarily engages with both critiques of the centering of whiteness, hence the erasing of the non-white, in the politics of musical memories as well as alternative narratives that center the experiences and contributions of minoritarian subjects. For example, in one of the earliest mainstream media articles about the riot grrrl movement, Emily White ([1992] 1995) acknowledges that the D.C. riot grrrl scene was more racially diverse than its Olympia counterpart but calls for riot grrrls to address the lack of non-white leadership and their privileged upper- or upper-middle-class backgrounds, which allowed them the time and support to express anger and desire otherwise (402). Zinsters like Ramdasha Bikceem (author of *Gunk*) and Mimi Thi Nguyen (author of *Slant*, etc.) frequently and blatantly call out riot grrrl's privilege of a "generalized 'we' that primarily described the condition of mostly white, mostly middle-class women and girls" (Nguyen 1998).

That said, riot grrrls of color have never sat in silence, vocalizing counter-narratives and fighting against the erasure of their participation and contributions. Asian American zines such as Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan's *Bamboo Girl* (1995-) and Felix Endara's *Chop Suey Spex* (1997) address intersectional racism, gender nonconformity, and queer sexualities head-on both inside and outside the riot grrrl

circle.[38] For example, *Bamboo Girl* (authored by Alcantara-Tan, who is of Filipino, Spanish, and Irish descent) addresses some of the most critical topics in the Asian American community and in society more broadly, such as adoptee experiences, mixed-race experiences, mental illness, and Asian hate (See Figure 5.1). The visual messages are often cathartic by using violent images to subvert anti-Asian violence and call out tiring and demonizing stereotypes such as the one that depicts the Chinese as rat-eating savages (Lee 1999, 38–39). The zine also gives the representational and vocalizing space that Asian women punks from around the world may not have in predominantly white zines, such as Lucy Stoners and Abrassive Relations (See Figure 5.2). Astria Suparak, an Asian American curator, co-curated with Ceci Moss an exhibition in 2013 on the lasting impact of riot grrrl, *Alien She*. Suparak (2014) notes in an interview that "one of the common misconceptions of riot grrrl is that it only consisted of a small group of white, middle-class, college-educated, cis-gendered females girls, but Ceci's and my experiences in the Bay Area, in L.A., were really diverse." Although their experience cannot represent the varied riot grrrl experiences all over the country or necessarily represent the ones also in the Bay Area, it is important to have this kind of counter-narrative to fight against the erasure of many riot grrrls of color who identified as and invested in this movement (See Appendix for a compiled list of POC riot grrrl zines of the 1990s).

[38] See (Goulding 2015; Wiedlack 2015) for more detailed case studies on *Bamboo Girl* and *Chop Suey Spex*.

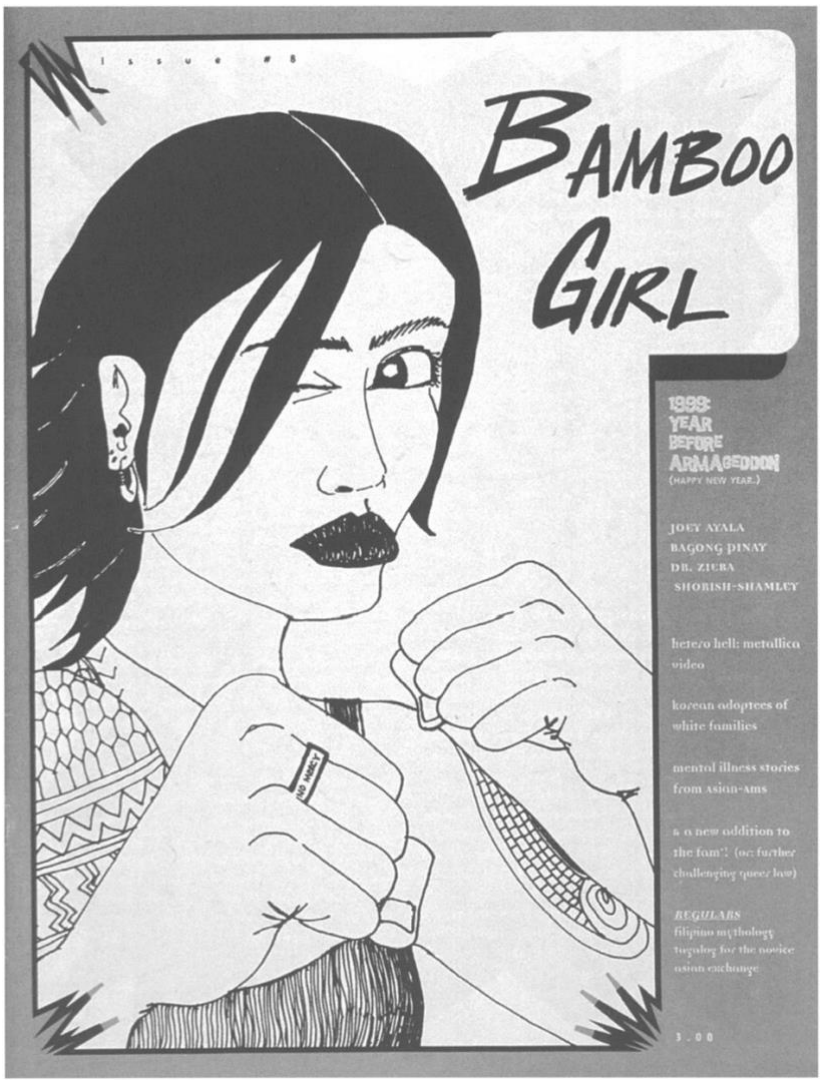

Figure 5.1 *Bamboo Girl* addresses a variety of Asian American issues and other issues like sexism and terrorism. Photo: (Alcantara-Tan 2000).

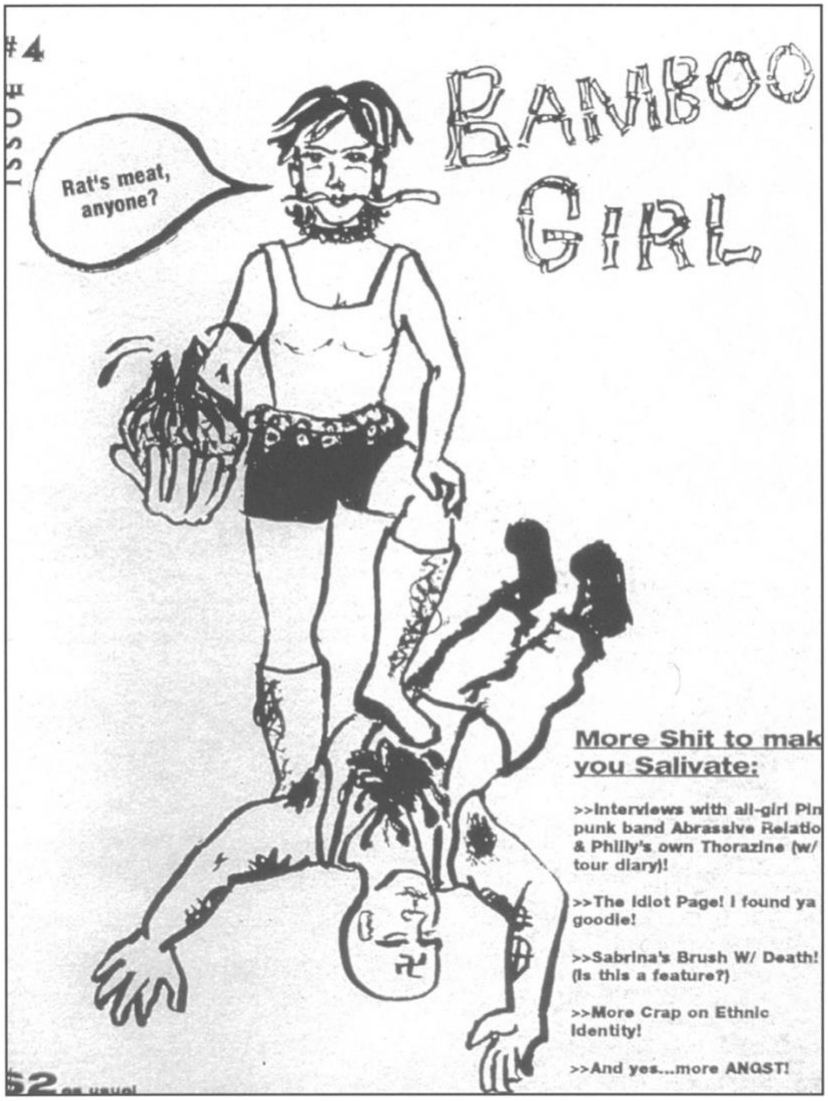

Figure 5.2 *Bamboo Girl* brings the stories of all-female Filipina punk band Abrassive Relations, formed in Manila, the Philippines. Photo: (Alcantara-Tan 2000).

One remaining issue is that it is one thing to talk about individual riot grrrl experiences, another to talk about the issue of reproducing the structural sidelining of minoritarian subjects in the dominant narrative and public memories of the movement. The mainstream media's interest in the movement died down after the mid-1990s, but punks and educators have endeavored to archive this much-needed feminist punk movement. There are multiple valuable zine collections across the country now, such as NYU's Riot Grrrl Collection, Cornell University's Riot Grrrl Zine and Music Collection,

and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum's Gayle Wald Riot Grrrl Collection. With these materials being archived and institutionalized and becoming a source of nostalgia and public memories, it requires us to rethink the politics of appearance. A 2015 *Vice* article criticizes NYU's Riot Grrrl Collection for the disheartening fact that there is only one issue of one zine, Ramdasha Bikceem's *Gunk*, about the experiences of Black riot grrrls is included in this collection, one that has hundreds of documents (Bess 2015). In this interview with *Vice*, Bikceem expresses the hesitance to talk about riot grrrl this way because she and *Gunk* become "a footnote all the time, for reference," a diversity token. While there are several Asian American zines, Bikceem's words still resonate with me when I think about how the all-Asian American riot grrrl band Emily's Sassy Lime (consists of Emily Ryan, Amy Yao, and Wendy Yao) has become the diversity musical token of the Asian American voices in riot grrrl. Like any token, their presence seems enough for those scrutinizing the diversity of riot grrrl to check the box that says "Asian" on the list.

Turning to the absence or the tokenism of certain things or bodies can induce something positive. We may see Bikceem/*Gunk* and Emily's Sassy Lime as minor objects—"marginal forms, persons, and worlds that are mobilized in narrative (including archival) constructions to designate moments of crisis" (Nguyen 2015, 12). The inclusion of Bikceem/*Gunk* and Emily's Sassy Lime in the narrative constructions of riot grrrl as a footnote or a diversity token exactly reveals crises of inclusivity and diversity. When writing about punk archives, Mimi Thi Nguyen (2015) describes the promise of absent minor objects for their abilities to reveal archival crises, urging one to "discover the something missing and to reorder things in their proper place" (17). One way to do so is

to construct alternative genealogies where we centralize minor objects. In line with this, for example, Nguyen, in collaboration with the People of Color (POC) Zine Project, donated over 60 POC zines to NYU's Riot Grrrl Collection (*The Mimi Thi Nguyen Collection in Collaboration with the POC Zine Project*) in 2012.[39] The hankering to reorder things, however, presupposes a displacement of things and accordingly, a rightful place, "proper place," for these things. The remaining questions are: Is the proper place of dismissed objects or bodies necessarily the same place where we discover they are missing? Meanwhile, is there only one proper place? The answers are almost certainly negative. For instance, although it seems that these 60 plus POC zines are minor objects that finally are in their proper place as a crucial aspect of the riot grrrl narrative, at the same time, they also have articulated an alternative proper place for themselves, gesturing towards a POC-focused genealogy of girls' punk zines. It then poses the question of if we necessarily need to see this alternative feminist historiography as part of the riot grrrl narrative even though it was created to de-universalize riot grrrl experiences in the first place. I don't think so. There are simultaneous "proper" places and finding these places is what I see as another promise of discovering what is missing from a dominant narrative.

Finding fringes and reorienting them as the center elsewhere is one way to find proper places for minor objects/bodies. Albeit imperfect, riot grrrl is an alternative to both the male-dominated punk scene and the sound-polished and women-unfriendly mainstream popular music scene. Following the quest for alternative proper places, I ask: What are fringes of this fringe? What are alternatives to this alternative? One kind of fringe I attend to are those who have an ambiguous membership to this scene, those who

[39] For the list of Zines and a donation statement where Nguyen wrestles with the dilemma of "correcting" an absence and contemplates on the productive outcomes of this move, see (Nguyen 2012b).

for many reasons often get lumped with riot grrrl but probably were never really part of it. While looking for Black women and girls in riot grrrl, Gabby Bess (2015) turns to Tamar-kali Brown, a contemporary Afropunk pioneer and hardcore musician, who offers "one black woman's alternative to both the male-dominated punk scene and the white-dominated Riot Grrrl." Brown, along with Maya Glick, Simi Stone, and Honeychild Coleman, founded Sista Grrrl Riot in the late 1990s as a response to riot grrrl. "I didn't think it was exclusive, but it didn't feel inclusive to me. I didn't see myself or my story, and so that's why Sista Grrrl came about later on," Brown explains (Demir 2021). Indeed, Brown would not identify as a riot grrrl, even though she understood Riot Grrrl and aligned with it philosophically and many critiques bring (the absence of) her up to call out the whitewashing of the dominant riot grrrl narrative and the 1990s feminist punk movement (e.g., Bess 2015; Phillips 2020). Instead of striving to carve out some space in it, having an alternative space and vocabulary was more urgent for Brown and many other like-minded women punks of color. It is not surprising that turning to Brown leads us to punk (feminist) genealogies of the Afropunk movement and Sista Grrrl Riot, which we may argue are more proper places than riot grrrl.

Prior to riot grrrl's emergence in the early 1990s, there was the LGBTQ punk movement queercore (or homocore), which began in the mid-1980s. Both queercore and riot grrrl have been copresent since the 1990s. In 1990s San Francisco, one of the cultural origins of queercore, it was not difficult to see queercore and riot grrrl bands playing together. There were collaborations and also heated competition because many bands needed to share bandmates (Gordon 2021). Thus, it is difficult to tell if a musician was necessarily aligned with any movement simply by looking at where they played or whom

they played with. But there are more reasons why these two distinct and co-present punk genealogies are so entangled. In 1992, Outpunk Records, an independent music label associated with the iconic queercore zine *Outpunk*, released two 7-inch compilations, *There's a Dyke in the Pit* and *There's a Faggot in the Pit. There's a Dyke in the Pit* features four bands, Bikini Kill, Tribe 8, Lucy Stoners, and 7 Year Bitch, bringing riot grrrl staples like Bikini Kill and queercore mainstays like Tribe 8 together. This vinyl henceforth has been a critical footprint for the narrative constructions about both scenes. For example, in *NY Times*' "Riot Grrrl United Feminism and Punk. Here's an Essential Listening Guide," Evelyn McDonnell and Elisabeth Vincentelli (2019) compile an "a list of essential riot grrrl music," where Tribe 8 and their "Neanderthal Dyke" (1995) are featured. Both authors/curators for this playlist are credible writers of popular music, with McDonnell being a journalism professor, whose work I appreciate, has contributed many valuable writings on women musicians and (co-)edited books like *Women Who Rock* (2019) and *Rock She Wrote* (1995) and with Vincentelli being a journalist who also has prolific writings on popular music. Tribe 8, however, has been so rooted in queercore that anyone who pays more attention would know that they have never been a riot grrrl band.

When looking further, we can easily find many of what I refer to as ambiguous fringes of riot grrrl being slated for the scene without much proper context of their background, therefore in a way erased as fringes of the fringe of riot grrrl and from their proper place at the same time.[40] This kind of unsolicited inclusion is also institutionalized

[40] I want to acknowledge here that the opposite (critical riot grrrl texts/figures being discussed within the context of queercore) happens as well but to a much lesser degree. For example, Curran Nault's (2018) brings up Mimi Thi Nguyen's zines (*Slant, Slander,* and *Evolution of a Race Riot*) and Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan's zine (*Bamboo Girl*) in the first monograph on queercore, but Nault does so carefully

through archives. In Cornell's Riot Grrrl Zine and Music Collection, recordings by queercore bands like Tribe 8 and The Needs and queercore adjacent, Asian-fronted band Kicking Giant are all included whereas the staunch all-Asian riot grrrl band Emily's Sassy Lime is not. This "slacker" move is misleading. In an archive of "original cassette tapes and seven-inch singles from Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, Skinned Teen, and *others bands who pioneered the movement and its sound*" (Cornell University Library 2016; emphasis added), it makes sense to include compilations like *There's a Dyke in the Pit* (1992) and *Yoyo A-Gogo* (1996) that include both riot grrrl mainstays and queercore fellows, but it makes not much sense to archive individual recordings of the latter as well as if they somehow became the bands "who pioneered the movement and its sound." It sounds flattering but operates to construct ambiguous fringes of fringes.

It is perhaps not surprising to find so many queercore acts on such fringes. "I was rejected by two subcultures, which was the gay subculture and the punk subculture, so I've always felt like I'm on *the fringe of the fringe*," says Bruce LaBruce in the documentary *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution*, the zinster, with G. B. Jones, behind the zine where queercore started its revolution, *J.D.s*. But then again, perhaps we might find more fringes amongst those who were not part of neither scenes.[41] Riot grrrl has

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enough by noting that "these zines relied on D.I.Y. practice to inform receptive parties of queercore's arrival," (21) as opposed to confusing these texts as some rare texts on the fringe of queercore. Queercore also has much less mainstream popularity than riot grrrl, thus less influential in terms of narrative construction. That is to say, there are much fewer archives, academic books, documentaries, and media articles. It means that even though that the documentary *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution* (2017) interviews Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna and that a *The Guardian* article quite confusingly and amusing mislabels Bikini Kill as a queercore band and includes a photo of them as the only band photo in an article about queercore (Farber 2018), anyone who knows Bikini Kill would almost never subsume them as queercore.

[41] Certainly, to be clear, there is also the situation where some musicians are/were part of both scenes. But this does not prevent a band from becoming a fringe of either scene. Here, I want to gesture towards Selena Wahng, Korean American, vocalist and bassist of Lucy Stoners, one of the feature bands on the compilation *There's a Dyke in the Pit* (1992). Wahng was involved in queercore before moving from San Francisco to New York in the summer of 1992 and got involved with the riot grrrl scene there. The riot

become a fluid yet strange label that the slacker media use on almost every underground all-girl and all-women rock band from the same period, such as hardcore band Spitboy, who probably have to say "not a riot grrrl band" too many times and unfortunately still archived in Cornell's collection.[42] Anlin Fan, the vocalist from what they self-refer to as a "kawaii core" all-girl band Xiao Wang from Beijing, China, even thought about naming a tour of theirs "riot grrrl is not a genre" because people kept labeling them as riot grrrl, a movement she never knew about before this (Brown 2018).

Finding and Reorienting Asian American Fringes

My point is not to nitpick the "accuracy" of any scenes or categories. After all, riot grrrl is a fluid definition. What I do gesture towards here is the issue of reproducing and constructing fringes of fringes through public memories, popular discourses, and institutionalized archives, which perpetuate hegemonic vocabulary and mainstream frameworks of musical movements, where less known movements and individual acts of activism are misplaced or outright erased. It is a caveat that I would call "eating the Other's Other" that I stress here. Therefore, it begs the question: while we recognize this massively important feminist punk movement called riot grrrl, how do we remember the fringes of the fringe? How do we find or construct proper places for these fringes? When certain minor bodies, objects, and sounds are circulated predominantly as riot grrrl fringes and become undiscovered "gems" for archivists and music enthusiasts to dig into,

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grrrl zine *Bamboo Girl* also interviewed Wahng. See (Caterofis and Humphreys 1997, 330–31) for a review of Wahng's "Killing for Pleasure" (1997), a song that channels the spirit and musical tradition of both punk and Korean shamans, powerful religious female figures who perform rituals for bringing well-being. I also write about the song in relation to the idea of an "Asian American sound" in the conclusion chapter.

[42] See Spitboy drummer Michelle Cruz Gonzales' (2016) memoir, *The Spitboy Rule: Tales of a Xicana in a Female Punk Band*, for more insights in this regard.

riot grrrl loses its liberating power and becomes a framework of erasure that limits the scope for finding proper places for minor objects. This way, the effort of putting certain bands on the riot grrrl playlists is damaging the exact project of restoring the narratives of both riot grrrl and these musicians. If the search for and centralizing of minoritarian bodies in a mainstream musical movement like riot grrrl is an act of activism that strives to claim erased contributions, what I stress here is the autonomy and significance for the fringes of riot grrrl to detach and reorient towards imaging meaningful places, vocabulary, temporalities, and genealogies. Some change the system from within; some change the system from the fringe; and some do so outside the system by constructing alternative narratives. These states are neither linear nor discrete. I want to consider a genealogy of Asian American women rockers that requires one to turn away and us to look away but necessarily engages with all three states to become meaningful.

With this in mind, I pivot towards examining June Millington's entering and leaving of the women's music movement, a staunchly anti-commercial and queer women-led musical movement that influenced both queercore and riot grrrl (Nault 2018, 64), whose active days coincided with the active period of women's rights movement in the 1970s. As I continue my journey of finding Asian American women rockers along with the major musical movements, June's involvement in the burgeoning women's music movement in the 1970s and her eventual departure provides an angle for me to rethink Asian women's roles in and contributions to the American musical activism. June and Jane Millington, a pair of biracial Filipina American sisters, formed Fanny in 1969 with June on guitar and vocals and Jane on bass. Fanny is the first all-female rock band that signed to a major record label (Warner Bros' Reprise Records) while also releasing a

full-length album, *Fanny* (1970). They are also the first notable Asian American women-led rock band. Like fringes of the fringe of the women's music movement, June's involvement with and contributions to women's music is often sidelined in the dominant narrative of this musical movement. However, instead of insisting how much June contributed to this movement, which she did and deserves focused studies,[43] I find it as important to free her from necessarily being interpellated into the framework of this known vocabulary that's called women's music, or Hollywood rock, and to highlight why June did not fit, why she kept leaving—leaving Fanny and Hollywood rock and leaving women's music.

Figure 5.3 Album cover of *Fanny Hill* (1972) (Reprise Records). From left to right: Jean Millington, June Millington, Alice de Buhr, and Nickey Barclay.

The electric sounds of rock were a gateway for the sisters into American society. "We were more scared of disappearing in the chasm of American society that gave not a whit about us and didn't even see us. We didn't want to be invisible. And we felt that really strongly. We didn't really talk about it, but we knew," June explains how she and Jane had a tacit agreement refusing to disappear into the background (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 17). Growing up in a strict Spanish Catholic household and the post-war

[43] Ann Power's (2015) essay about June's lifelong journey in rock music, including an interview with June, gives a nice review of June's stories with the nascent women's music movement.

Philippines, for June, “Rock and roll was a place where you could invent yourself and you could reinvent yourself over and over again” (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 16). Shortly after they moved from Manila to Sacramento, California in 1961, Jane and June would soon start their first all-girl band The Svelts in high school in the mid-1960s. Fanny’s journey started before the women’s music movement fully emerged. The sisters did not rush into the music industry with a strong feminist label. In fact, like many teenage girls, they “didn’t know anything about feminist principles at all. All we knew about feminism was that the idea seemed to be that you could do whatever you wanted to do, which we felt like we were doing already” (Juno 1996, 216). However, they were doing the feminist work by just being there, doing a hell of a good job at it. “I was really kind of a monk or a nun, cleverly disguised as a [cat meowing sound]. Because in order to [make the music] I had to put so much effort and energy into throwing it out. There was nothing coy about it. Nothing coy,” June explains how she did not fit into the stereotype of “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll” and they really concentrated on writing the best music and giving the best shows they could (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 21).

Figure 5.4 The Svelts. Jean on the far left and June on the far right. Photo source: June Millington’s interview Copper (Seetoo 2016).

In those years, Fanny was first of all seen as an all-women rock band and the Millington sisters' racial identity would come next or never. The erasure of their racial identity was at least predictable, paving their way to conform to the white and colorblind norms of rock. It was a common struggle for women of color rock musicians, especially many Black women singers and guitarists, back then to experience "a kind of double jeopardy" in rock as both women and nonwhite (Mahon 2020, 9). For years, the self-reinventing stage of rock was a place for the Millington sisters to simultaneously disappear and resist to disappear. "In all those years—and I've racked my brain to think of one time, even all through Fanny—I never felt racism on the dance floor. Never felt it," June notes how rocking out on stage affords a conditional equalizing opportunity. "But mostly it was about that communal joy and that thing of *disappearing*. We would watch people *disappear* right in front of us. And then we would *disappear*" (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 18; emphasis added). Here June is referring to the joy from the intense focus on playing music, but behind all these cases of disappearing, besides empowerment, is the removal of social differentiations, constructing an ephemeral sonic world, where (Othered) bodies disappear and only (white) standard sounds of classic rock are present. June left Fanny in 1973 after having recorded four albums with the original lineup (with Nickey Barclay on keyboards and Alice de Buhr on drums): *Fanny* (1970), *Charity Ball* (1971), *Fanny Hill* (1972), and *Mothers Pride* (1973). After June left, Fanny released their fifth album *Rock And Roll Survivors* (1974). "[Novelty] was the only frame that the record company, and I guess the public, could even imagine [Fanny] and enter as a commodity" (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 19-22). June's departure from Fanny and the commercial rock music scene as she realized that she was playing inside a frame of

novelty as a woman lead guitarist at the time, always becoming someone else, becoming a one-dimensional novelty; and as she finally lost patience with the question of "What does it feel like to be a girl guitarist."

After Fanny, June started participating in the nascent women's music movement. It all started with June befriending Cris Williamson and playing on Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed: A Record of the Times* (1975), one of the defining sounds of women's music. The women's music community consisting of many lesbian feminist musicians was a respite for June from the intense years of playing in Fanny (Powers 2015; Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 22). She needed to further unlearn and break the rules of rock; she needed to further disappear into the scene, become unrecognizable, and to get rid of the label of woman lead guitarist. The women's music community was that place for her. June became a supportive musician for Williamson and openly discussed her lesbian and feminist identities, topics that many contemporaneous women rockers and those who came after her avoided confronting. However, the idealized ideas about women's music soon dissipated, "woman's music totally surprised me and broke my heart," says June. Although June kept playing at women's music festivals, she eventually became much less involved as she started realizing the racism she experienced in the women's music community was not that much different from Hollywood with Fanny:

> I'll give you an example [of racism]. I am standing with a woman, a woman's music booking agent/events producer. . . she says, "I need a women-of-color act for this next festival I'm doing." And Ann [Hackler, Millington's partner] says flat out to her, "Well, June's a woman of color." So, that kind of invisibility is something I encountered, over and over again. I can give you another example. I called, I think, this college in Ohio because I wanted a gig and they said, "Oh we already have a woman of color act booked for this year." This was a woman that was saying this to me. So racism plays itself over and over again. It's the Hydra, it goes into every strata of society, and it presents itself in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that are not so different from festival producers or any producers when we

> were in Fanny saying, "Oh well, we already have a woman act." (Wald and Gonzalves 2019, 24)

From "Oh well, we already have a woman act" to "Oh we already have a woman of color act booked for this year," June had to navigate various forms of colorblind racism (as in all nonwhite colors are the same) across different scenes. If with Fanny, June was only seen as a woman lead guitarist whose racial identity is erased, with women's music, June's racial identity was acknowledged only to the extent that she was no different from another woman of color. From Hollywood rock to women's music, it is through the repeated failure to be a one-dimensional woman musician and the repeated learning of disappointment that June was able to disrupt the expectation of Asian bodies to be an apolitical vessel, always ready and available to serve and accommodate someone else's agenda. I call this radical sentimentalism—sentiments from failing and disappointing empower the non-accommodating body to turn away, to imagine outside the mold, and to break out of the mold. June not only broke out of the mold of finding self within the established genealogies of Hollywood rock and women's music, but she also imagined outside the mold as an Asian woman rock musician without a template to follow in a time when Asian women in American rock music were only the materials for various engagements with and experiments of musical Orientalism (See Chapter 2).

Would Fanny (1969) or The Svelts (circa 1965) be a beginning point of a genealogy of American rock music by Asian and Asian queer women, I wonder and so far, I think so. When Fanny appears in the narrative of rock, they more often than not appear in the genealogy of all-female rock bands (e.g. Fallon 2017; Danton 2018) and so many times, they would be introduced from the fun-fact perspective that Fanny is an

undiscovered gem that once wowed David Bowie (e.g. Roberts 2017; Cotto 2019).[44] The project of putting Asian women back into the general narrative of rock is an important one and we have just started doing so. But such accounts inevitably are less capable of efficiently addressing the complexity of race, gender, sexuality, and Asian racialization at the intersection of the politics of rock music. Therefore, I find it significant to see them both as one of the musical ventures fronted by women (of color) rockers in the 1960s and early 1970s and a starting point to imagine a distinct narrative about Asian women in rock. Reasonably enough, the Millington sisters were not the first Asian girls in the U.S. ever to pick up an electric guitar and write original rock songs, but they were the first to record multiple albums with a major label and have left a solid repertoire. Throughout Fanny's career, they had four singles reaching the *Billboard* magazine's "The Hot 100" charts, "Charity Ball" (1971), "Ain't That Peculiar" (1972), "I've Had It" (1974), and Butter Boy (1974) (Billboard n.d.). And the sisters have achieved much with a band that they formed voluntarily, not under the influence of any label manager seeking the novelty value of all-girl rock bands, a venture supported by their Filipina mother but opposed by their Caucasian father. All this is not to say that June and Jane were the only Asian women popular musicians gaining a bigger stage back then. Just to roughly point out a few notable examples in American popular music where we may find Asian women musicians from the same period: The 1960s has singing trio the Kim Sisters and the early 1970s has Nobuko JoAnne Miyamoto's political folk songs and ballads with Chris Kando

[44] The long-overdue first documentary of Fanny, *FANNY: The Right To Rock,* is being released this year. The trailer also deploys the quote from David Bowie, "Revivify Fanny. And my work will be done." However, this example should not be treated the same as the media coverage examples here. In the trailer, Bowie's testimony is among many other fellow musicians', hence the quote is not used to sell the same rhetoric that solely uses Bowie's fame and credibility as a golden standard for good musicianship.

Iijima and William "Charlie" Chin (notably, their 1973 album *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America*), chart-topping solo disco pop musician Yvonne Elliman, and experimental jazz band Hiroshima (whose first vocalist was Nancy Sekizawa, owner of Atomic Café, discussed in Chapter 3). But in terms of rock music, it is safe to say that Fanny is the first notable Asian-fronted all-female rock band, marking the beginning of a genealogy of Asian American women rock musicians.

Compared with the 1990s and afterward, there was a much smaller Asian women presence throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with a few notable examples.[45] Outside the mainstream rock scene, we can find Dianne Chai in the West Coast's thriving punk rock movement. Vocalist and bassist Dianne Chai co-founded the punk rock trio Alley Cats in 1977, with Randy Stodola (guitar/vocals) and John McCarthy (drums). A mainstay of the scene, the Alley Cats in their early days was signed to the punk label Dangerhouse Records, through which they released their first EP *Nothing Means Nothing Anymore* in 1978. Dangerhouse also featured many other seminal Californian punk bands, such as the Bags, X, Avengers, and the Dils, all of whom have played in L.A.'s Chinatown at either Madame Wong's or Hong Kong Café. Chai was one of the only Asian women in the L.A. punk scene at the time. The Alley Cats has formed and added a unique sound to the scene, one that is more than standard three finger power chords and involves more sophisticated instrumental work yet remains the stripped-down simplicity you would

[45] In comparison, Asian male musicians had a bigger presence in the Western rock music scene from the 1960s to the 1980s, see (Pianoman 2020) for a list of Asian American male rock musicians. This list is informative in terms of geographical scope, but it is certainly not exhaustive and lacks the presentation of Asian women. Notably, the pre-2000 section does not include any women rock musicians. See (Moon 2015) for another volunteer's curation of Asians in classic rock. This one adds valuable perspectives regarding musicians of Middle Eastern and Eurasian heritage. Note that neither list is gender or U.S. focused.

expect from a punk band.[46] The Alley Cats released two albums, *Nightmare City (1981)* and *Escape From The Planet Earth* (1983). In 1985, the Alley Cats transformed into the Zarkons with two new members, Freda Rente' and Terry Cooley, who replaced McCarthy on drums. With the joining of Rente' and Cooley, one Black female vocalist/keyboardist and one Black male drummer, the Zarkons was one of the most diverse crews of punks at the time. They had two full albums, *Riders In The Long Black Parade* (1985) and *Between the Idea & the Reality…Falls the Shadow* (1988), and continued to perform until the official disbandment in 1993.[47] Throughout over a decade of musical career, multiple albums, and making and performing Afro-Asian punk rock sounds, Chai has made indelible musical memories fronted by an Asian American woman rock musician.

Figure 5.5 The Zarkons. From left to right:
Terry Cooley, Dianne Chai, Randy Stodola, and Freda Rente'. Source: Zarkons' *Discogs* page.

[46] Like many protopunk rockers, Stodola, speaking to *Los Angeles Times* in 1980, never thought of the Alley Cats as a punk rock band (Snowden 1980). Even though often praised as the "godmother of punk," Patti Smith still clearly states that "I was not really a punk, and my band was never a punk rock band" (Kot 2015). Member of the DragOn Ladies, Dorothy Wang also never identified as a punk even though she played in a number of punk bands. There are many reasons why a musician identifies as a punk or not, but for women of color, one reason is that punk, in the U.S. at least, is often associated with white males, something that Wang could not relate to (Wang 2021).

[47] Chai and Cooley left the Zarkons in 1989, but Rente' and Stodola continued playing together with new lineups until the official disbandment of the Zarkons in 1993.

However, similar to the experience of Madame Wong's owner Esther Wong, who was not able to dodge the racial slur "dragon lady" labeled by both the mainstream media and underground punks (See Chapter 2), Chai was also exotified because of her looks. In *L.A. Times*, Chai was "a wailing Chinese banshee" (Waller 1982, 65) and "a striking Ronnie Spector look-a-like" (Snowden 1980, M88). Spector has greatly influenced the sound of rock as the lead singer of the Ronettes and she was born to a half-African American and half-Cherokee Native American mother and an Irish white father. In a much-praised edited archival collection about the punk and new wave history of California before circa 1981, Chai was called out as an "exotic Hawaiin [*sic*] bassist" (Lee, Shreader, and Belsito 1983, 16).[48] From the same collection, Alice Bag and Patricia Morrison of the Bags, a prominent Latina-fronted punk band, were also labeled as "two exotic girls" by the text writers, Craig Lee and Shreader (Lee, Shreader, and Belsito 1983, 29). Notably, Lee is a veteran white male guitarist who collaborated with many radical women in the underground music scene, including the Jewish lesbian singer-songwriter Phranc, and also played in the Bags. But like many punks from the same period and the same place (Ngô 2012), mainstream media and underground music journalists were knowingly and unknowingly reproducing and normalizing the gendered and racist rhetoric in the underground world of punk.

A Long Beach native, Janis Tanaka moved to San Francisco and has been an active bassist in the West Coast's rock scene since at least the mid-1980s. Tanaka has collaborated with at least 35 bands on bass and sometimes on backing vocals, traversing grunge, hard rock, punk, and metal. You can find her rocking with both underground rock

[48] It is unknown if Chai is actually from Hawaii. I was not able to locate any credible sources to clarify this.

bands and on television with more mainstream acts. Many of these bands are all-female or female-fronted bands, such as Pagan Babies (a short-lived band with Kat Bjelland, Deirdre Schletter, and Courtney Love in 1985), The Italian Whorenuns, Stone Fox, Femme Fatale, L7, P!nk, and Tanaka's first band Reign of Lee Kwan.[49] Tanaka moved to San Francisco in circa 1985 to start her first band with Jeanie M. Before Reign of Lee Kwan, Jeanie M. had another band A Happy Death, which was her first band. Tanaka and Jeanie M. are both women of Japanese descent. The band members—Tanaka, Jeanie M, Carmela Thompson, and Michael (last name unknown)—did not have fixed roles and would play on different instruments for different songs and they played at San Francisco's iconic Filipino-owned rock venue The Mab (Mabuhay Gardens) for a few times.

Figure 5.6 Reign of Lee Kwan.
From left to right: Janis, Michael, Carmela, and Jeanie. Source: Thompson's (2019) blog *Punk Rock Moments.*

Besides Cali natives like Janis Tanaka, Selena Wahng, and Tina Gordon (more later about these two rockers), San Francisco attracted many artists and musicians from

[49] The band name is spelled in many ways. Regarding the name and spelling of the band, Carmela Thompson (2019) recalls, "Lee Kwan was mentioned in the original Star Trek as the next world dictator after Hitler. There was no consensus on how to spell it, so we spelled it many different ways- Li Quan, Lee Kwan, Leigh Kawan, etc."

elsewhere to become part of the San Francisco scene in the 1980s and 1990s. Before moving to San Francisco to start the pioneering queercore band Tribe 8 in 1988, Leslie Shixiu Mah formed a hardcore band called Anti-Scrunti Faction (or, Anti-Scruntifaction or A.S.F.) with Tracie Thomas in 1984 in Boulder, Colorado, where she grew up. Mah is the child of a Caucasian mother of Irish and German heritage and a Chinese father, whose family fled the Chinese Communist Party's takeover in 1947. Raised to "be really nice and good and quiet and polite and sweet and just that whole stereotype of the Asian girl and the little Catholic girl," Mah got into punk rock because of its obnoxiousness and androgyny (Alcantara, Mah, and Whang 1997, 216–17). Mah weaponized such qualities of punk with A.S.F. At the time, Mah carried a mohawk hairstyle with one side shaved and a pigtail in the back (See Figure 5.7), which resembles the queue hairstyle mandatory for the majority of Chinese men of many ethnic backgrounds in the Qing dynasty, also a symbol of anti-Chinese sentiment common to find in political anti-Chinese cartoons and minstrel iconographies and lyrics (Lee 1999; Hamamoto 1994).[50] The Pigtail Ordinance is a failed anti-Chinese legislation in the United States in the late 1870s, a law that would legalize forcing Qing Chinese male prisoners in San Francisco to cut their queue. The failure to assimilate, as embodied through the resistance to change the queue hairstyle, was met with ridicule and insults, to say the least, and sometimes a matter of life and death for many Chinese men who migrated to the U.S. during the late Qing.

[50] For example, see a political cartoon named "Pacific Chivalry," drawn by Thomas Nast (1869) and published in *Harper's Weekly*. This political cartoon shows an American man embodying the state of California pulling a Chinese man's pigtail, with a text to the right that reads, "Courts of justice closed to Chinese. Extra taxes to yellowjack."

Figure 5.7 Mah performing as the bassist of A.S.F. at Club Foot in the mid-1980s, with an arm tattoo that says anti-war in Japanese kanji. Photo by Murray Bowles. Source: Mah's (2018) Instagram.

The artwork and performances of A.S.F. are not any less provocative than those of Tribe 8. Mah regularly engages with elements of her Chinese heritage and other Asian cultures throughout her career. Mah created A.S.F.'s 1986 album's front and back cover art that centers on images of dragon, one of the most common cultural symbols of China in Western imagination with often negative connotations (Tao 2009). Mah's persona and artistic engagements of Chinese and other Asian materials force punk's white riots to face its Orientalism, enacting a form of "bad Asian"—unapologetic Asian punks (See Chapter 3)—that claims the authority and autonomy for Asians to do punk, to punk (v.) punk (n.). A.S.F. started before queercore really formed, but they were doing exactly what a queercore band would do—two queer women on the fringe of punk challenging its norms around gender, race, sexuality, and hetero-masculinism with songs like "Big Women" (1984) and "Big Dick" (1986). Their 7 inch *A Sure Fuck* (1985) also provokes the patriarchy of punk with songs like "Slave To My Estrogen" while taunting toxic masculinism with the cover art that shows a naked man with an unrealistically enlarged penis that has just ejaculated. If seen alongside the genealogy of queercore, A.S.F., hailing from a suburb of the Mountain West, might be a fringe of queercore fringes—too

far away from its cultural centers and too early to gain traction without an established vocabulary of queer punk helping A.S.F. to be more identifiable. But if seen from a genealogy of Asian American women's rock, they made a milestone, signaling the arrival of a wave of Asian women-fronted punk and hardcore acts.

Making Space in the Age of Cathartic Art: *Shut Up White Boy* and the DragOn Ladies

There are notably more actively involved Asian women rockers and punks after the 1990s. There are a few queer Asian American women musicians, whose works help piece together a genealogy of Asian American women's rock music that could only be found on the fringe of the then-established musical movements of queercore and riot grrrl. I am able to collect pieces of information on them due to the arrival of the Internet age and that music fans, artists, and academics started to digitally document the underground scene of the time. I am able to find differently obscure trails left in such digital places as deserted Myspace band pages with broken links, fan archival websites documenting local rock history, and low-quality YouTube videos. This section also pays special attention to members of an all-Asian queer women punk band called the DragOn Ladies, formed by Dorothy Wang, Leslie Mah, and Tina Gordon. They created an original soundtrack for *Shut Up White Boy* (2002) (SUWB), an experimental short film directed by Vũ T. Thu Hà. I was able to reach and interview the four of them to help break down the subversive messages of *Shut Up White Boy* and the DragOn Ladies as well as to outline their musical trajectory and activism. The rest of the chapter pivots towards and highlights these Asian American fringes of fringes in the 1990s and early

2000s, aiming to sketch the silhouette of "obscure Asian punk rock," in Tina Gordon's (2021) words.

Two feature bands on the compilation *There's a Dyke in the Pit* (1992) consist of Asian members, Lucy Stoners and Tribe 8. Lucy Stoners consisted of two members of Asian descent, Selena Wahng (sometimes spelled as Whang) on vocals and bass and Kim Mosler on drums, in addition to Klara Lux on guitar. Selena Wahng is a Korean American transgender man and grew up in a working-class family in early 1970s South Korea. He went to New York University for a Ph.D. in Performance Studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s and remains as a performing artist. Kim Mosler is mixed Asian of Chinese and German heritage. Besides their early appearance in this Outpunk Records' classic compilation, Lucy Stoners released an EP *Father* in 1993. In the summer of 1995, Dorothy Wang, a Chinese American musician who grew up in Tennessee and moved to San Francisco after college, joined Lucy Stoners as their tour guitarist in replacement for Lux for a West Coast tour. The band of this lineup opened for Sleater-Kinney and the CeBe Barnes Band. This was Wang's (2021) first experience with an all-Asian queer female band at the time. This brief collaboration likely also created the first ever all-Asian American queer female band that had been on tour. Outside Lucy Stoners, Wang and Mosler have a two-piece dark rock band called Frozen Chicken Patties and they have been performing around the San Francisco Bay Area since 1995. A multi-instrumentalist classically trained musician-turned rocker, Wang's artistic activism also finds a home in supporting many Asian American filmmakers by creating original music and film score, sounding out alternative Asian Americas at queer, women, and people of color centered film festivals and places nationally and internationally. Besides Vu's SUWB (2002),

Wang also wrote music for Vu's feature film *Kieu* (2006) and Jennifer Lin's short film *Look Again* (2007), among others.

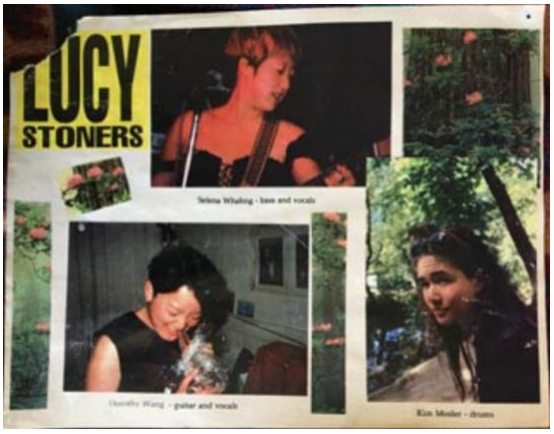

Figure 5.8 Lucy Stoners' all-Asian queer lineup. From left to right: Dorothy Wang, Selena Wahng, and Kim Mosler. Source: Dorothy Wang's (n.d.) website *Music Background*.

Leslie Mah co-founded Tribe 8 in 1988, one of the first queercore bands and known for their political music writing and radical live performances that often involve the singer Lynn Breedlove performing shirtless and wearing a dildo. Tribe 8 is named after a position of lesbian sexual practice, tribadism, or commonly known as tribbing or scissoring position. Mah's musical performances with Tribe 8 divert from the butch lesbian image she had with A.S.F. and lean towards a femme-oriented dyke image, where she combines "feminist menace, palpable rage, and unruly pleasure" (Shoemaker 2010). While the original lineup had two women of Asian descent, Leslie Mah (guitar) and Mahia Kobayashi (bass), the consistent members are Mah and Breedlove. Kobayashi is Canadian and she left Tribe 8 after their early recordings such as "Manipulate" (1992), *Pig Bitch* (1992), and *By The Time We Get To Colorado* (1993). Mah (bass), Dorothy Wang (guitar/violin), and Kim Mosler (drums) are joined by vocalist Carmen White to form an all-female queer punk band named Slow Club (1994-2000). One Black frontwoman and three bandmates of Chinese descent, Slow Club is a contemporary

embodiment of queer women's Afro-Asian punk. Tribe 8 for many years also exemplified queer women's Afro-Asian punk with Mah on guitar and Lynn Payne (a.k.a. Tantrum), who is from Toronto, on bass.[51]

Figure 5.9 Tribe 8 performing at Gilman in the early 1990s. From left to right: Leslie Mah, Lynn Breedlove, and Mahia Kobayashi. Photo by Murray Bowles. Source: Mah's (2018) Instagram.

Figure 5.10 Slow Club. From left to right: Leslie Mah, Kim Mosler, Carmen White, and Dorothy Wang. Source: Dorothy Wang's (n.d.) website *Music Background*.

On the other hand, in the mid-1990s and early 2000s hard rock and metal scene, besides bassist Janis Tanaka, we can also find Tina Gordon on drums for Lost Goat. Gordon (2021) refers to herself as "ubiquitous brown" and is mixed Asian of Chinese descent. Her mother was born and grew up in San Francisco Chinatown and was the first

[51] Payne has appeared on many recordings with Tribe 8, including three of their four albums from the 1990s, *Fist City* (1995), *Snarkism* (1996), and *Role Models for Amerika* (1998).

in the family to marry outside the community to a Jewish American man of English and Romanian heritage. Besides Lost Goat, Gordon also drums for an all-female AC/DC tribute band called AC/DShe as Philomena Rudd. Gordon has dedicated her entire teenage and adult life to challenging the lack of women's representation in different realms of life.

> When I was a kid, I played baseball and I wanted to be a baseball player. I was like why aren't there any female baseball players. I felt like activism was built into that. And then I got really into school politics. I was like there should really be more women in politics, why aren't there women in politics. Activism was part of that. And then I got completely disillusioned and then I found rock and roll. I was like why aren't there more women playing drums.

Gordon (2021) recalls a clear path of her activism that has been driven by the perennial desire of increasing women's presence in male-dominated fields. A producer, musician, event promoter, filmmaker, and now also a board member of the International Cannabis Farmers Association, Gordon's activism currently focuses on cultivating cannabis and advancing the legalization and education of cannabis. She relocated into the mountains of Southern Humboldt County in 2007 to start Moon Made Farms, caring for a 40 acres farm and providing healthy medicine to needed people. In 2000, Dorothy Wang (bass/vocals), Leslie Mah (guitar/vocals), Tina Gordon (guitar/vocals), and Kim Mosler (drums), already friends with each other in the network of San Francisco's DIY and underground music scene, were to form an unapologetically Asian and unapologetically queer punk band, the DragOn Ladies.[52]

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[52] Seme Sung is the drummer who recorded the soundtrack with Wang, Mah, and Gordon, while Mosler drummed with the band for live performances, including playing at Tranny Fest, now called San Francisco Transgender Film Festival—the first transgender cultural festival, co-founded by Christopher Lee, a pioneering and beloved activist-artist crucial to the fight for transgender rights. Mah also participated in Lee's films, see (Chen 2018) for an analysis on trans riot and Lee's films.

Vũ T. Thu Hà's SUWB might be the only film of its kind, an all queer, all API, collaborative 16 millimeter black and white film, featuring some of the most active Asian American queer artists in the Bay Area. A classic punk film shot in San Francisco in 2000, it tells the story of a group of queer punks' creative violent revenge on a "fucking yellow fever jerk." Mah plays one of the waitresses and Gordon plays Mah's girlfriend. Wang participated in the shooting of the alley scene of a gang of Asian dyke punks kicking the white boy's ass. The whole process was both "crazy and magical," Vu told me when I approached her for a copy of the film. With the access to free filming equipment at the art school she was attending at the time, Vu had to shoot, edit, and finish the film within a semester. A truly collaborative project. Wang and Mah were both there in the first group meeting in October 2020. Vu invited some friends, and friends invited friends. 14 plus people from all walks of life gathered in Vu's tiny living room of her San Francisco Mission apartment and cranked out the screenplay together. For Vu (2021), "it was all heart and soul." She cooked food and the group contemplated on the desire to make "a good high production well planned out film, where there is a goofy girl gang; low budget; over the top but yet still successful at getting to some deep issues film" (Vu 2021). Together, they tried to figure out things such as how campy the film was going to be and how serious, how violent, and how real the violence would be (Gordon 2021).

"The 90s was really a time for cathartic art," says Mah (2021) while explaining why SUWB went for shooting a scene of the fantasy of violent revenge as a way to deal with yellow fever, the sexualization and objectification of Asian women. Making space for queer Asian women's rage in cathartic art was much needed in the 1990s. While zines like *Bamboo Girl*, *Chop Suey Spex,* and *Slant* all use violent and provocative visuals to

subvert the one-dimensional representation of Asian women and girls and quiet and meek, there was a palpable dearth of the unruly use of violence in the music of Asian American women. Mah (2021) took the opportunity of shooting SUWB and making music as the DragOn Ladies to address the under-representation of "angry Asian women" in the discourses around "angry women in rock," a concept that was getting a lot of attention in the late 1990s. Andrea Juno's (1996) book *Angry Women in Rock*, as well as her earlier bestseller *Angry Women* (1991), is an important cultural imprint steering the media attention to and the formation of the subject of angry women in rock. The book features June Millington and Tribe 8. It also puts Yoko Ono's and Yoshimi P-We's names, two Japanese women rockers of undeniable transnational and international influence, on the "Women in Rock Map." Creating in-your-face, independent cathartic queer Asian art also refuses the commercialization and appropriation of women's anger by the music media. By the mid-1990s, concurrent with the mainstream media's loss of interest in riot grrrl, the music press appropriated key concepts of the riot grrrl movement and repackaged a group of female musicians as "angry women in rock," such as Alanis Morissette, Fiona Apple, and the Spice Girls, despite the fact that many denied this label, turning the angry women in rock into an enterprise of millions of dollars (Schilt 2003). Although not a musical movement per se, "angry women in rock" has become a genealogy itself.

Validating rage and anger in the fantasy space of the '90s art is also of particular value to queer Asian women who had to deal with harassment and erasure on the daily basis. The double femininization of Asian American women as both Asian and women means that their queerness and sexual fluidity are often erased as a kind of impossible

desires, ones that are often tied to "the elision of queer female diasporic sexuality and subjectivity (Gopinath 2005, 19). "Nobody has ever really accepted that I'm truly bisexual. Nobody has ever allowed it. It's still very much a point of argument between anybody that I've been with. People just don't accept it," says Margaret Cho (Michelson 2018), a veteran LGBT rights activist-artist for over 2 decades who has been outspoken about her sexuality. This normalized illegibility of a queer Asian woman's sexuality is not simply an issue of representation. It speaks to a racialized hierarchy of sexual autonomy that is mediated by nationalist politics of cultural citizenship and to the body politic of Asian women in the service sector that engenders these bodies as disposable and always available for heterosexual, and exclusively heterosexual, pleasures.

"I would get hit on by men a lot. And I had short hair and yet these white men would still ask me out. I was like, 'Come on, can't you just read me? Can't you just tell that I don't date men,'" says Vu (2021) with a wry laugh. Working as a cashier and front-desk staffer at a local co-op called Rainbow in the Mission District, Vu had been in an involuntary position being interpellated into the heterosexual and always-available object of yellow fever too many times. SUBW is a collaborative response by a group of queer Asian Pacific Islander American women artists being fed up with harassment, objectification, and outright racism. The trailer was a hit during the fundraising karaoke organized by many Filipinx volunteers of the Asian Pacific Islander Queer Women and Transgender Community (APIQWTC) that they had to play the trailer again. "It was like this moment of empowerment for Asian American queer women," recalls Dorothy Wang (2021) about how she was surprised to find so many people of the community were so

excited about the film. The film, just like its title, is a fast and direct message to the API community that this is the representation that we all have been waiting for.

SUWB plays with a lot of butch femme stereotypes over a simple plotline: In a Vietnamese restaurant, infuriated by the racist and sexist behaviors of the white boy (Philip Dachelet) at the table with his girlfriend Cherisma (Cherisma T. Feril), two lesbian waitresses Liz and Leslie (Liz Xuan Stevens and Leslie Mah) dump a huge amount of MSG into the white boy's food. The rest of the film is plausibly all fantasy. One fantasy scene features Cherisma and Liz making out in the bathroom of the restaurant; one fantasy scene features a group of Asian women dressed in varying traditional and nontraditional attire and accessories worshipping the white boy in submissive ways; and one fantasy scene shows a girl gang beating up the white boy in a dark alley after Mah drags him out of the restaurant like a dog with a chain. These fantasy scenes, layered together and between reality, confuse the subject(s) and actuality of the fantasies. Instead of constructing definitive narratives with regards to lesbian relationships between Asian women or revenge on a yellow fever jerk, the film confronts the hegemonic ideology of the illegibility and unrepresentability of Asian/American women' queer and perverse sexualities by leaving the decision to the audience regarding whether or not these scenes are real, which ones are real, or whose fantasies they are.

Figure 5.11 Behind the scene photo. The girl gang in *Shut Up White Boy*. Tina Gordon and Dorothy Wang in the middle to the right side. Photo by Chloe Sherman. Source: Instagram (Sherman 2018).

Figure 5.12 Behind the scene photo. From left to right: Tina Gordon, Leslie Mah, and Anne Lundbom (also SUWB's martial arts coordination). Photo by Chloe Sherman. Source: Instagram (Sherman 2018).

The layering of contradictory messages is an editing technique also used in the trailer and is undergirded by its punk soundscape and use of self-Orientalizing musical clichés. Upon watching the trailer, I got instantly hooked for its combination of queerness, campy acting, reversed violence that is usually on Asian bodies in reality, punk music and cast, and a self-Orientalizing soundscape. The trailer starts with four women posing for the camera in seductive ways with background music sampled from a random CD called *Traditional Chinese Erhu Music* (Lei Qiang), which Vu got from a friend. Immediately after this, the DragOn Ladies' original track "Choy Suey" starts

playing. The opening riff that parodies the notorious oriental riff (See Chapter 2) starts playing while we see the white boy being chased by the girl gang in an alley. The musical signs in the first 30 seconds of the trailer quickly establish the sonic realm of the film using both authentic, though sonically exotic for Western ears, traditional Chinese music and a punk parody of the fabricated stereotypical Asian riff. The transition from traditional Chinese music to "Chop Suey" signals the narrative diversion from inviting the orientalist gaze to the bad punk girl gang's creative revenge. Engaging with musical signs of Asianness is a way for Vu and the DragOn Ladies to confront the aural racialization and exoticization of Asia. "The Chinese music back then and Asian music from Asia was exoticized so much in the U.S. back then," notes Vu (2021) while explaining her musical choices in the trailer. "There was so much of like you walk into a hippie co-op store, you would hear people play exotic music that they never heard before. . . [so] sampling those was to in our own way make commentaries." The DragOn Ladies' oriental riff parody is also to poke fun at the stereotyping of Asians in punk and rock music. For members of the DragOn Ladies, they are all familiar with the endemic use of the oriental riff in popular music, such as in Siouxsie and the Banshees' "Hong Kong Garden" (1978) and David Bowie's "China Girl" (1983). Mah (2021) notes that this musical cliché sends a message that, "hi, we are white people, singing about Asian people now." They parody the riff at the beginning of "Choy Suey," as well as the song's title, to first invite the orientalist gaze and then disrupt the gaze with the rest of the song failing to deliver the signified Asianness as Mah growls and snarls over catchy guitar riffs and solos with her classic employment of wah-wah effects.

The name of the band, DragOn Ladies, is a playful re-appropriation of one of the most tiring tropes of Asian and Asian American women, "lady dragon," added with a layer of campy style. But the band name and "Chop Suey" are not the only ways that the DragOn Ladies satirize racism and sexism. In another original song from the soundtrack, "Drag On," the female narrator (sung by Gordon) adopts a queer gaze in the lyrics:

> Hey what's your name
> you are real good looking
>
> Shakin' those hips really
> gets me cookin'
>
> Shake them to the left
> And shake them to the right
>
> Why you gotta wear
> that skirt so tight
>
> Drag on, drag on. Ladies drag on
> Drag on, drag on. Ladies drag on
>
> …
>
> If you want to get off
> let me give you a hand
>
> Make you feel like a woman
> but fuck like a man

In between the chorus and the second verse, the song is also inserted with sounds of women's moaning, indicating (lesbian) sexual intercourse or the narrator's self-pleasuring after getting aroused by the lady in drag. The pun "drag on" makes the unapologetic queer gaze potentially empowering for both lesbian and trans listeners.

The DragOn Ladies was a short venture, but the members have continued to collaborate on musical projects and activism. Mah's decades of activism mostly recently resulted in a project called Comrade Lover, a punk jazz, social justice loving, lion slam,

mostly QTPOC dance troupe. The word comrade in Chinese has a common connotation of “homosexuals.” Comrade Lover, 爱人同志, thus has a bilingual pun, meaning “homosexual lover.” Mah teamed up with Jen-Mei Wu to found Comrade Lover a few years ago when Mah was planning a Chinese New Year party and she thought of lion dance because it is a traditional Chinese dance culture for ridding of bad energy and bringing good fortune during special celebrations. Two other DragOn Ladies, Wang and Gordon, have both made appearances performing with Comrade Lover. They regularly combine traditional cultural elements of lion dancing, percussions, and cymbals with distorted guitar, trumpet, and the drum set to appeal, while also not appeal, to a variety of audiences. Because of their unconventional approaches, it was difficult to collaborate with lion dance professionals from martial arts schools. So, they went to Chinatown themselves and picked out the lion dance costume in black and red to their satisfaction and started learning lion dance through YouTube videos. Comrade Lover continues the DIY spirit of the underground art scene that Mah has grown out of.

Figure 5.13 Comrade Lover (2017) protesting outside an airport. Facebook post. Caption: No wall no ban! Source: Comrade Lover Facebook page.

Looking at locations of Comrade Lover's live performances reveals the different demographics that they engage—in a conference room full of mostly adult and older Asian people, with many appearing in shock while watching Comrade Lover's entrance; outside the airport to protest the Trump administration's Muslim ban and to support the refugees stranded at the airport; and on the streets for the #ReclaimMLK march in Oakland. "We would insert ourselves," says Mah (2021). "Sometimes people would ask us to play, but a lot of times it's like 'Oh, we would just show up.'" Comrade Lover not only takes up physical and aural space like conventional forms of street protests, but they also do so by using often aurally foreign instruments and de-exoticizing a variety of Chinese cultural elements that are seen as archaic and exotic, calling for the respect of their identities. The banner photo in their Facebook group page is a child reaching out and touching the lion dance costume's tongue while a mother (presumably) holds the child. The photo reminds us of the community work the group does and the different communities and generations of Asian Americans they bring together. Is this a punk group? Or how is it not one? What I advocate here, then, is not to redefine punk but to look at bad punks as simply punk, an understanding that matters for both the ever-changing, diverse punk community and the diverse Asian immigrant and Asian American communities. Rather than a non-sustainable "no future," Asian fury offers a sustainable reimagination of punk futurity.

Final Notes: Imagining Otherwise and Elsewhere

This chapter strives to sketch a narrative about Asian American women rock and punk musicians, through which, I argue, there emerges the silhouette of an Asian

American musical movement. June Millington's repeated "failing" and turning away underscores the fact that as a woman lead guitarist and an Asian woman in rock at the time, she was treading a path without any previous example to follow.[53] This isolated feeling as an Asian woman rock musician had not changed much in the mid-1980s. "When I was a girl in the punk scene, you didn't have Riot Grrrl, and we didn't have queercore, and we didn't have e-mail. And I always felt so isolated, and now people have access," Mah recalls the isolated experience she had when she started playing music (Alcantara, Mah, and Whang 1997, 227). Due to the lack of role models and examples, members of the DragOn Ladies (Mah, Gordon, and Wang) stress the commonality and importance of breaking out of the mold as queer women rock musicians with a Chinese/Asian American cultural background.

> It's like our mothers were sort of the last of our lineage who did that more traditional [life], albeit like interracial marriage, being an immigrant. So, we had this opportunity to sort of live our own lives, but there wasn't much of a template for it, you know, so we were automatically on the fringe because we weren't getting married and having babies. You know, and a lot of us were, for the first time, you know talking about our sexual assault, we were talking about our eating disorders, we were discussing, like, sexual harassment. And there was a lot of pushback and I think a lot of us are somewhat traumatized from coming out as teenagers and living that life. (Mah 2021)

The isolation and urgency to break out of the mold in part speak to the unrepresentability of Asian bodies within the dominant racial spectrum of American rock music; in part due to the limited mainstream success of previous examples; in part due to the continued sidelining and erasure of Asian and women of color rockers; and in part are a result of the role of Asians in the mainstream music industry largely as representation (See Chapter 2).

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[53] On the other hand, there have always been great Black women singers, guitarists, and rockers. I gesture towards this list of "130 Historic Black Women Guitarists and Bassists You Need To Know," curated by the *She Shreds* staff (2020), as a quick primer and archival resource.

Even though this chapter aims to piece together a rough genealogy of Asian American women rockers and punks, the surveyed musicians in the pre-2000s were often unaware of such a genealogy due to a lack of awareness of each other's presence. When getting started in the 1980s and 1990s, many likely had never heard of Fanny through the television or the radio. When Dorothy Wang (2021) met Fanny's June Millington as June's sound engineer almost 15 years ago, neither of them had heard of each other. Wang remembers how excited June was to see her because she was probably the first Asian dyke person June ever saw in her 50 years of musical career. Fast forward to today's alternative and indie rock scenes, where there are markedly more Asian women-led acts (See Chapter 4) and more visibility aided by the power of digitalism, it is still a common sentimentality of these musicians to worry about being seen as a novelty decided by their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality (Euse 2017).

To briefly conclude my point, while many critiques demand that the riot grrrl feminist punk movement needs to evolve and reconstruct its narratives and there is much value in interweaving marginalized pieces back into this dominant feminist punk framework of the 90s, perhaps what is also much needed, if not more, is to see these pieces as what they were/as and to imagine and construct their own genealogies outside this and other established dominant framework. "Can an empty archive also be full?" Nguyen (2012b) ponders over this question while donating her POC zine collections. My gesture towards constructing other frameworks is a positive answer to this question. Perhaps what we need more now is to conceive alternative spaces, articulate alternative vocabulary, and more importantly, find ways to conceive and articulate alternative, yet often already-existing, musical movements. Writing in 1998, Nguyen laments that, "But

still I'm waiting for my race riot." A race riot, from Asian America, has always already happened and is still happening.

Chapter 6:

An Asian American Sound?: Reflections on Recurring Themes

Is There an Asian American Sound?

> I haven't yet met an Asian American musician or producer who is interested in creating something aurally recognizable as an Asian American sound; rather, almost all such cultural workers are interested in the political and artistic potential of Asian Americans who could change social land- and soundscapes with their mere presence.
>
> — Deborah Wong (2004, 237)

"I haven't yet met an Asian American musician or producer who is interested in creating something aurally recognizable as *an Asian American sound*," writes Deborah Wong (2004, 237; emphasis mine) in her trailblazing book on the music of Asian Americans that covers a variety of styles and ethnic groups, including, for example, Asian American hip hop, jazz, avant-garde styles, karaoke, Japanese taiko, and Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese musical cultures. Through this astonishing survey of the landscape of American music up until the early 2000s, it is equally astonishing to learn about the reluctance of these professional and grassroots musicians, as well as scholars, to claim their work as an "Asian American sound." Considering the racial politics of different musics, it is reasonable to be cautious when making such a claim. After all, claiming historically Black music such as jazz and R&B as an Asian American sound versus predominantly white classical music as an Asian American sound are different. Due to the lack of presence and recognition in a variety of musical spaces, Asian American musicians are often seen as the "interlopers" of both Western "high" culture (G. Wang 2009) and "low" culture. Perhaps to circumvent this strand of argumentation, in the official promotional description of Wong's book, *Speak It Louder: Asian*

Americans Making Music, we can find a semi-disclaimer passage: "This book is not about 'Asian American music' but rather about Asian Americans making music. This key distinction allows the author to track a wide range of musical genres." Here, in the shadow of the historical complications sprawling out from the politics of racial (in)authenticity in relation to music, Asian American music/sounds become antithetical to certain musical genres. By differentiating "Asian American music" and "Asian Americans making music," the statement is premised on a version of Asian American music having to be aurally recognizable for its racial particularities, which could be done through, for instance, lyrical engagement with Asian/American experiences and musical engagement with Asian/American instruments or musical traditions.[54]

This approach to conceptualizing Asian American music may be narrow, but it is not without good reasons and in fact, as Wong points out, reflects the mentality of many Asian American musicians and producers about their own music-making practice—they are not interested in creating music that may speak loudly to their Asian American identity. The reluctance to claim something as an "Asian American sound" speaks to many concerns, such as the intention not to exotify one's music especially when one is not mobilizing any Asian or Asian American instruments or musical traditions, or the intention not to give a false impression of snatching a musical culture historically belonging to another group of people, or the intention to save space to continue the civil rights movement tradition of creating alliances through music. Similar to Wong's

[54] "Asian American instruments" here are supposed to have open-ended connotations. For example, for Jack Hsu, the frontman of progressive rock band Hsu-nami, what he uses as his main instrument—a remodeled Chinese instrument *erhu*—is an Asian American instrument, as opposed to necessarily an Asian instrument, because for him, this instrument is amplified as an instrument of rock music and for rock music (Hsu 2013), while for listeners, his instrument may be either, neither, or both.

observation, throughout Cat Zhang's (2021) career as a music and culture writer, she notices that many artists she spoke to in fact dislike the term "Asian American music" because, similar to the problems of a pan-Asian American identity, it implies a shallow, essentializing, singular aesthetic. Thus, as Zhang (2021) stresses, theorizing Asian American music is "endlessly challenging." That is to say, to a large extent, talking about Asian American music is different from, say, talking about Asian American jazz or Asian American hip hop. Quite the opposite, doing Asian American jazz can be "a way for Asian American musicians to rescue certain possibilities made so difficult by racializations that muffle and silence them" (Wong 2004, 179) and doing Asian American rap can be a way to confront the "authenticity crisis" aided by the model minority myth making Asians incompatible with street cred (O. Wang 2007, 41). Consequently, it prompts me to ponder: How do we speak of Asian American sounds or Asian American music in ways that do them justice?

To begin with, there is no single, universal version of Asian American sounds/music. Just like we would never call George Harrison's music "Asian American" or Peter Gabriel's music "Black British" based on the fact that their music is aurally recognizable as touching on elements of two cultures, a different approach to understanding Asian American sounds/music is much needed.[55] A conceptualization of an Asian American sound that is necessarily musically or aurally recognizable as a mixture of Asian and American elements and is produced by and for the Asian ethnic groups is unable to reflect neither the complexity nor the accuracy of this racial group.

[55] Joseph S.C. Lam (1999) observed a similar conversation during a scholarly debate about the ambiguous meaning of Asian American music, where "a white American composer who creates with both Asian and American musical elements asks if his music is Asian American or not, and points out that the mixing of cultural/ethnic musics is a global phenomenon."

Furthermore, this conceptualization, which resonates with the ways that ethnic musics are typically characterized in the West, is anchored by a European-centered knowledge (Lam 1999) and established racist discourses that script Asians and Asian Americans as emotionless and conformist (G. Wang 2009). Due to the frustration of not having a clear-cut definition of Asian American music, many scholars and audiences have eschewed this potentially problematic term or even doubted if Asian American music exists (Lam 1999). The political empowerment and pitfalls of discussing Asian American music are as ever-challenging as discussing the identity of Asian America in other contexts (e.g. Bow 1995; Lowe 1991).

Resisting this approach and embracing Asian American music's "rapid growth, diversity of styles, and changing musical and ethnic meanings. . . challenges European and analytical parameters of music, such as performance practice, style, genre, repertory, and so forth, which reference specific ethnic peoples. . . by direct hereditary lineages, common languages, accepted histories, geographic sites, and social understandings of community and belonging" (Lam 1999, 39). Therefore, claiming the name of Asian American music, especially when it is *not* aurally recognizable as an Asian American sound, becomes a powerful statement to challenge an elitist and colonizing epistemology that perpetuates discourses of otherness through music. Only then shall we reclaim healthy space for Asian American artists to engage with one's cultural heritage without necessarily being interpellated into a subject furthering (self-)Orientalism or to turn (self-)Orientalism into a tool of critique and delivering activist messages.

Although there is an apparent version of it commonly resisted for good reasons, there is also a version focusing less on (claiming the authority over certain) musical styles

and more on capturing fuller experiences of Asian Americans. The folk trio A Grain of Sand's (Chris Iijima, Nobuko Miyamoto, and William "Charlie" Chin) first album *Music for the Struggle of Asians in America* in 1973 is widely regarded as the first album of Asian American music (e.g. Phillips 1998; Kim 2011). These activist artists were an active presence in the Asian American Movement and became the first group to have self-consciously produced music promoting the pan-ethnic identity of Asian America. For A Grain of Sand, the album is a political statement, calling for the solidarity and empowerment of being Asian American and the solidarity and alliances with African American and Latin American social movements. The trio was not the first Asian American group to release albums or the first Asian American musicians to combine Asian musical elements with American musical styles.[56] What has earned them the praise of "the birth of Asian American music" (Phillips 1998) heavily lies in the radicalization of their music—their use of music to deliver activist messages. If politicization is the key to the formation of Asian American music, it then provides a useful angle to free ourselves from the impasse of musical authority versus racial (in)authenticity to explore Asian American music, as Lam (1999) so thoroughly charts out, as an heuristic device, attending to diverse sonic and non-sonic variables in various formulations and meaning-makings of Asian American music (30).

As singer-songwriter MILCK (2017) succinctly yet powerfully responds to the political nature of her music, "As a woman of color, any art I do is political." While A Grain of Sand uses their music as an unmistakable announcement that Asian American music is political, MILCK uses her music to contest what it means to be political and

[56] *Music for the Struggle of Asians in America* (1973) is largely folk music but occasionally, we can also find elements of jazz, soul and blues and a Chinese instrument *dizi* in it.

what is political music. These days, there is a version of Asian American music that simply means music created by those who have Asian heritage. This framing is commonly used in media coverage, public scholarly efforts, and college curriculums to promote the awareness of the existence of a variety of musicians and the breadth and quality of their musical works. For example, courses like "Asian American Music" and "Music in Asian America" were offered at Columbia University and the University of Virginia.[57] There are also the projects at the Music of Asian America Research Center and the Asian American Music Society, the "Asian American Music Playlist" Oliver Wang (2015) created for the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and Cat Zhang's (2021) recent viral essay for *Pitchfork*, pondering over "What Is Asian American Music, Really?" Under this conceptual perimeter, all the artists surveyed in Wong's (2004) book are making Asian American sounds/music. While these discourses do not always set out to be critical or political, there is an urgent need to politicize them, especially considering the historical lack of awareness and recognition of Asian American activism. To that end, this dissertation not only addresses a variety of cases where the artists make and complicate the looks, sounds, and affects of Asian American music but also unravels how these works capture fuller Asian American expressions to undo the Orientalized body that is deemed inscrutable and apolitical.

Moreover, how Asian American musicians think about Asian American sounds is ever-changing. Like many South Asian immigrants and their children (D. Wong 1994),

[57] This institutional support, however, is a more recent development. Lam (1999) recounted a rejection by a leading musicology journal, where the editor cited his use of Asian American music as too broad and instead invited him to submit something on Chinese music. Lam uses this academic experience to call upon Asian Americanists to begin embracing the term Asian American music to address "the lag of conventional music categories to the rapidly changing music realities" (43).

Bochan Huy grew up listening transnationally to a lot of Cambodian new wave music both in her homeland and that made by fellow Cambodian Americans, which is usually circulated at local Cambodian grocery stores. She (2020) refers to this music as "Cambodian rock sound," suggesting that Cambodian (American) musicians are not victims or copycats of Western mass-produced popular music and have instead inserted their own flavor into it. Huy is one of many contemporary Asian American popular musicians reclaiming their cultural hybridity through embracing the multicultural musical influences in their music. For instance, Selena Wahng's "Killing for Pleasure" (1997) embodies the uncanny connection between punk rock and the spiritual power of Korean shamens; Dengue Fever has been covering classic Cambodian songs and making original Cambodian psychedelic-influenced songs in Khmer since 2002; electronic pop band Ming and Ping is known for their Cantonese Opera inspired performances; Shanghai Restoration Project is known for fusing classic Chinese pop songs and instruments in their experimental electronic music; Polartropica creates whimsical space-pop fusions in "Wild Lyfe" (2020) with Jett Kwong adding *guzheng* melodies; Asian American artists also make covers of mega pop songs to address anti-Asian racism and violence, for example, Tow-Arboleda Films teamed up with rapper Jason Chu in making "This is Asian America" (2018), inspired by Childish Gambino's "This is America" (2018), and artist Arigato Grande made "7 Meats" (2019) that sings about Korean BBQ to parody Ariana Grande's "7 Rings" (2019). As the examples show, many contemporary musicians no longer shy away from making something aurally recognizable as an Asian American sound by engaging with Asian and American elements both sonically and non-sonically.

Besides contributing to the discourses of the political nature and necessity of the work of many Asian American women rock musicians and promoters, in doing so, this dissertation also offers interventions regarding what it means to be political for Asian American women in the subcultural field of rock and punk, which extend beyond conventional conceptualizations of musical activism as exemplified by the work of the members of A Grain of Sand. It entails the investigations of how come the interventions and contributions of certain Asian American women punks and rockers have been suffering from de-politicization and how to expand our understanding of the political engagement, intentionally or unintentionally, of Asian American women in rock and punk in ways that capture the particularities of their lived experience as first- or second-generation Asian Americans with various backgrounds. Doing so, my research not only enriches how to understand Asian American music, but it also reminds us that interpreting an Asian American musician's work as "Asian American music" is always one of the infinite ways to approach this work because Asian American experiences are fundamentally intersectional. Knowing that one's music can be Asian American music, Chinese, Cambodian, or Indian American music, American music, or simply music all at the same time, although each identification entails its own strand of inquiries, is a key premise of using Asian American music as a productive critical lens. This means that, for example, the Cambodian new wave music that many Southeast Asian kids listen to is both a Cambodian rock sound and an Asian American sound and so much more all at once. This critical lens allows space for confronting the internal heterogeneity and continuous evolvement of Asian America to both identify common struggles of these peoples and their differences.

The Fuzziness of Asian American Musical Activism

"Just keep doing it." This is what Mayda Miller (2021) told me about how she tackles the discrimination she faces in the music industry, such as not being selected for certain jobs or subtexts like "you can't do rock because you are Asian." Miller is a Korean adoptee and an R&B-influenced funk rock multi-instrumentalist based in Twin Cities, Minnesota. What is hinted here is the power and empowerment of the pure existence of Asian musicians in various settings of the music industry. Likewise, in my conversation with Leslie Mah (2021) and Dorothy Wang (2021) about the frustration of underground Asian rockers being disillusioned, they both emphasize the importance of "keep playing it" even when it seems your instrument is not taking you anywhere or paying your bills. Indeed, for the bodies often erased from the predominantly white musical spaces, such as Black and Asian bodies, their mere presence, rocking the stage or raving in the crowd of music clubs, is both an artistic and political statement, inserting alternative bodies to change these landscapes and soundscapes (D. A. Wong 2004, 237; Mahon 2004, 102).

For artists like Miller, music, more than anything else, is their activism. Mark Pedelty (2012) differentiates musical activists and activist musicians in his studies of environmental musicians:

> The former [activist musicians] are professional musicians like Woody Guthrie, Joni Mitchell, Bill Bragg, and Michael Franti. Activist musicians are first and foremost musicians. They do not play music halfway or on the side. For the most part, music is their activism. . . Activist musicians like Guthrie serve us best by playing music. That is what they do best. Conversely, the musical activist is first and foremost an activist, dedicated to political organizing, education, and strategic communication. Like making good music, these tasks are all-consuming, so musical activists can only make music on the side. To the extent that music is

> integrated into their activism, it tends to be in the form of special events and participatory music. (154)

Pedelty would think of Miller as activist musicians. Indeed, activist musicians are not activists in the conventional sense. As Miller explains the music video of the lead single "Panthers" from her 2011 album *Tusks in Furs*, "I don't consider myself a protesting feminist in the stereotypical sense. . . I would like to see myself as an artist promoting strength, talent, equality and a positive message who happens to be a Korean American woman" (Drury 2012). Miller rarely makes music directly reflecting her Korean heritage or adoptee experiences, with a few exceptions such as "The Han" (2018), and instead turns to an intentionally ambiguous symbolism in writing her music, leaving space for the audience's own interpretation. For that, Miller writes often about themes of justice and empowerment, such as "Justice" (2018), "Panthers" (2011), "The Perfect Mess" (2009), and "Stereotype" (2007), that speak to broader constituencies than just the Asian American audiences. Similar to MILCK's intervention of "Quiet" (2017), a song that became the unofficial national anthem of the Women's March, Miller and MILCK demonstrate a kind of Asian American sounds that renegotiate racial and cultural boundaries and their place outside the Asian American enclave.

Nonetheless, although this dissertation elaborates the particularities and resilience of the activist messages of the work of many Asian American women who rock, whether or not a person identifies as an activist, or as a musician doing activism, remains as an identification largely based on their personal understanding of what (musical) activism is. While we may think of Treya Lam as a representative activist musician—she writes music for her queer community ("Queer + Quiet"), openly speaks about her queer and immigrant experiences on social media, and regularly performs for a variety of social

justice and community engaged events—Lam (2021) told me that she believes that she needed to do more activism before feeling comfortable self-identifying as an activist. For Lam, being a musician and being an activist requires two sets of work and she strives to do well in both to earn the activist hat. This mentality that one needs to do enough to earn a title is in fact reflected by Pedelty (2012) for his musical and environmental activism done with his band Hypoxic Punks, "The Hypoxic Punks do not put enough work into either activism or music to have earned either title. We are neither 'musical activists' nor 'activist musicians'" (154). This points to the fuzzy line between the two positions in reality experienced by many community-engaged artists.

Unlike professional and mega-successful activist musicians like Woody Guthrie or Joni Mitchell, many Asian American musicians cannot afford to be full-time musicians. For example, many of the musicians I study in this project have day-time jobs and have done more benefit shows than they can remember. Neither making music nor organizing activism is their full-time job. This way, it is often difficult for them to feel comfortable or confident to self-identify as an activist because they tend not to think that they have not done enough to earn the title. For example, Dorothy Wang (2021) was reluctant to claim the title and instead calls herself "activism-adjacent" when I asked her about her activism as a lifelong member (almost 20 years and still counting) of the independent rock music scene. Similarly, despite not being a musician, Phil Yu, the person behind the Angry Asian Man blog that confronts and raises awareness of issues of racism, calls himself a "reluctant activist" (Lopez 2014, 432). On the other hand, musicians such as Leslie Mah and Tina Gordon, each having a day-time job respectively as a tattoo artist and as the founder of the Moon Made Farms, demonstrate a different

mentality negotiating their multiple identities as striving and active members of Asian America. Mah (2021) stresses the various yet dangerous work that doing activism entails and therefore the importance of logistical support and protecting our activists who put themselves on the front lines. Similar to what many artists and scholars think about the political significance of the mere existence of marginalized bodies in various musical spaces, Gordon (2021) stresses the political significance of "lifestyle activism," where continuing to make music, take space, and giving back to communities through everyday practices is its own way of doing activism.

Theorizing Asian American musical activism is as fuzzy and challenging as theorizing Asian American music in that every musician has their own way to negotiate a balance between their musical work, activist work, and sometimes personal work to pay the bills. However, this fuzziness also reflects the intersectionality and complexity of Asian American musical activism. While not every artist examined in this project would comfortably call themselves an activist or activist musician, it is the activist messages delivered in their work and everyday practices that I am interested in examining. Examining Asian American musical activism through focusing on activist messages as opposed to labeling individuals as activists, I argue, we can reimagine what musical activism looks like, feels like, and sounds like.

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Appendix A: Discography, Filmography, and Asian American Artworks

Music and Performances:

1874 | Thomas Comer and Silas S. Steele - *Favorite Melodies From the Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin, or, The Wonderful Lamp* | "Come, Come Away" | "Aladdin Quick Step"
1910 | William Jerome and Jean Schwartz - "Chinatown, My Chinatown"
1918 | Marie Hall-Brimacombe - "Little Sally-San (Of Old Japan)"
1955 | Gaylords - "Chow Mein"
1961 | Nancy Kwan - "Fan Tan Fannie"
1964 | The Coasters - "Bad Detective"
1965 | The Beatles - "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)"
1965 | The Kinks - "See My Friends"
1966 | The Beatles - *Revolver* | "Love You To"
1966 | The Byrds - "Eight Miles High"
1966 | The Hollies - "Oriental Sadness"
1966 | The Kinks - "Fancy"
1966 | The Rolling Stones - "Paint It Black"
1967 | Jim Morrison - "The End"
1967 | The Beatles - *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* | "Within You Without You"
1970 | Fanny - *Fanny*
1970 | Steppenwolf - "Snowblind Friend"
1971 | Fanny - *Charity Ball*
1971 | George Harrison & Friends - *The Concert for Bangladesh* (original live album)
1972 | Buck Owen - "Made in Japan"
1972 | Deep Purple - "Woman from Tokyo"
1972 | Fanny - *Fanny Hill*
1972 | George Harrison & Friends - *The Concert for Bangladesh* (film; dir. Saul Swimmer) | Ravi Shankar - "Bangla Dhun" | George Harrison – "Bangla Desh"
1973 | A Grain of Sand (Chris Iijima, Nobuko Miyamoto and William "Charlie" Chin) | *Music for the Struggle of Asians in America*
1973 | Fanny - *Mothers Pride*
1973 | Nobuko JoAnne Miyamoto, Chris Kando Iijima, and William "Charlie" Chin - *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America*
1974 | Carl Douglas - "Kung Fu Fighting"
1974 | Fanny - *Rock And Roll Survivors*
1974 | New York Dolls - "Bad Detective"
1975 | Cris Williamson - *The Changer and the Changed: A Record of the Times*
1976 | Rush - "A Passage to Bangkok"
1978 | Lou Reed - "I Wanna Be Black"
1978 | Patti Smith - "Rock N Roll Nigger"
1978 | Siouxsie and the Banshees - "Hong Kong Garden"
1978 | The Alley Cats - *Nothing Means Nothing Anymore*
1978 | The Bags - We Don't Need The English"
1979 | Avengers - "White Nigger"

1979 | The Dils - “Red Rockers (Rule)”
1980 | The Rolling Stones - “Indian Girl”
1980 | The Vapors - *New Clear Days* | “Turning Japanese”
1981 | Aneka - “Japanese Boy”
1981 | Japan - *Tin Drum*
1981 | The Alley Cats - *Nightmare City*
1982 | Descendents - “Kabuki Girl”
1982 | Hanoi Rocks - “Oriental Beat”
1982 | John Mellencamp - “China Girl”
1983 | David Bowie - “China Girl”
1983 | Gyllene Tider - “Teaser Japanese”
1983 | Red Rockers - “China”
1983 | The Alley Cats - *Escape From The Planet Earth*
1984 | Anti Scrunti Faction - “Big Women”
1985 | Anti Scrunti Faction - A Sure Fuck | “Slave To My Estrogen”
1985 | The Alley Cats - *Riders In The Long Black Parade*
1986 | Anti Scrunti Faction - *Damsels In Distress* | “Boys Will Be Boys” | “Big Dick”
1986 | Joy - “Japanese Girls”
1986 | Paul Simon - *Graceland*
1987 | Chhan Huy – “Hello Hi”
1987 | John Zorn - “Forbidden Fruit”
1988 | Talking Heads - *Naked*
1988 | The Alley Cats - *Between the Idea & the Reality…Falls the Shadow*
1989 | Paul Simon - “The Feeling Begins”
1990 | BZN - “Cambodian Girl”
1992 | Paul Simon - “Come Talk To Me”
1992 | Tribe 8 - *Pig Bitch*
1992 | Various - *There’s a Dyke in the Pit* | “Manipulate” (Tribe 8)
1993 | Lucy Stoners - *Father*
1993 | Tribe 8 - *By The Time We Get To Colorado*
1994 | Led Zeppelin - *Unledded*
1995 | Tribe 8 - *Fist City*
1996 | Tribe 8 – *Snarkism*
1996 | Various - *Yoyo A-Gogo*
1997 | Selena Wahng - “Killing for Pleasure”
1998 | Tribe 8 - *Role Models for Amerika*
2001 | MC Hotdog - “Han Liu Lai Xi” (trans. “Korean Wave Invasion”)
2001 | The DragOn Ladies – *Shut Up White Boy Original Soundtrack*
2002 | I Was Born With Two Tongues - *Broken Speak* | “Excuse Me, ameriKa” | Anida Yoeu Ali - “ALAG”
2002 | Yellow Rage (Michelle Myers and Catzie Vilayphonh) - “Listen Asshole”
2003 | Shan-Wei Chang - “He Quan” (trans. “Crane Style Boxing”)
2005 | Cyndi Wang - “Jie Mao Wan Wan” (trans. “Curved Eyelashes”)
2005 | George Harrison & Friends - *The Concert for Bangladesh* (live film) | Bob Dylan - “Love Minus Zero/No Limits”
2007 | Leehom Wang - “Xing Zuo” (trans. “Astrology”)

2007 | Mayda Miller – *Stereotype* | "Stereotype"
2007 | The Bags - *All Bagged Up: The Bags 1977–1980*
2009 | Kirsten Dunst - "Turning Japanese"
2009 | Laura Mam - "Cambodian Simplicity"
2009 | Mayda Miller - *The Interrogation* | "The Perfect Mess"
2010 | Laura Mam and the Like Me's - "Sva Rom Monkiss," cover of Pan Ron's "Sva Rom Monkiss" ("Monkey Dance Monkey")
2010 | Margaret Cho - *Cho Dependent*
2011 | Asobi Seksu - *Fluorescence*
2011 | Bochan Huy - *Full Moon Monday* | "Chnam Oun 16" ("I am 16") | "Love Me"
2011 | Laura Mam - "Refugee"
2011 | Mayda Miller - *Tusks in Furs* | "Panthers"
2011 | Model Minority (Grand Master Chu, D-One, and Inglish) - "Vincent Chin"
2013 | Day Above Ground - "Asian Girlz"
2014 | Bochan Huy - *Hello Hi*
2015 | Blur - *The Magic Whip*
2015 | Margaret Cho - (I Want To) Kill My Rapist"
2016 | Christy NaMee Eriksen - "You Bring Out the Korean Adoptee in Me"
2016 | Japanese Breakfast - "Everybody Wants to Love You"
2016 | Japanese Breakfast - *Psychopomp* | "Everybody Wants to Love You" | "Psychopomp"
2016 | Mitski - "Your Best American Girl"
2016 | Peter Bjorn and John - "Young Folks"
2016 | Thao Nguyen - "Before You Vote"
2017 | Japanese Breakfast - *Soft Sounds from Another Planet* | "Diving Woman" | "Boyish"
2017 | MILCK - "Quiet"
2017 | Say Bok Gwai - *Chink In The Armor* | "Revenge of Vincent Chin"
2018 | Christy NaMee Eriksen - "I Can't Wait to Be an Old Asian American Woman"
2018 | Jason Chu - "This is Asian America"
2018 | Mayda Miller - *MRDR PxP* | "The Han" | "Justice"
2019 | Arigato Grande "7 Meats"
2019 | Jay Som - *Anak Ko*
2019 | SASAMI - *SASAMI* | "Turned Out I Was Everyone" | "Morning Comes"
2020 | Polartropica - Dreams Come True | "Wild Lyfe featuring Jett Kwong"
2020 | Thao Nguyen - "Ballad to the Ballot"
2020 | The Linda Lindas - "VOTE!"
2020 | Treya Lam - "Queer + Quiet"

<u>Films and TV/Web series:</u>
1960 | *The World of Suzie Wong*
1961 | *Flower Drum Song* (dir. Henry Koster)
1978 | *Louder Faster Shorter: Live At The Mabuhay Gardens* (dir. Mindaugis Bagdon)
1981 | *The Decline of Western Civilization* (dir. Penelope Spheeris)
1982 - | *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*
1984 | *Sixteen Candles*

1987 | *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (dir. Renee Tajima-Peña and Christine Choy)
2002 | *Shut Up White Boy* (dir. Vũ T. Thu Hà)
2005-2008 | *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
2006 | *Kieu* (dir. Vũ T. Thu Hà)
2007 | *Look Again* (dir. Jennifer Lin)
2008 | *Kung Fu Panda*
2009 | *Vincent Who?* (dir. Tony Lam)
2014 | *Angry Little Asian Girl* (creator: Lela Lee)
2015 | *Angry Asian America* (hosted by Phil Yu and Jenny Yang). ISAtv talk show.
2016 | *Asians, That's Funny* (hosted by Sierra Katow). ISAtv talk show.
2016 | *Bad Rap* (dir. Salima Koroma)
2017 | *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution* (dir. Yony Leyser)
2018 | *Crazy Rich Asians*
2020 | *Asian Americans* (dir. Renee Tajima-Peña)
2020 | *Atomic Café: The Noisiest Corner in J-Town* (dir. Boch and Nakamura)
2020 | *FANNY: The Right To Rock* (dir. Bobbi Jo Hart)
2021 | *Bling Empire*

<u>Other Asian American Artworks:</u>
1993 - | Mimi Thi Nguyen - *Slant.* Zine.
1994 - 2011 | Eric Nakamura and Martin Wong - *Giant Robot*. Zine.
1994 | Lela Lee - *Angry Little Asian Girl*. Comic strip/animated cartoon.
1995 - | Sabrina Margarita Sandata - *Bamboo Girl.* Zine.
1996 | Margaret Cho - *Drunk with Power* | "Asian-Americans – Racists." Standup Comedy.
1997-1998 | Lala - *Chop Suey Spex*. Zine.
2012-2017 | Phil Yu - *Sound and Fury: The Angry Asian Podcast.* Podcast.
2016 | Ocean Vuong - "Ode to Masturbation." Poem.
2016 | Quincy Surasmith - *Asian Americana*. Podcast.
2017 | Talitha Angelica (Angel) Acaylar Trazo - *Where are you from?: Short stories about being Asian in America.* Graphic novel.
2019 | Sierra Katow - "Straight Up, Stand Up" series at Just For Laughs. Standup comedy.
2021 | Michelle Zauner - *Crying in H Mart: A Memoir*.
2021 | The Music of Asian America Research Center - *Who Is An Immigrant?*. Podcast.

Appendix B: List of 1990s BIPOC Riot Grrrl Zines

This list is largely drawn from NYU's "Mimi Thi Nguyen Zine Collection, in Collaboration with the People of Color Zine Project." I added additional ones. For the purpose of this dissertation, Asian American or Asian America concerned zines are emphasized in bold. The following list is by no means exhaustive.

Aim Your Dick
Bamboo Girl
Behind These Fragile Walls
Boredom Sucks
Borelando
Broken Thought
Cage
Chica Loca
Chinese, Japanese, Indian Chief
Chop Suey Spex
Consider Yourself Kissed
Cyanide
Eracism
Evolution of a Race Riot
Exedra
Funeral
Guillotine Series
Gunk
Hey Mexican
Hey White Girl
Hijinx Zine
Hollyhock
Housewife Turned Assassin!
Juryrig
Kreme Koolers
Mamasita
Marks in Time: The Very Early Go-Gos's
Messy Flowers/Lolita
Mestiza
Mija
My Broken Halo
Oppression Song
Photobooth Toolbox
Please Don't Hit Below The Belt!
Punk
Pure Tuna Fish
Race Riot
Race Riot Project Directory
Scarbaby
Screaming Goddess
Secret Agent Girl
Slander
Slant
Suburbia 8/Tennis and Violins
Superette
Tennis and Violins
The Bakery
Totally Fucked Up
Wild Honey Pie
YOU ARE RACIST WHITE PUNK BOY
You Might as Well Live
ywap!