

BY GRACE OF THE FLESH:  
RACE, SEX, REPRESENTATION AND DAVID MURA'S MEMOIRS

by

STEVEN CHUNG

B.A., The University of Toronto

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

At its most general level, this thesis will engage with theoretical dialogues surrounding the complex intersectionality of race, sex and representation, especially in Asian American cultural production. On another level, I set up an interpretive tension between a Foucauldian genealogical approach and a kind of liberatory post-colonial approach engendered by a number of theorists, including Frantz Fanon. The specific field of representation that I will explore will be pornography—a medium/genre that raises, in a problematic but I think important fashion, the question of sexual discourses and the bodies, desires and pleasures which are their targets. It is a field that also crudely exposes the ‘gendering of ethnicity’ or the ‘eroticization of race,’ a signifying practice that has, as many critics have argued, historically formed the racialized subject. The specific texts upon which these issues will be negotiated come from disparate quadrants of ‘Asian America.’ These will include papers that in various ways formulate a pro-porn position as a hedonistic counter to the ‘emasculatation’ of the Asian body that is produced by the ‘white gaze.’ The core of this study will be a reading of Japanese American writer David Mura’s memoirs. In these works, Mura at once ‘confesses’ to a number of sexual ‘transgressions’ and ‘disorders,’ including an addiction to pornography, and further manufactures a concept of race and sexuality out of those experiences. I will argue that Mura naturalizes or ‘essentializes’ the raced body along masculinist lines in order to evoke an ethos of psycho-somatic healing and community reconciliation. The thesis will conclude with an attempt to salvage this ethos from what might be called its ‘implication in power strategies’ by rearticulating it through the work of post-colonial theorist, psychiatrist and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon. His preoccupation with the erotic, colonizing gaze provides an illuminating counterpart to Mura’s fixation with the pornographic, racializing gaze and points enigmatically to the possibility of a critical-emancipatory praxis of the body and its representation.

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## CHAPTER 1

The senses are not only the basis for the epistemological constitution of reality, but also for its transformation, its subversion in the interest of liberation.

Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

Suddenly, out of the recesses of popular culture, Chow Yun Fat has become a sex object; so too has Jet Li. On the cover of the April 1999 special issue of the popular Asian American periodical *A. Magazine* on "The Body," Rick Yune's muscular chest and chiseled features entice the reader with a mix of eroticism and novelty. We are left to wonder then, is this the new face of Asian masculinity? If so, what has happened to Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan? The eclipse of those iconic representations seems to have robbed Western mainstream culture of one of its favorite repressive mechanisms: sexualized racial stereotypes. For decades now, the issue of Asian American masculinity has been a major preoccupation of Asian American studies—in fact, it could well be argued that the issue has anchored the field in a specific political direction. The 'emasculatation' or 'feminization' of the Asian male has been employed ubiquitously as a trope for the predicament of the Asian in America: the ethnicizing of gender and its corollary, the gendering of ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> And it is on the field of representation, especially the zone of the scopical drive, that much of this problem has been negotiated. So is it then a sign of the triumph of the efforts of anxious writers and theorists that now a whole generation of white girls and boys will swoon over Jet Li's gritty manliness? Does the appearance of Asian males on catwalks and beer advertisements placate Frank Chin's decades long lament that the Asian American man has been 'sissified' by 'white racist media'?<sup>2</sup>

The simple answer is, of course, no, although it is tempting to read these images as a kind of harbinger of authentic socio-political change. Other struggles give us pause; thirty years after its appearance on the big screen, Sidney Poitier's dauntless face is readily eclipsed by those of Willie Horton or O.J. Simpson or Clarence Thomas. Meanwhile, Denzel Washington's allure has come to signal a liberal, more heterogeneous, racial politics. The images of Chow Yun Fat and Jet

Li now arouse their female co-stars on-screen in a way that breaks through sexual barriers. The contradictions that are projected onto the raced body, however, suggest something much more complex than the fall of the status quo of race relations. Sex, not sexiness, is at the core of power:

A proliferation of sexualities through the extension of power; an optimization of the power to which each of these local sexualities gave a surface of intervention: this concatenation [. . .] has been ensured and relayed by the countless economic interests which, with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasure and this optimization of the power that controls it. Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another: they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement. (Foucault 1978: 48)

Representation is not a mere instrument of power. Stereotypes—visual, aural, textual—are not deployed simplistically as repressive weaponry, as mere propaganda. Rather, representation, specifically in the visual field, is one (albeit integral) mechanism within a vast machinery of power which operates via discourses of race, biology, nation, gender, and even discourses of beauty, the body, the pornographic, the erotic, etc. As such, visual representation functions within a critique of power as *both* a sign of that power and as one potential site of its contestation. In a sense, then, the steady growth of the Asian male presence in popular media *is* an indication of political change; but so too is it a glaring indication of the marginal status of that change in relation to those other much more diffuse and subterranean political discourses. So too can it be read as a mechanism of power itself, as Foucault would no doubt hint, the very sign of its vexing proliferation: the pre-emptive mechanism that makes icons of tokens.

### **Cultivating Praxis**

If the point of a philosophical, political, or cultural analysis of the world is indeed to change it, the dialectic of theory and praxis—the very way we coordinate these terms—takes on a crucial dimension. Whether or not, at this particular historical juncture, a change in social relations is necessary or even desirable is not an issue worth contemplating.<sup>3</sup> At stake for what we might call a critical-emancipatory movement are the means by which power—a vast organization and codification of socioeconomic ‘positions’—can be challenged (or perhaps even refused) without (re)animating that power or reinvesting a new form of power into our challenge. This is the analytic task political and cultural theorists across many disciplines are engaged in so earnestly

today. But, to lay it out crudely, it seems that a critical-emancipatory praxis has been overwhelmed by the weight of critico-discursive theory: the relationship has become elementalized and undialectical. In the drive to say *no* to power a kind of political impasse has been erected behind which we must also say *no* to pleasure. Might liberatory praxis lie yet in the attempt to say yes to pleasure while saying no to power?

This, of course, is territory Foucault trod (nearly) exhaustively in his writings. In one of his interviews, Foucault offered a succinct formulation of his concept of power and its resistance:

Political analysis and criticism have in a large measure still to be invented—so too have the strategies which will make it possible to modify the relations of force, to co-ordinate them in such a way that such a modification is possible and can be inscribed in reality. That is to say, the problem is not so much that of defining a political ‘position,’ (which is to choose from a pre-existing set of possibilities) but to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicization. If ‘politicization’ means falling back on ready-made choices and institutions, then the effort of analysis involved in uncovering the relations of force and mechanisms of power is not worthwhile. To the vast new techniques of power . . . one must oppose a politicization which will take new forms. (Foucault 1981: 167)

His call to opposition here is characteristically exciting; however, as in most other instances when he engages the problem of resistance, Foucault is also vague and reticent. For what could these new forms of politicization look like? Who could decide how they are to be shaped? What—within the history of our institutions and desires—would differentiate them from the old forms, the ‘ready made’? Even in his later work where he began to speak of a kind of new subjectivity and an aesthetics of bodies and of pleasures directed towards their intensification, Foucault refused to elaborate positively.<sup>4</sup> Through a close structural reading, we could attribute this reticence to his methodology: within the terms of ‘Foucauldian genealogy’ such positivity would represent a deployment of power that must exert mastery or call for attunement.<sup>5</sup> An *ars erotica*, under such a reading, offers no qualitative advantage (in political terms) over a *scientia sexualis*—power is always everywhere. As the mere flipside of power, empty of any positive characteristics, ‘bodies and pleasures’ cannot be ‘liberated’ from repressive discourses. There is in fact no such repression and no such extra-discursive truth to liberate.

But this does not mean that a socially transformative agency is unavailable within Foucauldian genealogy. Following Foucault, theorists such as Judith Butler or William Connolly have attempted to fashion a politics that would ‘cultivate’ the bodies and pleasures that are shaped

and regimented by power into normalized sexuality and identity.<sup>6</sup> ‘Performativity’ and ‘care for the self’ become forms of politicization that act to counter the monolithic techniques of power. This approach acknowledges the discursivity of any identity and any social order while recognizing the pain and loss that are the consequences of those constructions. Thus for Connolly ‘bodies and pleasures,’ or the ‘protean abundance’ of life, become the contingent subjects rather than the transhistorical objects of liberation:

The excess of life over identity provides the fugitive source from which one comes to appreciate, and perhaps to love, the anarchy of being amidst the organization of identity/difference. (Connolly 1993: 371)

Against the charge that Foucault has no ground on which to stand against power, Connolly salvages from within genealogical analysis a new and subversive ‘technologization’ of selves that would cultivate that which is lost or distorted via discursive domination. Praxis, then, is not the refusal of power and the embrace of pleasure—it is, rather, the politicization of both power and pleasure that rests on recognition of the body’s suffering under systemic domination.

### **Hardcore Resistance**

Out of the recesses of Asian American studies Darrell Hamamoto has issued a call for a counter-attack against “the prevailing sex/race/power regime” that is deployed against Asians via specific schemas of representation. In the abstract to his essay “The Joy Fuck Club: Prolegomenon to an Asian American Porno Practice” Hamamoto summarizes his quasi-Foucauldian approach to Asian American sexuality:

A history of exclusionism, segregation, and even incarceration are material forces that have shaped the sexuality of Asian Americans. Drawing from a range of feminist theory, film, studies, and current scholarship in Asian American studies, this essay examines the role that the dominant media has played in enforcing a sex/power regime that helps maintain a system of racial subordination. The piece concludes with the suggestion that the illustrious history of Asian erotica be reclaimed and extended to include a porno practice that becomes part of a larger cultural politics of Asian American *jouissance*. (323)

As he does in his other work,<sup>7</sup> Hamamoto here probes into the techniques with which mainstream media both defines and distorts Asian American identities along stereotyped, racialized lines. By taking a Foucauldian approach Hamamoto is able to offer a somewhat nuanced analysis of the historical production of Asian American sexuality that is grounded in a range of discursive

enunciations and material conditions.<sup>8</sup> Dealing in particular with the complex problem of pornography, Hamamoto uses Foucault to salvage from within an otherwise totalized regime of power a kind of *ars erotica*, a politicized ‘porno practice’ on behalf of Asian American bodies and pleasures—the counterattack of Asian ‘*jouissance*’. If the field of sexuality is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (Foucault, as quoted in Hamamoto: 326), it may also be *the* site for the reversal of those relations that constitute the status quo. Refusing to dwell on the possible dangers of pornography or the renewal of Asian erotica, Hamamoto proposes the “Joy Fuck Club” as a carnivalistic subversion of racialized representations and an appropriation of the media of their deployment.

But if this exclusive and still rather oppressive club seems to be far removed from the political seriousness of Foucault’s call for a new subjectivity, the grounds for its creation are nonetheless prepared by Foucault’s notoriously ambiguous conception of the body’s relation to transformative praxis. At the foundation of his investigation of power lies an antagonistic relationship between the particular techniques of social discourses and institutions (prison, asylum, school) and the resistance of bodies and pleasures. These latter are not like Freud’s *Id*—they have no positive characteristics of their own and present, therefore, nothing specific to repress or liberate. Power finds resistance in the materiality of bodies; the discursive subject is produced, must always be produced, in this fundamental power relation. And yet, Foucault claims that “the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures” (157). This ambiguous gesturing towards a kind of pre- or extra-discursive body may be, as many critics have suggested, Foucault’s attempt to salvage from the wreckage of psychoanalysis some ground on which to stand against the oppressive sexual ‘knowledges’ that codify sexuality and normality. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz, among others, have argued that Foucault’s formulation of the body as an inscriptive surface leaves the materiality of body, that which is written upon, open to masculinist, essentialist and distinctly un-genealogical interpretation. “In lieu of any specification,” Grosz reasons, “one must presume, along with the rest of patriarchal culture, that the neutral body can only be unambiguously filled in by the male body and men’s pleasures” (1994 156).

The unambiguous pleasures that Hamamoto seeks to mobilize are those which are supposed to be exposed by the pornographic lens. “Yellow people reveling in the joy of their own sexuality without White interventionism” (335) is the rallying cry opposed to the sex/race/power regime that ‘genders ethnicity.’ The male Asian in particular has been radically marginalized; his sexuality, as his very absence in the American porn industry demonstrates, is articulated, deployed and regulated as invisible, powerless, feminine. The Asian male is produced as a sexual subject that is lacking—his body and his pleasure are marked by discursive regimes as illegitimate and inferior. The ambitious task of an “Asian American porno practice” then, is to resuscitate what may be a pre- or extra-discursive Asian—particularly Asian male—desire and pleasure as an intervention into the existing porno-discursive regime.

### **Discourse/ Impotence**

As the following reading will suggest, Hamamoto’s gesturing towards a pre-discursive Asian body-pleasure is plagued by the same Freudian specters as Foucault’s Power-Resistance matrix. In a group discussion of the question of a racialized sexual imagination in his Asian American studies class, Hamamoto notes that his students exhibited an embarrassed secrecy, an apprehension of sexuality inextricably linked to discursive regimes:

The reticence and general unease with which the students greeted my questions spoke volumes about a fundamental self-alienation that has its material source in a sex/race/power regime so total in scope and depth that it reaches into the unconscious, shaping the stuff of the erotic imagination. It is out of this classroom experience that I began thinking about the ways of destabilizing a hegemonic system of sex/race/power wherein the denial of unalloyed sexual desire and carnal pleasure to Yellow people is coextensive with their social subordination. (325)

Hamamoto interprets the reluctance of his students to “discuss the content of their sexual fantasy life” as the defensiveness of sexual subjects that have been not repressed but rather produced and ‘shaped’ in abjection, in ‘self-alienation’. Carnal, bodily pleasure and ‘unalloyed’ (presumably unmixed racially) sexual desire are precisely what are denied, marginalized or erased in the constitution of the Asian American identity. But, as if aware of the danger of these essentialist and quasi-psychologicistic analyses of the processes of racialization, Hamamoto submits his in-class revelations to a more abstract genealogical critique. The ‘absexuality’ of his Asian students becomes one node in a vast network of power effects; it is the product of a history of hegemonic

discursive violence and 'social subordination.' Thus, after a brief survey of sexually and economically discriminatory legislation that has targeted Asian Americans historically, Hamamoto can confirm that,

The regulation of erotic desire and expression being inextricably linked to a comprehensive system of political-economic and sociocultural control, Asian Americans have grappled with a psychosexual self-alienation that stems from a racialized sexuality shaped and sometimes deformed by hostile social forces. (328)

Hamamoto here shades away from strict Foucauldian discourse towards the language of the psyche and its repression. This may be because the direct critical objects of Hamamoto's analysis, rather than being juridico-discursive mechanisms, are novels, films and porn videos—media which explicitly invite psychological involvement.<sup>9</sup> But Hamamoto has already cast the Freudian die. There remains, amidst a totalized regime of socialized production and control, the suggestion of healthy, un-alienated, un-deformed Asian bodies and pleasures that can be freed from their repression. Hamamoto blows open the material gap that Foucault left in his discussion of the counterattack of bodies and pleasures by calling for a "counterhegemonic visual resistance" on behalf of the suppressed and distorted Asian American sexual psyche. The "carnal pleasure of Yellow people," itself a resistant construct of power, can, by virtue of that basic, resistant nature, nonetheless function to 'destabilize' the very terms of its own constitution.

What makes the "Joy Fuck Club" a distinctly post-modern as opposed to old-fashioned sexual-liberationist political strategy, however, is its shifting deployment of race and its distanced appropriation of pornographic techniques. The fluidity of the racial terms Hamamoto uses ('Yellows,' 'Asians,' 'Orientals,' 'Asian Americans') allows the anti-racist counter-strategy to draw with greater slipperiness on a wide range of cultural phenomena—from Japanese porn and 'traditional Chinese erotica' to canonical Asian American texts and the American porn industry—to fashion what I shall call its 'porn-interventionist' position. But further, Hamamoto finds that there is, at the dominant node of the sex/race/power regime, a "White racist masculinity complex" that exercises its control by shaping and codifying a range of racial identifications along sexual axes. In pornography, Hamamoto argues, this 'complex' produces a shifting and fragile but nonetheless masterful White male subject by fetishizing black male sexuality and by "eliminat[ing] the . . . emasculated Yellow man from the ranks of heterosexual competitors"

(334). The racial other, as much as the White male subject, is produced in the antagonism of the sex-regulative matrix. And while this discursive sexualization/eroticization of racial difference works its positive-productive power in virtually all representational modes, “the naked display of the White racist masculinity complex is found at its rawest in video porn, both gay and straight” (333). What is so starkly revealed in porn—and what is essentially Hamamoto’s critical target—is the ‘emasculatation’ of the Yellow man and the ultra-feminization of the Yellow woman. This ‘gendering of ethnicity’ complements white male sexual and political supremacy and negates the ‘social agency’ of Asian Americans as well as the “joy of their own sexuality”

### **Ancient Chinese Secrets**

There are, certainly, a number of problems with a political-aesthetic strategy which takes this discursive-emasculatation thesis as its object and a pro-porn proposal as its instrument. Among the more obvious of these are the ever-threatening corollaries to a ‘re-masculatation’ movement—misogyny and homophobia—and the disturbing inequality and violence of the pornographic field and industry. These issues form the core of the final chapter of this essay. However, it might be helpful here to discuss a specific aspect of the problematic of pornography—its function within the sex/race/power regime. There is an ambivalence in Hamamoto’s conception of pornography. On the one hand porn is a thoroughly mainstream and sanctioned cultural and economic product: “Once stigmatized as servicing the warped needs of antisocial, deviant subculture, the products and services spawned by contemporary porn businesses have moved to the vital center of U.S. industry” (339). On the other hand, Hamamoto (drawing upon Laura Kipnis) claims that porn is a radically subversive medium: “The anarchy of the imagination through porno fantasy permits otherwise forbidden exploration into the complex and often conflicting meanings attached to the limitless variety of sexual desire and practice that are formative constituents of human subjectivity” (339). The field of pornography, then, is located both inside the vast machinery of political technologies and its control of the sexual subject and outside of it, somehow occupying a ‘forbidden’ zone of multiplicit ‘sexual desire and practice.’ This ambivalence, it becomes clear, is structurally similar to the ambivalence of Foucault’s

counterattack of bodies and pleasures. Asianness—in its silence, invisibility and ‘absexuality’—is discursively produced as the resistant flipside of whiteness. It is inscribed corporeally and the Asian body is constituted by that signification. But whereas for Foucault political resistance lies in the mobilization or cultivation of a defaced but inherently blank or neutral body, Hamamoto’s Joy Fuck Club operates by reinscribing the Asian American body with a sexual script that purports to arouse the Asian American body’s resistant pleasures. And in the diasporic context, the roots of this script take on a sort of pre-discursive appearance:

Whereas the dominant media system of White racial supremacist representation alternately hypersexualizes or desexualizes Asian American women and men through the control and containment of their visual presence, an illustrious tradition of Asian erotica simply assumes Yellow people to exist at the center of desire and pleasure. (342)

Is this an aesthetic tradition outside of the dominant historical sex/race/power regime? Is its illustriousness invisible to the White male gaze? If so, Hamamoto concludes, political transgression may be available via a rearticulation of the pornographic field that would cultivate a therapeutic Asian erotic pleasure:

By building upon a history of visual resistance, revisiting and reclaiming Asian erotic arts traditions developed over several centuries, and integrating the cultural politics of the Asian American independent film movement, a Yellow porno practice can help recuperate a sexuality that has been distorted by the internalization of core racist values and beliefs that reach into the depths of individual psychology. (345)

In short, then, the rallying point against the distorting effects the ‘White racist masculinity complex’ has on the Asian American subject can be the pleasures of an Asian pornotopia. Interestingly, in his discussion of Laura Kipnis’ pro-porn politics, Hamamoto quotes Katha Pollitt, a journalist who questions such political claims, as remarking that “only a postmodern academic could seriously propose that a skin magazine offers a serious challenge to ‘state power’” (339). Pollitt’s criticism, perhaps, rings true. For what kind of counterhegemonic potential can a strategy bear that is based in such a transparent and politically suspect medium? Judging by the kinds of power relations still at work in the Joy Fuck Club, the answer might have to be: none. Yellow men fucking their Yellow women for their own pleasure; Yellow ‘people’ watching the Yellow woman get joyfully fucked by the Yellow man—can no one else watch? Or indeed can no one *own* these images through their gaze? At its most naked level, Hamamoto’s club seeks to insert the Asian penis in the popular scopic-discursive field. It does so, however, by, first,

investing heavily—almost exclusively—in the pleasure and power of that member and, second, withholding a criticism of the medium of its proposed visualization. Does this then mean that a porn-interventionist strategy that somehow avoids these two problems might have real transgressive possibilities? Is it possible that porn can liberate pleasure from and then mobilize it against the clutches of power? Can the Asian penis really have such fissurous capacity?

### **Lost Members, or Where's the Beef?**

In a survey of the field of popular representation, filmmaker and critic Richard Fung observes that

Asian men . . . have been consigned to one of two categories: the egghead/wimp, or—in what may be analogous to the lotus blossom-dragon lady dichotomy—the kung fu master/ninja/samurai. He is sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism. So whereas, as Fanon tells us, “the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis,” the Asian man is defined by a striking absence down there. (150)

Fung proceeds from this criticism to outline his project of finding the Asian penis—of at once scrutinizing the representation of “our desire” in relation to the “hegemonic image of the white man” and attempting to install Asians (specifically gay males) as viewing subjects. His work is proposed as an active intervention in the elision of Asian male desire in the pornographic field.

In a recent article in *Giant Robot's* “Sex Issue,” Claudine Ko narrates her own adventures with porn :

I scan the gay shelves: cops, guns, young guys, African American, Latino, but no cigar. No Asian porn. Finally, I approach the punk rock guy behind the main counter. “Do you have an Asian male porn section?” I ask sweetly. He's only slightly moved and promptly turns to his female co-worker and repeats my question. “Nope,” she answers. “We've got lots of Asian women, but not one for men.” . . . The dearth of Asian-boy booty is beginning to unnerve me. . . (83)

This time the scopic elision, the invisibility of Asian men, provokes a playful hunt for the asian ‘cigar.’ Ko follows a trail of clues in search of ‘Brandon Lee,’ a baby-faced actor rumored to be ‘packing a 10-inch egg-roll.’ Rulers indicating just how long ten inches is run down the margins and across the bottom of the page of the article and a large photograph of Lee is displayed on which a graphic ‘10”‘ in futuristic font conceals his crotch. While Ko is ultimately unable to find the star and spends most of the article interviewing various directors and producers of the gay porn industry, the emphasis of the piece, through the highlighting of certain comments, is

definitively on size. And, after finally tracking down and viewing the Lee feature “Fortune Cookie,” Ko happily reports that “Brandon blows the notion of the submissive Asian out of the water. He never takes it in the ass, let alone in his face. He’s a top through and through” (84).

So, as with Hamamoto’s ‘prolegomenon,’ both Fung’s article, “Looking for My Penis” and Ko’s, “My Search for Brandon Lee” have as their aim the insertion of the Asian male penis into the racialized aporia in pornography. In this sense the work of all three carries on the ‘anti-emasculatory’ project that has occupied the vexed center of Asian American studies. But certainly the latter two essays must be read in their contextual specificity: while he is known primarily as a filmmaker, Fung’s article is largely academic, generated from a panel discussion on gay and lesbian aesthetics, whereas Ko’s piece is playfully journalistic, appearing in an ‘asian pop culture’ zine. As such, a rigorous critique of the latter through the standards of the former might be a methodologically suspect move. This does not, however, render an investigation of similarities and divergences unfruitful. In fact, if we can understand the common objective of the authors as a strategic intervention into the construction of a racialized corporeal schema, then we need to be especially attentive to the *politics* of that strategy as it is played out in all discursive systems. These are essentially the same problems encountered with Hamamoto’s porn-interventionist politics. If the ‘dearth of Asian-boy booty’ in the porn industry is ‘unnerving’, is the ironic fetishizing that operates in “My Search for Brandon Lee” the appropriate narcotic? What does it mean to celebrate a heroic Asian penis in light of the pervasive discourse of Asian male undersexualization and under-endowment? Does visibility of any kind disturb a socially empowered and structured invisibility? How much does this anti-emasculatory strategy rely on a hypothesis of sexual ‘repression’ and the dangerous racial essentialism contained within that formulation?

A most obvious suspicion could be thrown on the very site of conflict—that is, on how and why these offensives against the racialized sexual economy are played out on the pornographic field. This tactic appears problematic not because of the violence *per se* of pornography as representation but because, at least with Ko, as it was for Hamamoto, this potential violence is virtually unacknowledged as a disturbing aspect of that genre. The humour and irony that animate both their papers do not somehow suppress the claims of this aspect but

rather open a perilous gap in their critique of power. While a censorious approach to pornography, as we will see below, is also problematic, this cannot become an excuse to blindly ignore its principle function—that is, the reduction of gendered socio-discursive violence. Richard Fung, on the other hand, wary of the thickly sedimented power relations that weigh on its production, is much more critical and reflexive in his use of pornography:

Should we call for an independent gay Asian pornography? Perhaps I am, in a utopian sort of way, though I feel that the problems in North America's porn conventions are manifold and go beyond the question of race. There is such a limited vision of what constitutes the erotic. (162)

Fung goes on, however, to conceptualize his critical engagement with pornography in terms of its socio-political instrumentality:

Whether we like it or not, mainstream porn is more available to most gay Asian men than any independent work you or I might produce. That is why pornography is a subject of such concern for me. (168)

This may be, in its simplest form, the most persuasive rationale for the instrumentalization of porn. Now while this certainly does not settle this vexing issue, a more salient question to pose here, rather, might be: to what extent do Fung and Ko seek to destabilize the phallogentric fantasy of the omnipotent white male gaze operating at the core of pornographic representation? For this is, as Fanon well knew, a critical component of any attempt to interrupt the eliding effects of a colonial economy of desire.

In his essay Fung directs his critique not only at the vast range of signifiers that have determined the Asian male as “passive/bottom/object” in gay pornography but also at the various biologicistic and scientific discourses—including the notorious work of Philippe Rushton—that ground that determination. What Fung proposes as the work of an ‘independent gay Asian pornography’ is an *affirmation* of a heterogeneous (active and passive) Asian sexuality instead of its *appropriation* by the dominant forms of representation for consumption by white males:

The liberal response to racism is that we need to integrate everyone—people should all become coffee coloured, or everyone should have sex with everyone else. But such an agenda doesn't account for the specificities of our desires. I have seen very little porn produced from such an integrationist mentality that actually affirms my desire. It's so easy to find my fantasies appropriated for the pleasures of a white viewer. In that sense, porn is most useful for revealing relationships of power. (186)

Herein lies a dual function of installing the Asian penis towards the fulfillment of a dialectic of recognition (between the Asian viewer and his portrayal) and, with that shift in viewership in mind, an implicit critique of the phallogocentric expectations of the assumed white audience.

The deployment of such a *representational strategy* can be read as a response to the challenge, formulated by Jinqi Ling, of “problematizing the rage against emasculation while acknowledging the hegemony at its foundation” (Ling 1997: 321). Claudine Ko’s approach to this tension is much less satisfying. Her exaltation of Brandon Lee’s penis, thickened with playful ‘asian’ signs (‘egg-roll’, ‘Asian-boy booty’), at once exposes the Asian aporia in porn and injects a disruptive object in its place. But left intact is the assumed white viewer whose orientaling gaze constructs the erotic schema in the films and to whose enjoyment they are directed/marketted/distributed. For in limiting her ‘search’ to the existing porn industry, Ko can only champion actors and penises which have already been implicated and appropriated in the fetishizing discourses of the market. Hers, then, becomes a *reading strategy* in which she extracts from these discourses a celebration of Lee’s size and aggressiveness (‘he’s a top’). But because there is no implicit or explicit critique of the racialized context of the production of this heroic Asian male, the attempt Ko makes to position herself as a viewer can only result in, at best, an inversion of pornography’s racial hierarchy and, at worst, a further reification of sex-regulatory categories of activity-passivity, masculinity-femininity. As Fanon asks, “is it not understandable that thenceforward [the Negro] will try to elevate himself to the white man’s level? To elevate himself in the range of colors to which he attributes a kind of hierarchy?” This is ultimately the function (and internal limitation) of Ko’s search for Brandon Lee. But, as Fanon continues, “We shall see that another solution is possible. It implies a restructuring of the world” (*BSWM* 81).

### **Ars Pornographica**

We shall see, below, how Fanon’s revolutionary socio-diagnostic politics might indeed suggest a way of reading the problematic of race and pornography that is qualitatively different than what we have seen so far. To round out this discussion of Hamamoto, Fung and Ko,

however, Foucault will have to make a reappearance. For it was Foucault who suggested the radical difference of an *ars erotica*:

In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul. (Foucault 1978: 57)

This orientation to pleasure and truth, however, virtually disappeared with the advent of the modern West, replaced by a *scientia sexualis* that instead produced the truth in sexuality by proliferating the public discourses—from confession to interrogation—that surrounded and cultivated it. Power constructs sexuality as the truth of our being and constitutes identities in relation to this truth. The discourse that interprets embarrassment and defensiveness as sexual distortion and self-alienation; the research that correlates race as an axis of brain and genital sizes; the gaze that must behold the veracity of pleasure in sexual images—these renderings of truths in turn produce power-effects.

Pornography then is not an erotic art—the images that the medium projects are not simply the riotous bodies and pleasures that are repressed by power but are also the very instruments of power—the sexual science on naked display. We have seen in our readings of Hamamoto and Ko that the inability to recognize this ambivalence is coextensive with the refusal to acknowledge the potential violence and pain of the porn industry. The unfronted mastery of the white male gaze in porn—of its enjoyment, control and above all its ownership of female bodies and pleasures—prompts the Joy Fuck Club and the Brandon Lee Fan Club to repeat the old oppressions for the procurement of its own pleasures. These are not so much new pleasures as much as the old ones given the sanction of a culturalist project. Only Fung recognizes this difficulty:

For one thing, we cannot afford to take a libertarian approach. Porn can be an active agent in representing *and* reproducing a sex-race status quo. We cannot attain a healthy alliance without coming to terms with these differences. (160)

It is interesting, though, that Fung presents these obstacles to a counter-hegemonic porn practice more as sites of contest rather than as a radical impasse. It is also interesting that pornography does not constitute a significant portion of Fung's film and video work.<sup>10</sup> The deconstruction of

the sex-race status quo is inseparable from the invention of new pleasures—affirmation of Asian sexual subjectivity requires the empowerments of discourse criticism. Both forces, Fung might argue, must be mobilized with care and rigorousness. For as Foucault has warned, “we must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the deployment of sexuality” (157).

A Foucauldian critical emancipatory movement that is seriously engaged in the pornographic field, then, seems to have a number of regulations of its own. It must, first, recognize the discursivity of pornography—that is, both its social agency in the construction and enforcement of desire and in its own constitution as a truth-producing discourse of sex. It must uncover and destabilize the hegemony of white masculinity in both its economic and symbolic deployments. This means that vigilance will have to be exercised over the potential eruption of misogynist or homophobic tendencies—even in the interpretation of bodies and pleasures themselves. And such a movement must have as its aim the invention of new pleasures, new modes of experiencing the body, new sources of knowledges “in their multiplicity” as Foucault promised, “and in their possibilities of resistance.” A true *ars erotica*, then, where none has ever existed before—a teaching and a worshipping of pleasure, an aesthetics of bodies and pleasures, an aesthetization of being. Porn, the master’s tool, rearticulated as an emancipatory instrument.

But the questions remain: in an age when the pleasure of child-like bodies in Southeast Asia and South America and in Fidel’s Cuba are procurable for a relative pittance, and when sexual terror on our own continent has taken on more diffuse and popular forms—what could such an *ars erotica* look like? In an era where the *Kama Sutra* is the butt of endless sit-com jokes, where Larry Flynt has become a kind of hero—what can distinguish the science of pornography from the arts of the erotic? How, specifically, is sexuality to be experienced in a freer, more caring way? Where is there the master that could tell?

## INTERLUDE

. . . Who cannot but recall  
how my father, as a teenager, clutched his weekend pass,  
passed through the rifle towers and gates  
of the Jerome, Arkansas, camp, and in 1942,  
stepped on a bus to find white riders  
motioning, "Sit here, son," and in the rows beyond,  
a half dozen black faces, waving him back,  
"Us colored folks got to stick together."  
How did he know where to sit? And how is it,

thirty-five years later, I found myself sitting  
in a dark theater, watching *Behind the Green Door*  
with a dozen anonymous men? On the screen  
a woman sprawls on a table, stripped, the same on  
on the Ivory Snow soap box, a baby on her shoulder,  
smiling her blond, practically pure white smile.  
Now, after being prepared and serviced slowly  
by a handful of women,  
as one of them kneels, buries her face in her crotch,  
she is ready And now he walks in —  
Lean, naked, black, streaks of white paint on his chest  
and face, a necklace of teeth, it's almost comical,  
this fake garb of the jungle, African and All-America,  
black and blond, almost a joke but for the surge  
of what these lynchers urged as the ultimate crime  
against nature: the black man kneeling to this kidnapped  
body, slipping himself in, the screens showing it all, down  
to her head shaking in a seizure, the final scream  
before he lifts himself off her quivering body . . .

I left the theater, bolted from a dream into a dream,  
I stared at the cars whizzing by, watched the light change,  
red, yellow, green, and the haze in my head from the hash,  
and the haze in my head from the image, melded together, reverberating.  
I don't know what I did afterwards. Only, night after night,  
I will see those bodies, black and white (and where am I,  
the missing third?), like a talisman, a rageful, unrelenting release.

The passage is from "The Colors of Desire," one of the many works in which David Mura explores his self-diagnosed 'addiction' to pornography—an addiction that was intensified not only by the racial aporias in pornography but by the historical production of a repressive Japanese American model identity. Towards the close of the poem, Mura gestures to a healing beyond the effects of porn, a kind of visceral reconciliation with his obsession with race:

Tonight snow drifts below my window,  
and lamps puff ghostly aureoles  
over walk and lawns. Father, mother,  
I married a woman not of my color.

What is it I want to escape?  
These nights in our bed, my head  
on her belly, I can hear these thumps,  
and later, when she falls asleep,  
I stand in our daughter's room,  
so bare yet for a simple wooden crib  
(on the bulletin board I've pinned the sonogram  
with black and white swirls like a galaxy  
spinning about the fetal body),  
and something plummets inside me,  
out of proportion to the time  
I've been proportioned on this earth.  
And if what is granted erases nothing,  
if history remains, untouched, implacable,  
as darkness flows up our hemisphere,  
her hollow still moves moonward,  
small hill on the horizon, swelling,  
floating with child, white, yellow,  
who knows, who can tell her,

oh why must it matter?

In this poem, as in the broader scope of Mura's writing, there is a shift from a confession of the flesh to its affirmation as a source of love and community. Can this be the trajectory out of the perplexities of the *ars erotica*?

## CHAPTER 2

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

### **Sexual Proliferation**

As recently as the early part of the last decade it was both possible and provocative for Sau-Ling Wong, among others, to point to a consistent lacunae in Asian American writing: sex and sexuality. Issues of the body, its desires and pleasures, its sexual orientations, according to Wong in her “Ethnicizing Gender,” take on a sort of taboo status in the literature of American born Asians.<sup>11</sup> Two interrelated developments in the field have put such findings into problematizing light. First, the 1990s saw the publication of a wide range of writing directly engaged with issues of sexuality. Texts such as Timothy Liu’s *Vox Angelica*, Shawn Wong’s *American Knees*, and the collection *On a Bed of Rice* attempt, as one reviewer has noted, to “salvage an (East) Asian American erotic vernacular.” A wealth of critical work—witnessed most prominently in the Russell Leong edited volume *Asian American Sexualities*, the *Queer & Asian* compilation, and in the substantial space sexuality and queer studies has occupied in recent Asian American studies conferences<sup>12</sup>—was also fomented in the 1990s. The second development problematizing earlier work on sexuality arises from this activity. I would like to consider this as the growing discursive conceptualization of the field. This emerges, of course, from general currents in theory—heavily influenced by Foucault and more recently by Judith Butler (among others)—but such discourse analyses are more directly linked to the efforts of a wide of range of writers and critics to come to terms with the political and cultural fallout of the ‘Asian American movement.’<sup>13</sup> The work of Rey Chow, Lisa Lowe and Jinqi Ling are obvious examples of such a re-orientation. I would, however, like to look at some very work by historian Jennifer Ting which engages critically with the issues of sexuality this paper seeks to explore and which highlight the conceptual shifts in Asian American studies.

In her paper “Bachelor Society: Deviant Heterosexuality and Asian American Historiography” Ting examines critical efforts to understand the relation between the social and political conditions of early Chinese communities in America and the sexual functioning of its

bachelor-members. "The Power of Sexuality," a more recent essay, looks at the writings on sexuality from the 1970s Asian American 'movement press.' Ting's primary criticism in these works is directed at the way a generic and narrow conceptualization of sexuality was employed by Asian Americanists as a strategy to define Chinese/Asian Americans as a single and politically significant ethnic/racial group. Sexuality is understood by this movement in a wholly non-discursive fashion as the sexual practices and pleasures of the body, as a basic human biological drive, as the existence of multiple sexual identities. Economic, political and social relations (immigration policies and restriction, debates around dating and socialization, marriage, miscegenation and standards of beauty, etc.) are treated as somehow separate from sexuality. In this respect Ting's analysis problematizes Sau-ling Wong's above-mentioned location of a realm of sexual silence: while indeed bodies and pleasures seem to have been a taboo subject for Asian American writers, *sexuality*, inescapably, has been at the core of the field since its inception. According to Ting, if we do not understand sexuality as a thoroughly political and historical category we cannot hope to critique with any rigour the fundamental *power relations* that are at the heart of Asian American cultural politics.

We might say that Ting's political scourge is the repetition of power in the formulation of an Asian American identity through the ahistorical naturalization of sexuality. The 'gendering of ethnicity,' variously read as the 'emasculatation' of the Asian male and the 'ultra-feminization' of the Asian female, has been a familiar way of understanding Asian American economic and political subjugation, and as a platform for cultural activism. Sex, according to this logic, has been employed in a double function to erase and silence Asian American participation in the mainstream, weaving the 'community' into subordinate, 'feminized' positions in racial hierarchies, as well as to retroactively justify this subordination.<sup>14</sup> This 'gendering' becomes a defining register of the marginalization and suppression of the Asian American community and the site of an oppositional stance. Criticism of such an understanding of sexuality—which intensified around the cultural-nationalism vs. feminism debate surrounding Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston—has paid closest attention to the way the rage against 'feminization' reinscribes a "phallogocentric economy" that naturalizes gendered power relations.<sup>15</sup> The oppositional community

identity cultivated by the editors of *THE BIG AIIIEEEEE!*, for instance, depends upon a dangerous and exclusive naturalization of 'real' and 'authentic' sex roles. Critics have rightly pointed out that, under the terms of this theory of race and sex, political agency cannot exist but through the valorization of a hegemonic masculine Asian heroism.

Ting's rigorously historical understanding of sexuality adds an important dimension to this cultural problem. She introduces to the field a conceptual term, 'heteronormativity,' that challenges the biological naturalization of sexuality. She uncovers at the foundation of Asian American racial consciousness the operation of certain heterosexual norms informing a hegemonic organization of sexuality that does not simply characterize 'normal' sexuality as 'opposite sex'-object-choice but that "collapses every aspect of sex into the heterosexual activities demanded by some version of biological reproduction" (76). The *uses* of sex, under this formulation, are structured by power—the racial hierarchization of racial groups, as an instrument of subjugation—but sex itself is not. To put clearly what I feel is both the crux of Ting's argument and what makes it so germane to current thinking about sexuality: sex must be thought of *as a deployment* of power and not solely as its register. This is a discursive understanding of sexuality that seeks, by historicizing and indeed politicizing sex, to problematize any notion of healthy, normal, original or authentic bodies, pleasures and desires in the construction of racial/ethnic communities. If the work of feminism in Asian American studies has been to disturb the operations of power along gendered lines, this discursivity works to disrupt the magnetic attraction to a notion of an ideal Asian American sexuality. As Ting observes in the movement press writing on sexuality, ". . . people did not convert to an Asian American sexuality, nor did they become Asian Americans through sexuality. Rather, they discovered that their sexual desires and pleasures were already (and always had been) Asian American" (7). To understand sexuality narrowly as sex acts and identities and then to proceed to read sex as a register for the distortions of racial ideology, leads too easily into an idea of an original, perhaps even pre-discursive, Asian-Americanness. Thus the push towards a kind of sexual emancipation and masculine re-appropriation not only runs the risk of reinscribing traditional gendered positionalities and naturalizing the erasure of marginalized sexualities, but it also and emphatically repeats and even

gives renewed strength to the essentialist racial categorizations of the dominant culture. An oppressive, erasing power operates in the gendering of ethnicity; such power continues through the normalization of sexuality in the creation of racial identity.

### **Where the Body Meets Discursivity**

These are essentially the same critical terms through which the porn-interventionist project was indicted in the first chapter of this thesis. The continued objectification and exploitation of women's bodies and the incitement of a sexually aggressive and possessive Asian American masculinity signaled the dangers of a positive or affirmative politics. By saying yes to the pleasures which have been erased or forgotten under 'dominant schemas of representation,' the interventionists also ended up saying yes to a naturalized understanding of race and sex—in other words, to power. Hamamoto, Ko and to a lesser extent Fung continue, in a sense, the discourse of the 'Asian American movement' in the pornographic realm. But out of the recesses of Asian America has come a voice which narrates a troubling and earnest attempt to move beyond power. Towards the end of his second memoir, *Where the Body Meets Memory*, David Mura inscribes one significant moment in this disavowal:

I remember the afternoon I poured my pornography into the Dumpster, the glossy pages unfolding, spilling out like liquid dreams. I doused them with gas, the match popped, and the faces and naked bodies flamed, curled to ash, smoke sifting through my lungs, blood, brain. Something caved inside me, some long, slow unrepentant sigh.

I knew, even if I went back, it would never be the same. Something inside me had changed. (219)

After years of sexual addiction, of pornographic fixation on the bodies of white women, Mura, with the help of his wife and a number of therapists, is able to repudiate the violence of that addiction—both that which is directed at women and that which turns in towards himself. Elsewhere Mura refers to this as part of the 'decolonization' of his sexuality. In fact the stress in much of his writing falls on the process of healing as a form of decolonization—of coming to terms with historical trauma and the production of psycho-sexual suffering. But rather than seeking to recover the community that has been lost through 'colonization' *within* pornography, Mura attempts to find it among the Asian American population at large. He tells us that 'another healing' began in their company:

As I met Japanese American and Asian American writers, scholars, and critics, I could feel my self shifting, slowly becoming someone else, gaining a history and a sense of Asian American culture I hadn't even known existed. (239)

Here, as in the poem in the interlude, Mura finds healing and affirmation not through the pornographication of Asian American bodies but through their politicization.

I would like, then to tenuously suggest that the formulation of race, representation and community that arises out of Mura's writing escapes the kind of power-effects against which Jennifer Ting argues so rigorously. But why so tenuously? If Mura's private writings are inescapably political, there should be no problem in bringing them into critical engagement with theory; but there is. Mura responds soundly to the problem of 'emasculatation.' Instead of striving to disprove or reverse the invisibility/ 'feminization' of the Asian male and to thereby somehow articulate an oppositional identity, Mura's project is to address and perhaps subvert the logic of representation. The object of his discursive strategy is not Asian male heroism or sexual power; rather, it is the demystification of the cultural norm, especially in its frenzied, visual deployment. And furthermore, I think Mura is sensitive to the discursivity and historicity of sexuality. Part of the novelty of his work is that he so carefully locates his sexuality within a cultural-political matrix of oppression and repression. His sexuality, his body, does not register, is not marked by, the trauma of the internment, by racist representational schemes—it is produced by them historically. His body and the bodies of the men in his family signify, bear witness to, and are produced within the "regulative 'ideal' of the racial matrix."<sup>16</sup> In this sense Mura provides a response to the 'gendering of ethnicity' and the deployment of sexuality *by* racial ideologies that is more politically sensitive and rigorous than, say, that of Frank Chin's polemics. Nevertheless, the problem with Mura's approach is the way he takes all the evidence from his body, all of his impressive treatments of pornography and other forms of cultural prohibition/regulation and fashions a vague but actually very specific identity out of these conditions. As we shall see, throughout *Where the Body Meets Memory* and *Turning Japanese*, there is a growing sense of a *community* to which he feels he belongs, and which he gains more confidence to *speak for*. It is this jump from suffering bodies to political agency, from shame and silence to community identity that is most problematic. And it is a shift, I will argue, that is performed largely below the level of

critical reflection, submerged in uncharacteristically inchoate suggestions about the body, and suggestive but largely ambiguous gestures towards Japan and a somehow more liberated sexuality. The thoroughness of Mura's political critique gives way to the seduction of community identification. As Ting would most certainly point out, the danger is that such a seduction to speak for contains within it the exclusions and conceptual erasures of power.

### **Perilous Embodiment**

Much of the difficulty of Mura's treatment of sexuality arises from a fundamental ambivalence in his use of the 'body' as a conceptual tool. On the one hand bodies are socially constructed entities. Within the context of American racist ideology the Asian body is marked as inferior in the hierarchy of desirability and beauty. In an obscure turn this inferiority comes to be read as a product of 'Asianness' itself.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the clearest statement of this understanding of the body's function comes from one of Mura's acknowledged influences, Frantz Fanon. The notion of a "racial epidermal schema" that Fanon elaborates in his *Black Skin, White Masks* is remarkably relevant: he shows how racial norms and identities are *epidermalized*, written and produced on the skin (151). Such identities are enabled and fixed by narrative, fantasy and, most powerfully, by the gaze. Now where for the colonized black man the body is produced as inferior because sexually threatening, Mura's Asian American male is produced as inferior because sexually insignificant:

As an Asian male, I was placed in a category of neutered sexuality, where beauty, power, and admiration were out of the question, where normalcy and acceptance were forbidden. None of the women I saw on television, in the movies, or read about in books dreamed of a lover like me. (*TJ* 149)

The organization of race in America operates by marking bodies with 'inherent' qualities (which appear as 'evidence' of otherness), not the least of which is the marking of whiteness as beauty and desirability embodied. Mura's personal experience within this hierarchy, his debilitating addiction to pornography and its objectified white bodies, throws into disturbing relief the degree to which cultural-sexual norms are not only internalized but can constitute the bodies of its subjects.

What Mura calls his 'sickness' is his body's inability to derive pleasure from anything but white bodies:

I see it in my lack of desire for Asian women as a young man, in my desire for my wife, in my secret fear that my wife would betray me with a white man. It is part of the pervasive nature of my sexual desires. It sings to the very heart of my lust. (*WBMM* 186)

Here he seems to articulate an understanding which Ting herself enunciates clearly: "power operates in part by dividing the world into . . . erotic and non-erotic bodies, deviant and normal desires" (65). Mura's perception of his lack of desire for Asian bodies as a pathology, however, may presuppose a heteronormativity; Ting might point out how excluding the possibility of homosexual relationships enables Mura to register the deviancy of his racially organized desires. But while indeed certain biological imperatives are presupposed in the structuring of his sexuality they are not necessarily confined to a heterosexual realm, to norms of reproduction. The most forceful, and, as I shall attempt to argue below, most ambiguous, function of biology in Mura's text is to set up a notion of pre-symbolic or pre-discursive bodies.<sup>18</sup> If we can recognize how the healing strategy in *Where the Body Meets Memory* is to map pathological desires in a field of power relations, we can see that the most persuasive evidence for the constitutive operation of power is in its production of Asian bodies as non-erotic. This, I think, is the core of the body's ambivalence in Mura's schema: while it is constructed as a performance of cultural norms it is also a site of resistance to them. The problem here is not with the body's resistance, for in the regulation of bodies there is always an interplay of repression and excess; but it is rather how what is repressed in Mura's apprehension of the body takes on a specific, though still ambiguous, form. He takes the social, political, cultural constitution of bodies and reads this total constitution negatively as the repression of desire for Asians. The process of cultural recovery and healing then becomes a sort of return to the site of the body—not to re-animate a residual and authentic 'Asian' sexuality, for this would simply repeat some of the essentialisms of the 'anti-emasculatory' movement. Rather, the body *itself* emerges as a counter-discourse, as a site where erased desires can be cultivated or re-constituted, and where marginalized identities can be empowered.

The body is historicized in Mura's text—but perhaps not enough. The formation of a coherent, perhaps even oppositional, community identity is enabled out of the body's ambivalence as both a discursive product and as a pre-discursive or pre-oppressive site. A Japanese American community is not recovered from its subjugation but must be constructed counter-discursively out of the body and its residual Japaneseness, out of its cultural memory. This is where, I think, Mura's text becomes most problematic. In his growing sense of health he presupposes the existence of a uniquely Japanese American selfhood and sexuality that is authentic and legitimately political only to the degree to which its innate sexuality has been repressed. We can easily recognize how such a position arises through the course of Mura's recovery from a very real racially organized sexual addiction. I would like, however, to interrogate closely how the body changes, is perhaps even manipulated, by Mura as a therapeutic and then discursively deployed tool in this shift from pathology to politicization.

### **Fixation and Therapy**

Towards the end of *Where the Body Meets Memory* Mura gives an intense and disturbing account of a typical night in his 'descent' into sexual addiction :

At one o'clock, I'd stood milling around at the entrance of the bar, desperate for some woman to acknowledge my look, knowing all the while how futile it was, I didn't have a chance. Somehow I had to make it up to myself, reward myself for what I'd been through that night—why was this happening to me, what have I done. . . why doesn't that bitch see me, why am I invisible, how can I rip this face from myself? I drove straight to the porno store, entered the video booth, full of rage that I picked up no one. . . while the image on the screen of the woman writhing on the bed, servicing two men, one white, one black, served to tell me who would always be left out. (213)

On one level Mura points to his racially structured self-hatred, a rage directed not at the racial hierarchy which renders his Asian body invisible but at his own face, and at the objects of his frustrated desires. The psyche in this passage questions neither his need to possess and control women, nor the ideological structures of the pornography that leave him out. What Mura captures most emphatically here is the compulsiveness of this condition and his utter helplessness within its grip. Elsewhere he explains that "most often, as an individual, I'm helpless against this power. And my helplessness evokes a towering rage. Not thought. Not strategy. Not avenues of coalition. But rage. Visions of revenge" (17). We can see how Mura's body is produced by a

matrix of desires for whiteness, both as an object and idealized subject, and how the power relations structuring this production are also simultaneously mystified by them. Treating the Asian American male body and its desires as a discursive construction is, I think, a sensitive response to the dangers of the 'possession paradigm.'<sup>19</sup> Under that formulation the desire to possess white bodies is a facet of the desire to possess all that those bodies signify—power, status, belonging etc. It is a frame that both naturalizes female bodies as an objective means to 'legitimate access' into American society and idealizes the Asian male as a static sexual subject. The exercise of power is placed under erasure, the structural deployment of sexuality read as an impossible challenge. In his sickness Mura can only think sexuality through this paradigm—elsewhere he writes that "I'd elevated whiteness, I'd inculcated its standards of beauty, I'd believed on some deep level the myth of white superiority." In his recovery he comes to see this "was a part of my sickness, part of the colonizing of sexuality, [the feeling that] every white woman who rejected me somehow reaffirmed both my sense of a colour line and my sense of debasement" (232). His awareness of the 'colour line,' denied and naturalized in his sexual addiction, evokes a realization, first, that the possession paradigm itself is mandated by racial and sexual hierarchies and, second, how his body is produced within them. He shifts from an ambivalent worship-hatred of the white women who reject him to a criticism of the cultural logics of his desires and the intricately related social and political structures that call him into being.

Returning to the first passage quoted above, we can see how a major force of these political—we can perhaps even say corporeally interpellating—structures is their deployment in hegemonic visual representations, especially pornography. Mura's desires are produced by the fetishization of both white and black bodies, or, more specifically, fashioned out of the absence of Asian bodies as erotic subjects in the visual field. The Asian body is what he elsewhere calls the "missing third" in the black-white sexual binary. This invisibility is inscribed so consistently in all forms of representation that Mura upholds films such as *The Lover* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, which feature Asian male/ White female relationships, and even obscure titles such as *The Crimson Kimono* or *The Ginger Tree*, as "talismans," as assurances of the legitimacy and acceptability of his own interracial sexual desires and relationships. We should perhaps be alerted

to that fact that, in searching for representations of sexually powerful Asian males, Mura commits himself to the same essentialisms inherent in Frank Chin's masculinist project. He does, on the other hand, problematize his position by acknowledging how this "need of precedent" is also "part of my obsession, my sickness" (263)—the invisibility of the self creates what Homi Bhabha refers to as a "crisis in the representation of personhood," an inability to fashion a coherent identity. Early in his text Mura writes of how "the images and phrases, the movies and my desires, have melded into each other, despite any attempts I make to keep them separate" (16). Elsewhere he relates how his 'discovery of sexuality' occurred through his encounter with pornography, evoked by his gaze at fetishized, objectified white bodies.<sup>20</sup> In his account of the development of his sexuality Mura shows how his guideposts, his 'talismans,' were confined to visual texts that both celebrated and degraded white women, but which presented them as nothing but sexual objects. The project of his poetry, Zhou Xiaojing insightfully observes, is to "subvert racial stereotypes by historicizing them, and by exposing the strategies of constructing identities intersected by race, gender, sexuality and class" (250-1). The project of his memoirs, I would argue, is to expose his suffering in the deployment of race and sexuality within the context of power, and to demystify the 'regulative ideals' that produce that suffering. Nevertheless, the fashion in which women remain as largely passive sites of desire and change, the way the vicissitudes of patriarchal structures go largely untheorized in his text (except for a few casual references to Andrea Dworkin), remain a problematic area in his writing.

### **Probing for Asia**

Women remain a conceptual aporia in Mura's thinking about sexuality. This is most certainly a deficiency that Ting would be quick to point out. It is not a heteronormativity *per se* but a very specific kind of heterosexual relationship, one that repeats oppressive gendered positionalities, that renders Mura's apprehension of the discursive production of race and sexuality incomplete. The naturalization of this relation in large part enables his theorizations about the body. The logic that has consistently represented, and in turn produced, the Asian male as 'eunuch,' or which has woven him out of the field of vision altogether, is radically historicized in

*Where the Body Meets Memory*—the female body is not. This is not to say, however, that Mura is unaware of these problems. In fact, his interrogation of the site of the body, its desires, pleasures and suffering, can be read as a strategy for circumventing complications of gender: by emphasizing the body's ordeal in the intersection of race and sexuality he manages partially to avoid the necessity of positive substitution. In other words, he argues that the Asian American male body is 'emasculated,' constructed in an inferior relation to the white body, without replacing that body with a coherent theory of genuine or authentic *masculinity*. Nevertheless, as I attempted to sketch above, it is precisely in this 'return' to the body that Mura's theory of sexuality becomes most problematic. This 'return' leads Mura to a *performance* of virility that relies on the exploitation of women as tokens of cultural well-being. Two episodes from the memoirs will suffice to expose the dangers of such a performance.

In the first, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, Mura describes a significant turning point in his sexual life:

One discovery I made in Japan was that after years of sexual relations with only white women, of knowing I would marry a white women, of shunning Asian-American women, I suddenly found Japanese women attractive. Part of this flowed from my joy in being part of the visual majority for the first time. Day after day, in Shinjuku, in Shibuya, in Roppongi station, they rushed past me like a rainstorm, the cool placid surface of their faces, registering for me a new beauty. . . . They knew nothing of Fu Manchu or Charlie Chan. I looked at the women, I found them beautiful, but there was no charge, no feeling of being excluded, being singled out. They were not forbidden to me. There was no taboo. In their eyes, I was neither strange, nor feminine, nor dark, nor exotic, nor irrelevant: I looked like their brothers, their fathers, their husbands, their lovers. Perfectly normal. (TJ 148-9)

Thus Japanese women themselves become talismans—they represent for Mura a field of non-repressive sexual objects. The Japanese body, or more specifically the appearance of Japaneseness, facilitates a liberatory reciprocity that was unavailable in America. But by reading this reciprocity in terms of sexual possession—of unforbidden and 'perfectly normal' desire—Mura consigns it to the misogynist dustbin. Women, this time Japanese, are exploited as registers of racial and sexual health. For Mura, the 'cool placid surface' of their faces become mirrors to reflect his 'normalcy,' desirability, and, ultimately, power.

Such power and the joy that is attached to it is even more obviously presented in Mura's description of his brief affair with his student Thuy, a Vietnamese refugee. What makes the affair so problematic is not simply that he cheats on his wife or that he takes advantage of his authority.

In fact, Mura acknowledges that “I abused the power of my position as her teacher and did not keep the boundaries between us” (*WBMM* 209). The really troubling aspect of this affair, at least under the terms of our criticism so far, is the way that Mura *uses* Thuy as an instrument in the fashioning of his identity and recovery. He celebrates her somewhat melancholically as “the only Asian woman I’ve ever touched” (208). She becomes a kind of vessel, in both senses of the word: she transports Mura to a realm of ‘unalloyed desires’ at the same as her body contains all the signals of ‘perfectly normal’ sexuality. Mura directs our attention to these non-verbal recognitions that fomented their affair: “the slight, but hardly accidental touchings, accompanied by smiles, glances held a moment too long, just stepping over a boundary without either of us saying ‘Yes, now’” (204). And even later, when the relationship becomes more explicit, there is a kind of intuitiveness to their motions: “five thousand miles away from that city, all our hesitations over, and what surprised me was not that we were suddenly kissing but that, almost automatically, my hand was thrust up her skirt, and she was parting her thighs, letting into some knowledge I did not think she possessed” (207). Mura, I think, tries to evoke in this episode a sense of natural reciprocity—an organic, non-verbal (perhaps pre-discursive) mutual desire that just ‘feels right.’ The possession paradigm is thereby reversed so that possession of *Asian* women provides ‘legitimate access’ to Asianness itself: “perhaps that sense of being in the presence of what I had missed, or what I had longed to see . . . drew me closer” (207).

We might remember here Jennifer Ting’s observation that the Asian American movement writers, in the process of empowerment, “discovered that their sexual desires and pleasures were already (and always had been) Asian American” (7). Mura, I think, uses the Asian women in his life to trigger a similar discovery and then to inscribe it as an empowering experience. While he attempts to de-naturalize the sex roles that have been assigned to Asian men, Mura projects onto Asian women’s bodies a sexuality that is somehow *inherently* affirmative. In a sense, the pornographic discourse continues from Mura’s addiction through his ‘recovery’: women’s bodies are objectified—or, more accurately, given an extremely narrowed, eroticised subjectivity—to fulfill his perceived lack of recognition, masculinity and power. I have already referred to this masculinity as a ‘performed virility’—might these gestures towards an inherent and quasi-

legitimate pan-Asian sexuality then not be read as a performative strategy? In other words, while Mura, under the ambivalent terms of his thinking about the body, at various moments naturalizes both racial and sexual identifications, is there any way we can affirm these naturalizations within the terms of our criticism? And further, is such an affirmation possible without the sexual instrumentalization of women's bodies?

### **By Grace of the Flesh**

One of most provocative, and so most problematic, passages in Mura's text is his account of his meeting with Japanese American historian and political activist Gordon Hirabayashi. He writes that he suddenly recognized, with a shudder, that "if Gordon Hirabayashi had been my father, if my father had talked like this, I would have felt differently about my body, about my sexuality. I would not have seen them as a source of wounding and shame" (246). Throughout *Where the Body Meets Memory* Mura suggests ways that his identity and sexuality are "directly tied to what happened nearly fifty years ago—the signing of Executive Order No. 9066 and the internment of the Japanese American community." There is a continuity of repression, exacted initially as a physical relocation and displacement and then much more pervasively as silence and shame. By referring to Hirabayashi and the openness of his speech, Mura does not elevate him as a talisman of Asian American masculinity. Instead, the activist serves to highlight how it is the zone of silence, the intense discomfort with the body, that characterizes Japanese American repressed sexuality. Mura finds in Hirabayashi something liberating, something so unlike the other Japanese Americans, especially in his own family, that he has known: "I felt something physical in his presence, something palpable, about the way he was in his body, the way his words allowed me to be in my body" (246).

The Japanese American body is produced within and to some degree *as* silence. We have already seen how Mura experienced a vague sense of sexual freeing among Japanese women—an awakening from miscegenatory 'sickness.' Elsewhere, he quotes a 'therapist-friend' who tells him that most of her Asian American women patients "feel nauseous when they think of making love with an Asian man" (184). Drawing on this evidence, Mura jumps to the following

conclusion: “In the end I can’t vouch for the truth of my version of the past. But I know it is truly my version, and *therefore* reflects the *reality* of Japanese Americans of my generation, of my time” (257 italics mine). How is it that out of a sense of utter alienation from the ‘community’ he is able to suddenly speak for it? I think such a shift is enabled within the terms of Mura’s argument that silence and shame is what marginalizes and represses Japanese Americans. To this is added what I alluded to earlier as a vague and uncharacteristically inchoate theory about the bodies that are repressed in this process. Without overtly changing his treatment of the body as a discursive product, Mura returns, when dealing with a specifically Japanese American embodiment and sexuality, to that ambiguous theorization. For instance, he speaks romantically of his garrulous grandfather Jinnosuke:

Women liked him, though. It’s not that he tried to change himself to be with them. He had this charm, this ease. He was rough, but he wasn’t. Friendly, certainly, but more than that. He just wasn’t withdrawn like the other Issei men, he wasn’t stiff. He liked to tell jokes, he was literate and yet never went beyond high school. (179)

And in an odd passage in *Turning Japanese*, Mura ventures to inscribe a quasi-mystical source of cultural identity. Lost in the mountains outside Kyoto, he accesses a kind of intuitive cartography:

In the thick dark, amid the smell of the needles, I felt a sense of uncanniness, of whatever was Japanese inside me, suddenly palpable and present in the wind that flowed around my body, so familial, that peace. I knew the way back. I could return to Tokyo. (174)

There is a sense here that Mura hesitates to make claims to healthy bodies but that it is a reluctance that is ultimately overridden by his felt need to fashion some idea of a community.

Perhaps the most provocative of these attempts to recover or negatively produce a Japanese American body is Mura’s recollection of moments of intimacy with his father that seem, in retrospect, “almost biological.” Again Mura clouds his approach to the body in ambiguity and his assumption of a deep, confessing mode of expression: “A couple of these moments carry a certain mystery, a zone of memory beyond interpretation. It’s hard to find a place for the images in the weave of narrative; they seem timeless, permanent, existing in their own aura” (79). And yet there is something so powerful in his description of these moments that I am tempted to accept them at face value:

I realize now that part of the strangeness of seeing my father naked came from the fact that I was circumcised and my father was not; at the time it seemed only that his penis was different, foreign, larger. I don’t know now why I was there in the washroom to see this, but I sense I felt

comfortable in that washroom with the steam rising about him, more at peace than I ever felt with him clothed. It was a setting of intimacy, of fathers and sons. . . . It will be years before I recognize, in a poem, this gesture of love. (79)

There is a very strong sense of a pre-linguistic, pre-repressive, perhaps even pre-discursive body here—a zone of comfort outside the production of silence, the constitution of shame in the body. There is a gesture towards a Japanese American body that escapes discursive repression. Taken together with his comments about his sexuality in Japan, about Hirabayashi's comfortable embodiment, we can recognize an implicit argument for an authentic, healthy and original Japanese American body.

Whereas his negotiation of the construction of racialized bodies involved the naturalization of gendered power relations, this articulation of a unique and resistant Japanese American body involves a fundamental naturalization of the body itself, along ethnic valences. It is a strategic move—overtly, for the course of healing and, covertly, for the articulation of a community identity. Such an approach to the intersection of race and sex on the body is certainly dangerous: by grounding an identity both negatively as the product of repression and positively in an inchoate theory of the body, Mura runs the risk of repeating hegemonic racial and sexual categorizations. Jennifer Ting would argue furthermore that any notion of a pre-repressive body exactly contradicts a reading of sexuality as discourse. However, because Mura's text is primarily soteriological, dedicated to the cess of the suffering of his body, and precisely because such a return to the body seems to have been psychically therapeutic, there is an itching temptation to accept *Where the Body Meets Memory* as an articulation of a problematic but ultimately very important *provisional* strategy for navigating the 'odyssey of race, sexuality and identity' in America. For Mura, at least, "Imagination is intervention, an act of defiance. It alters belief."

### CHAPTER 3

Every man got a right to decide his own destiny,  
And in this judgment there is no partiality.  
So arm in arm, with arms, we'll fight this little struggle,  
'Cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble.

Bob Marley, *Zimbabwe*

The real world challenged my claims.

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

#### **Confessing Race**

How does one address pain? By what means can one move beyond the traumas of childhood and their disturbing recurrences in maturity? Where does one turn when one's own body is exposed as a fiction?—a fiction which nevertheless houses, orders and disciplines one's desires, pleasures and pains? As we have seen, for David Mura, part of the answer to these questions lies in this very fictitiousness—the constructedness—of the raced and sexed body. By depicting and then rejecting an insidious addiction to pornography, literally committing his porn collection to flames, Mura mobilizes against a conspicuous site in the body's traumatic social construction: visual representation. We have also seen how a process of communal return and healing is co-extensive with this mobilization. At work here is a kind of socio-diagnostic psychologizing that identifies the 'pathology' of individuals and groups as having root causes in the social structures from which they are alienated. Japanese Americanness itself becomes a kind of pathological condition, born of the silent aftermath of the internment experience. What Mura shows us is that if there is to be any healing from this silencing repression, the inaugural act must be one of confession—a confession not only of the sins but also the suffering of the flesh. He informs us that:

Telling is a form of healing; the Catholics with their confession, Freud with his couch, both acknowledge this. To be shaven, to be understood, to be purged. To find the buried, the necessary emotion, and release it . . . [Confession] is what you tell yourself so that you may begin anew, with a different set of imperatives, an altered sense of what you must do. (*WBMM* 223)

Confessing to a 'welter of sexual acts' and telling of his tortured helplessness form the practical basis of Mura's therapeutic recovery from his addiction to pornography. There is at the same time

the suggestion that Japanese America, shamed into restrained conformity, must also be purged and shriven through telling:

My own sexual history certainly isn't a common Sansei experience, but it does point to zones of silence within our culture. Questions about how our desires are formed or where they came from are somehow too troubling to many, including many Asian Americans in interracial relationships. Such questions bring up too many doubts about the 'natural' process of assimilation. (248)

If we are reminded here of Darrel Hamamoto's comments on his classroom experiences cited above it is perhaps because they stem from the same possessive discourse. Bi-racial desires and relationships, the unremitting 'intervention' of white bodies and culture into the sexual sphere, are symptoms of a fundamental sickness that plagues Japanese Americans as a collectivity. This sickness, in Mura's formulation, is the unwillingness to speak of the past: *sho ga nai* and *gaman*, the quiet endurance of fate.

We perhaps cannot help but read this solicitation of a collective confession to pathologized desires in light of Foucault's discussion of the *scientia sexualis*. Power, as we have seen, does not operate by repressing truth and sex; such a conception—the 'repressive hypothesis'—is itself an effect of power. For Foucault, power works, rather, via the proliferation of sexual discourses, through the codification of assiduously delineated 'sexualities,' and most especially in the injunction to speak, to name. This injunction, Foucault argues, has been co-extensive historically with the 'implantation of perversions':

it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured to the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice. (HS 48)

If telling, for Mura, is a form of healing it is also, for Foucault, a form of submission—not to the master/therapist nor to the cathartic links of an imagined community but rather to the field of discourses that define normality/perversion, sanity/insanity, and wellness/pathology. The turn we have detected in Mura's writings—from sexual confession to group representation—dramatizes the seductive dangers of the sexual science. For it becomes clear in *Where the Body Meets Memory* that Mura seeks to write the Japanese American body politic, or at least that part of it which has been written out of history—its potent, angry masculinity. The act of telling, and

indeed the act of writing, is at the same time an act of circumscription, one that demarcates exactly what it is that must be purged.

How then, can one address pain when its diagnosis is implicated in the very exercise of power that oppresses one? Can a critique of power not contain an affirmative dimension, as well as its genealogical one? Can the pain of 'emasculatation' exist only as an 'instrument-effect' of power, a discursive codification of sexual normativity? For if Mura's texts make anything clear, it is that there *is* such a thing as pain, that there *is* a relationship between that pain and historical injustices, and that it can become transmogrified into abuse if it is not recognized—not redressed. Nowhere in his writings does Foucault deny this suffering; in fact, it the cue for his critique of mechanisms that have historically disciplined the modern subject. Power operates not by denying pain, but by articulating it—producing its signification—through specific, inductive channels. Thus, the problem with Mura's confessions is not that they express pain but that they express it only as *male* pain—the pain of the colonized father and his abject male progeny. We have already seen, in Mura's writings as well as those of the porn-interventionists, the violence that stems from non-recognition of women's pain: sexual possession of Asian women's bodies became the determinant of socio-cultural well-being and Asian male castration anxiety was countered with a remasculatation project that invested power solely in the symbolic representation of the penis. Women, thus, are essential to the regeneration of the Japanese American body politic but only insofar as they are incorporated into, become vessels for, men's corporeal politics. 'The' body, it seems, meets memory somewhere outside of women's subjectivity.

Is there, then, any way to salvage Mura's devastating exhibition of trauma and his pained longing for communal affirmation from restrictive patriarchal discourses? Writing specifically on woman and visual representation, feminist theorists such as bell hooks and E. Ann Kaplan have gestured towards the maternal body as a potentially disruptive aporia in patriarchy:

Motherhood is one of the areas that has been left vague, allowing us to reformulate the position as given, rather than discovering a specificity outside the system we are in. . . . The focus on women as (simply) sex object, or (more completely) as fetishized (narcissistic male desire) . . . in Hollywood films, may be part of the apparatus that represses mothering . . . One could argue that since the law represses mothering, a gap is left through which it may be possible to subvert patriarchy. (*IGM* 322-323)

Within the boundaries of Mura's writings, however, such a possibility could only be actualized negatively—the memoirs simply do not inscribe the maternal body.<sup>21</sup> They do, on the other hand, indicate other aporia, and within them suggestions of qualitatively different experiences of embodiment. As noted above, these appear in Mura's writings as inchoate and submerged yet somehow significant and instrumental. I have so far turned to Foucault to understand this not-quite pre-discursive body, only to disqualify it for its implication in discursive domination. I will now turn my reading other-wise, outside of critical-discourse, to that thinker that has haunted this paper thus far (in fact haunted each one of the writers we have examined)—Frantz Fanon.

### **Racing Confession**

But why Fanon? On the one hand the answer seems obvious: his theorizations of race and sex under colonial rule and his radical politics provide an illuminating counterpoint to Mura's political discourse. And in his work as both a psychiatrist and a writer, Fanon became well known for his advocacy of violence—violence that would free the psyche from traumatized stasis, that would liberate men from dehumanizing servitude. Such violence in the discursive realm (which may be better understood as contestatory intensity) may help to breach the impasses that stare out at us from the pages of Mura's work. But this of course raises the ambiguity of appropriating Fanon for our discussion. For if the danger in Mura's healing community was in the way women—both coloured and white—were narrowly subjectified in order to facilitate its formation, Fanon alone cannot present us with any refuge. As many critics have pointed out, in his valorization of a revolutionary community, Fanon assigns to women a harsh self-disciplinary regimen as the terms of their begrudging admittance to the group.<sup>22</sup> Thus Fanon's phallogocentric insurgency seems amiss in our endeavor to resolve similar conflicts we have encountered so far in Mura's work and that of the pro-porn theorists. However, I would like to show how, within the Fanonian paradigm, a radically different notion of embodiment presents itself as an alternative to the remasculination project. It is a dynamic, heterogeneous and active body that we might animate to bring both Fanon and Mura into fuller engagement with feminist theory and thus a more radically transformative conception of race.

Perhaps the best way of introducing Fanon to this dialogue would be to show how his specters have already inhabited its contours. Early in his paper Hamamoto records Fanon's insight that "inequality based upon racial identity plays out through the field of sexuality," and acknowledges *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon's first book) as a foundational text in the exploration of "the questions of race and racial oppression under the regime of capital" (326). Richard Fung, as we have already seen, also cites Fanon for his critique of the objectifying gaze that reduces the signification of the raced body to its sexual organs; it is a critique that prefigures Fung's own pursuit of the Asian penis. And most significantly, Mura himself details his own experiences with reading Fanon; *Black Skin, White Masks* itself becomes a cathartic agent. Having read the chapter, "The Man of Color and the White Woman" Mura writes that:

In an instant I understood what I'd been doing all those years. What had long been unconscious had suddenly become conscious. Fanon had laid it all out before me . . . Here, I realized, was a truth that neither therapy nor my work on family systems nor addiction had ever addressed. None of that psychological thinking had ever considered very deeply the context of race. As the years have passed, I've come to feel both liberated and entrapped, penetrated and critiqued by Fanon. (WBMM 232)

For Mura, as for a number of writers, Fanon radically illuminates the predicament of race in oppressive systems. What he finds in *Black Skin, White Masks* is an address of pain that is profoundly unlike that available in other therapies—one that not only admits of the complexities, even the irreducibility, of race in the development of the psyche, but which also engages with the regressive and ultimately self-defeating paradigms through which such complexities are treated. Contemporary psychology, Mura suggests, is for the man of colour an incomplete, attenuated science; its investigations are configured through a homogenized notion of the social that subordinates race to supposedly more substantial, more universal psychic structures. Thus what Fanon reveals, and what the various therapists, encounter groups and even men's movement gatherings to which Mura submitted in his 'recovery' did not, is that the trauma of race—of being in a world that is split into Manichean opposites (self and racial-other)—is both analogous to and implicated with the psycho-sexual dramas that produce the subject. "Fanon," Mura writes, "knew the source of psychic sickness might not lie always solely in the individual or that individual's family but in the greater sickness of a society, in the relationships and ideas that society has produced" (TJ 292).

Like Fromm, Reich, Marcuse and a number of other theorists working with Freudian psychoanalysis, Fanon seeks to reformulate the individual-social demarcation and to highlight the relationship between individual alienation and alienating social arrangements. But while the former sought to map social psychoses within the historical rise of capitalism and totalitarian class society, Fanon applies his own psychic diagnostics to a seemingly timeless system of colonial domination. He clarifies this in his introduction to *BSWM*:

The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- primarily economic;
- subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority. (11)

Thus while the goal of therapy is to disalienate the black man, the double process of colonization makes this goal unattainable within psychiatry alone. For Fanon, the colonial world is a world of splitting: economic and political power for white colonizers, socio-cultural subordination for black colonized. But there is a further split that both maintains and is maintained by this primary disparity, that which resides in the black man himself: his fundamental self-alienation. Consequently for Fanon, psychiatry is auxiliary to the political struggle for freedom. For the man of colour, psychiatry has one political goal—disalienation from colour itself.<sup>23</sup>

### **Neurotic Alienation and the Colonial Gaze**

It would be impossible to trace to any satisfactory degree how Fanon constructs both his psychoanalytic approach and these political aims. It must therefore suffice to analyze certain moments and specific events in Fanon's texts that seem most illustrative. The case study, then, through which we can most clearly observe the fabric of this psychiatry—the one which Mura finds so intensely resonant with his own experiences—is that of Jean Veneuse, the 'man of colour.' Fanon introduces Veneuse in deceptively simple terms:

The problem is admirably laid out, for the character of Jean Veneuse will make it possible for us to go much more deeply into the attitude of the black man. What are the terms of this problem? Jean Veneuse is a Negro. Born in the Antilles, he has lived in Bordeaux for years; so he is a European. But he is black; so he is a Negro. There is the conflict. He does not understand his own race, and the whites do not understand him. (64)

Veneuse is in some senses the quintessential colonized man: an *aliené* from both his own society and that of the colonizer. And while he desires white women exclusively and ventures to succeed as a French intellectual, these are not, Fanon argues, the most insidious marks of his colonization.

Psychic colonization operates at deeper, much more disturbing, levels:

Above all, he wants to prove to the others that he is a man, their equal. But let us not be misled: Jean Veneuse is the man who has to be convinced. It is in the roots of his soul, as complicated as that of any European, that the doubt persists. (66)

For Fanon, it is in these very doubts, these subterranean anxieties, that the truly debilitating effects of colonization are manifested. They are evidence to the splitting of the colonized psyche. Echoing DuBois, Fanon discloses in Veneuse evidence of the ‘twoness’ of the colonial condition, the split which ultimately forces the man of color to make an obscure choice between ‘his own’ culture and that of the master. Obscure in that it is not a choice at all but rather a definitive structuring of the superiority-inferiority binary along the colour line. But, even while the onset of Veneuse’s self-doubts are linked to an experience of alienating social structures, Fanon infers that:

Jean Veneuse is a neurotic, and his color is only an attempt to explain his psychic structure. If this objective difference had not existed, he would have manufactured it out of nothing. (79)

In making such a diagnosis Fanon does not, as many critics have argued, reduce pathology to the singular causality of colonialism.<sup>24</sup> (We might remember here Mura’s assertion that his sexual history, while atypical, nevertheless “does point to zones of silence within our culture”). In a sense, Veneuse is like any other man: at conflict with his world, prone to psychic disturbances, essentially unfree. Fanon wants us to see that it is precisely this universality, this shared psychic fragility, that makes Veneuse’s condition a clear illustration of the fundamental injustice of the colonial condition. By presenting Veneuse as a neurotic who happens to be black, Fanon sets up a calculated politico-psychiatric model, one which will lay open the radical limitations that systems of colonial domination place on any attempt at disalienation.

Interestingly, Mura himself offers a reading of the political implications of this model:

Trapped in feelings of inferiority, Veneuse clings to the sense that his skin color is a flaw; a loner, he accepts the separation imposed on him by the color line. At the same time, he wants “to elevate himself to the white man’s level,” and his “quest for white flesh”—he constantly seeks out white women—is part of that attempt. Veneuse’s acceptance of the color line dooms him, says Fanon. It keeps him from seeing that the world must be restructured and, with it, his own psyche. (231)

Thus if there is any hope of adequately confronting the disorders arising out of the colonial relationship, therapy must attack simultaneously the individual's and the society's sickness. But here, of course, is the deliberate irony of Veneuse's case: for while he indeed he may have, as a neurotic, manufactured racial difference out of nothing, the fact remains that such difference does exist and does, in fact, organize humanity into opposed valences of beauty and ugliness, desirability and repugnance, superiority and inferiority. If the conventional approach to neuroses might prescribe a change in environment or the adoption of a different, more actional orientation to that environment, how far, Fanon asks, can such therapy go when the environment itself is neurotically structured? Is there, for the man of color—born into a world divided into Manichean divisions, split himself by these divisions—an alternative to paralyzed inferiority or deluded superiority? Fanon, followed by Mura, wants us to see that there is a possibility of existence outside of these oppressive binaries, beyond fruitless psychologizing: "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?" (231). But because the world is so pathologically split by race, because bodies are so deeply inscribed with the demarcating lines of colour, this attempt to touch the other, Fanon argues, "implies a restructuring of the world."

But what is it specifically that must be restructured? What kind of praxis would someone like Veneuse or even Mura need to make the world less alienating? And what does this have to do with our discussion of pornography and community politicization? A substantial part of the answer to these questions rests in the central role Fanon, following Lacan, gives to 'the look' in the constitution of not only the psyche but of the racialized body. In his essay "The Fact of Blackness"<sup>25</sup> Fanon gives this process stunning expression:

. . . in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance.

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare, I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro! (116)

In this passage Fanon makes it clear that the codes of racial difference have the status and sanction of scientific discourse, of bio-genetic transparency, of objective truth. But he also turns on his

medicalized metaphors to highlight the instrumentality of this look: the look itself becomes a microscopic, surgical apparatus, one that dissects the flesh to bring genetic truths to the surface. This 'microtomic' gaze fixes the man of colour to an interpellated corporeality. Whereas for Althusser the subject is 'hailed,' called into being by that naming, Fanon's colonial subject is 'fixed,' called into being through the suspicious, interrogative, fearful, lascivious eyes of the French doctor, the colonial soldier, and most wrenchingly, the white child:

"Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. . . .

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down my tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (111-112)

The power of this look is generated from the concatenation of a range of discourses—the anecdotal, the fantastic, the historic, the scientific. It causes a crisis in the black man's psyche—a new awareness of his 'twoness,' of his self-alienation. Fanon in a sense comes to stare at himself through the child's eyes, to batter himself down with blackness, and thus make himself an object. The truly insidious dimension of this 'look from the place of the other,' then, is not only its capacity to radically depersonalize its object, to reduce it to its bare corporeality, but rather in how easily it becomes the 'look from the place of the self,' doubled back onto one's own body. 'Epidermalization'—literally, the inscription of race on skin—is a socio-cultural construction that nevertheless signifies as a biological given; a projective, categorical fantasy that is nonetheless corroborated—because compelled, enforced—in the real world.

In many ways this formulation of the body-in-culture resembles (and perhaps prefigures) Foucault's model of discursive production. In both theorizations, the body is constituted within a panoptical field of looks—looks which turn inward to surveil and discipline the self. Both theorists, furthermore, underscore the centrality of sex and sexuality in the body's constitution—the prurient solicitations of the interlocutor, the sexualized nature of the colonial gaze. But whereas Foucault articulates how the power of sex lies in the proliferation of sexual

significations, Fanon is concerned with how discursive proliferation mobilizes against the man of colour by reducing his subjectivity—his being—to sex, or more exactly, to his eroticized body: “The Negro is only biological” (165). Fanon tells us that, in a casual though extensive survey of friends, colleagues and patients, ‘Negro’ consistently signified “biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent, boxer, savage, animal, devil, sin” (166). Appropriating Sartre’s analysis of anti-Semitism, Fanon shows how these significations, rather than merely standing as ‘evidence’ for blackness, actually *mark* it, defining the ‘Negro’ erotically. Responding to ethnographer Michel Cournot’s observation that “four Negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral,” Fanon writes that:

... one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis. It is easy to imagine what such descriptions can stimulate in a young girl in Lyon. Horror? Lust? Not indifference, in any case. (170)

The black man is sexually threatening because he is black; at the same time he is black because he is sexually threatening. He cannot escape this objectification because he can neither shed his blackness nor see himself through anything but white men’s eyes; he cannot help discovering himself as that inferior genus, the ‘genitalized’<sup>26</sup> Negro. And while this eroticization of his body might stimulate desire, lust and even jealousy among whites, and thus endow him with a kind of power, it ultimately marks the black man as a site of excess—excess masculinity, animality—that must, Fanon asserts, be tamed, dampened, castrated.

### **Pain that Matters**

Thus we return to the emasculation theme that has run the length of this study and will now be able to recognize the terms by which Veneuse—and by implication Mura—is read by Fanon as a self-castrating neurotic. Veneuse, Fanon argues, is, like any other black man, a prisoner of his own body. He is “woven out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories,” sutured to a body that is “sprawled out, distorted, recolored,” and depersonalized by the gaze, dehumanized by his *imago*. But if this gaze, this collapsing of the imaginary and the symbolic, endows the black man with a to-be-castrated genitality, it is Veneuse who, in his neurosis, castrates himself before it. Instead of ‘standing up’ to fetishization and Manichean inferiorization he merely strives

to prove that he, as an individual, is in fact 'not a Negro.' And rather than search for the company of other black men and women, for the possibility of finding recognition among them, Veneuse withdraws from society altogether. This leads Fanon to make a clarification: ". . . the purpose of our study becomes more precise: to enable the man of color to understand, through specific examples, the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Negroes" (79). It appears then that, for Fanon, emasculation is an instrument of social alienation, of community dis-identification. Veneuse sees his skin colour as a flaw because he exists in a white world where blackness *is* a flaw; if the black half of his 'twoness' is abjected this is because he avoids identification with those who might affirm it. The white master fixes him scopophilically as a penis; his black brothers, it seems, may help him to regain the phallus.<sup>27</sup>

And so we make another return, this time to the site of the non-oppressive community, first introduced by Hamamoto's longing to see "Yellow people reveling in the joy of their own sexuality without White interventionism." We revisited this theme in Richard Fung's call for an independent pornography that would exist somehow outside the symbolic codes of Western sexuality. And, most seriously, we were led to question David Mura's ambiguous gestures towards psycho-sexual harmony among Japanese bodies. The questions that arise from a Fanonian perspective then: do these exhaltations of an 'unalloyed' sexuality constitute a world-restructuring praxis? could these representations of sexual solidarity turn back the ethnocentric gaze? Fanon's answer to these questions would most likely be in the ambiguous negative. For Foucault, the problem with these counter-representational practices is that while indeed they do resist or possibly even subvert the prevailing 'specular matrix of intelligibility,' the program of positive substitution that they endorse mark them merely as supplemental instrument-effects of power. "Where there is power," Foucault warned, "there is resistance." A Fanonian critique of these 'visual resistances,' though equally ambiguous, is grounded in much more concrete material causes, which the case of Jean Veneuse makes clear. The 'look,' as we have seen in his case, is extremely important: it is a site of power-knowledge *par excellence* that simultaneously incites and fixes the man of colour from without with blackness; both racist discourses and the gaze itself are internalized in this epidermalization. However, the fundamental question for Fanon regarding the

colonial gaze is not so much *how* it oppresses or *how* its signifying chains produce the racialized, alienated subject but *why* it can do so, and *why* it can do so with such impunity. This question is, of course, symptomatic but as such it cuts to the heart of Fanon's rhetoric. For Fanon, if whiteness is desirable, it is so because of the *real power* that people who happen to be white possess; if blackness is degraded it is rendered so by the degraded social position that is consigned to masses of black people under colonial rule; and if identification with or internalization of racist images is a prevailing reality, it is because the proliferation and hegemony of these images are enabled by gross iniquities in the control of their production and traffic. Thus for Fanon,

The Negro problem does not resolve itself into the problem of Negroes living among white men but rather of Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white. (202)

The questions surrounding race and representation that we have been pursuing thus far become refigured—for Fanon, the issue is not so much whether racist and racializing images can be contested, subverted or transgressed but whether they can be refused, abandoned or destroyed. In other words, the aim is to discover what kind of praxis is necessary to revolutionize the oppressive and exploitative structures which are only coincidentally owned by whites but which nevertheless are sustained by the systematic exploitation and oppression of blacks.

Thus as Freud did with both Hamamoto and Foucault, Marx makes a covert appearance in Fanon. But, of course, materialist criticism has been everywhere in the production of Fanon's revolutionary sociodiagnosis. We have already seen how, in the introduction to his study, Fanon argued that the roots of the colonial inferiority complex are 'primarily economic.' Returning to that passage we will see that Fanon makes the bold assertion that "there will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places" (11). But beyond this stress on economics, there is a real resonance between Marx and Fanon relating to the complex notion of praxis. For it is clear that for Fanon, as it was for Marx, political critique is useful only insofar as it facilitates action against the status quo of class domination. Veneuse's anxieties about the colour line hence remain neurotic insofar as he refuses to 'stand up to' it. The Marxist point that Fanon is thus making is

that the colonial condition can not only compel a passive conformity or even conversion to its ideological apparatuses, but that it can also blind its subjects to the base structures of exploitation that permeate all aspects of social and political life, including processes of psychic identification and alienation and, of course, the provocations of desire. Praxis, to a certain extent, rests in the articulation, or rather the exhibition, of these chains linking psycho-social alienation to material forces—in other words, in deconstruction or demystification. However, the greater point is that, for Fanon and Marx, praxis requires that we make a concrete and collaborative effort to re-make the world. That point, they say, is to change it.

### **Fanon and the Porn-Interventionists**

The desire to change the world is without a doubt also the primary motive of the porn-interventionists. The visual tactics that Hamamoto, Fung and Ko seek to employ are clearly directed against the racist and fetishizing representational practices of the status quo. While within the Foucauldian paradigm what made this strategy less than effective as an attack on power was its structural positivity—that is, its re-inscription of Asianness as a sexual site—the Fanonian critique offers a somewhat more basic reproach. The porn-interventionist tactic, in a colonial frame, is indicted for its tendency to mask or even intensify the foundational power imbalances to which schemas of representation—even processes of psychic identification—are subordinate. Consequently, while images of Asian male virility and sexual prowess may subvert the pornographic gaze of the ‘white masculinity complex,’ while an ethos of mutual sexual recognition between Asian Americans might transgress the prevailing racial codes of Western pornography, these tactics do not engage with the basic structures which enable the oppressiveness of all pornography. In their rage against *symbolic* castration, the porn interventionists, like Jean Veneuse, miss the *materialist* point.

That point, Fanon may have declared, is that while the porn interventionists rally to varying degrees around the notion that pornographic representation has the potential to violate and disturb established codes of sexuality, the fact remains that pornography, in essence, is the commodification of sex. It is, in other words, lashed to economic reproduction: it is at the same

time a commodity in itself and an instrument that enforces subordination to the social order that that commodification signifies.<sup>28</sup> Like the epidermalizing gaze, the pornographic gaze fixes its subjects within the bounds of desire—reduces their subjectivity to purely sexual signification—and controls that desire itself, submitting it to chains of racialized signification. What makes the colonial gaze so paralyzing and so ultimately enervating is what makes pornography so marketable. The intervention of Asian male potency, an increase in his masculinity quotient, does nothing to break the mechanical reductiveness and objectifications that make pornography such an insidious apparatus of power. Like Veneuse, the porn interventionist merely attempts to “elevate himself to the white man’s level” by trying to prove that they, Asians, are equally capable of commodifying their sexuality. As if to underline this solecism, Hamamoto concludes his paper with this astonishing concession:

So long as Asian Americans are marginalized within or outright excluded from the dominant system of film representation, they will continue to embody an alienated sexuality conditioned by an oppressive system of White racial supremacy. Since independent feature films are prohibitively costly to produce, difficult to distribute, return scant profit to investors, and often tiptoe around issues concerning sexuality anyway, perhaps the most efficacious and crudely direct strategy to assert an immediate visual presence would be to take up the camera and turn it inward to capture the pleasures of the flesh as enjoyed by Yellow people. (344)

One of the many disturbing implications here is that the proliferation of racist attitudes and stereotypes is somehow independent of modes of production and the creation of value. There seems to be, therefore, no need to directly confront either the more established ‘dominant system of film representation’ or the economic structures which keep those more costly, less crude means of production in the hands of the ruling class. Representational hegemony thus goes virtually unchallenged. Without a coherent critique of the material foundations of the racializing gaze, counter-hegemonic porno practice is of little consequence: mere scribbling in the margins.

It might be said, however, that Hamamoto’s analysis of the juridical and legislative mechanisms “that have shaped the sexuality of Asian Americans” is the beginning of that coherent critique. So, it seems, are Richard Fung’s anxious concerns about the “constraints of the marketplace” and the relative obscurity of independent filmmaking. But what remains intact within their approach, however, is the separation of representational practices from the institutions which legitimate those practices. Consequently, they can make no distinction between the erotic and

pornographic—that is to say, no distinction between sexual representation which might indeed facilitate “otherwise forbidden exploration of sexual desire and practice” and sexual representation which mass produces this exploration, and codifies, packages and markets it shamelessly for profit. As we have seen, this singularizing commodification is what defines pornography.

Thus while the pornographic gaze might be appropriated, problematized and subverted, the pornographication of race and sex cannot. The erotic awaits the world’s restructuring. For men like Veneuse, Fung or Mura, affirmation of sexuality is certainly possible, though such affirmation can seemingly only take the form of only the most generic and conventional (i.e. patriarchal) sexuality. We know from his long and uneasy dialogue with the Negritude movement that this is the position Fanon would have held. For while Cesaire, Senghor and a number of other writers and artists worked passionately to affirm blackness as a positive reality, Fanon, in light of more foundational Manichean iniquities, criticized such efforts for their romantic naiveté:

Let us be clearly understood. I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe. (230)

Historical revisionism, counter-strategies of representation, are thus premature—their genuine insurgency is in a sense pre-empted by structural oppression. But further, they tend to conceal what are for Fanon the real tasks of alienation. They merely address emasculation with a parade of imaginary phalluses, trumpeting to no one their potency in the grip of power.

### **Working with Mura**

How then do David Mura’s cultural politics fare within a Fanonian critique? As we have already seen, the shaping of Mura’s views on race and sex and the limits of conventional psychiatry were deeply influenced by Fanon’s writings. His rejection of pornography did not, of course, stem from some Fanonian notion of colonial disalienation. However, in the particular way he theorizes his recovery from sexual addiction, his ‘return’ to the site of the body, and in his gestures toward cathartic if not inherently healthy community attachments, Mura seems to perform a kind of Fanonian procedure. Fanon’s diagnosis of Veneuse’s neurosis established a firm link

between social alienation and individual pathology. Thus the task of psychiatry is superseded by the political one just as schemas of representation give way, as objects of transformation, to the material conditions of colonial rule. Can we then see Mura's return to the *bodies* of Japanese American activists and artists as a recognition of the active political ethos Fanon argued is essential to disalienation and de-pathologization? Or, put another way, can Fanon's sociodiagnostic psychiatry affirm these ambiguous gestures Mura makes—to the 'palpable' energy and freedom of Gordon Hirabayashi's presence and the 'almost biological' acts of paternal love—in his own politicization of race?

The fundamental problem with these gestures in the terms of our earlier reading was a structural one: its implicit remasculination discourse abjected femininity/passivity in the name of a tyrannically performed masculinity. Fanon cannot recuperate Mura's politics in this regard. As many critics have pointed out, misogyny and homophobia are woven tightly into the fabric of Fanon's own politics.<sup>29</sup> However, I would like to argue that a reading of Mura's work through a Fanonian paradigm may reveal or open spaces within the cathartic remasculination project that could allow for a resolution to this stubborn problem. By doing so, I endeavor to join critics such as bell hooks or Françoise Vergès who continue to 'work with Fanon,' trying to evoke a more 'inclusive vision of freedom and liberation' by inhabiting and speaking out of the aporia in his work. These critics variously argue that it is important to rearticulate—as opposed to simply dismiss or disavow—Fanon's dangerous sexual politics for the fact that his theories have a radical affirmative dimension that is unmatched in 'postcolonial' criticism.

What makes this affirmative dimension so germane to contemporary thinking about race is that it is not, as critics have argued, grounded in some natural, essentialist and static concept of the raced body. (This is also what makes it possible to occupy Fanon's discourse and carry it forward). Fanon's analysis of the processes of racialization and even his delineation of Manichean opposites are based on a theory of embodiment that is heterogeneous, dynamic and, above all, historical. "The Negro is not. Any more than the White." Fanon never refers to an essential blackness—he shows, in fact, that that very essentiality, that biological fixity, is projected onto the black body. "It was not the black world that laid down my course of conduct. My black skin is

not the wrapping of specific values” (227). Fanon is, moreover, careful to distinguish between an ideal ‘corporeal schema’ which for the colonized can exist only as an ideal, and a ‘historico-racial schema’ which is the prevailing and seemingly inescapable mode of embodiment. Therefore, when in his famous ‘final prayer’ Fanon pleads “O my body, make of me always a man that questions!” he is performing an invocation or entreaty—a calculated appeal to a fundamental essence which can only come into being in the act of invocation and in the process of contestation.

But further, even when Fanon speaks of the national liberation of the colonized, when he talks of the ‘decisive battle’ between the ‘two species’ of the colonial relation, he does not appeal to a resistant identity somehow prior to colonial history. Rather, the bodies of those black men who fight to restructure the colonial world are identified, defined, only in the process of change. History has fixed that black man as essentially black; his refusal of this subjugation may re-animate history itself, restore to it its dynamic spontaneity:

The problem considered here is one of time. Those Negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialized Tower of the Past. For many other Negroes, in other ways, disalienation will come into being through their refusal to accept the present as definitive. (226)

Thus it is through *action* that the man of colour can achieve both ‘authentic disalienation’ and the fomentation of a cathartic body politic. “Every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows,” Fanon continues, “I have felt solidarity with this act” (226). The cure, then, for Jean Veneuse’s neurosis—and in fact for the pathologized alienation of all men of colour—lies not in a miraculously restructured and changed world but in the participatory struggle, the cooperative *connatus*, of *restructuring* and *changing*: “It is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world” (231). The liberatory body is kinetic, protean; the disalienated corporeal schema is inaugurated through resistance.

It is with this dynamic, quasi-phenomenological theory of the body that we might address the problematic sexual politics of David Mura’s work. It provides an alternative way to conceptualize community identification and catharsis that does not have to ground itself in ‘almost biological,’ ‘strangely palpable’ bodily resonances. As we have seen, such discourse enabled the furtive return of racial essentialism and an exclusive celebration of inter-Asian sexuality. In a

sense, this is what leads Mura to perform a kind of ‘Sinotude’—like Césaire, much of his writings mine the past for sources of affirmation and belonging and for signs of healthy eroticism. However, there is a fascinating episode in his *Turning Japanese* that suggests a reorientation to the kind of active solidarity and dynamic embodiment that we have sifted from Fanon. To close out this thesis, I would like to read this episode—which I will call the ‘Narita episode’—‘Fanonically,’ and will argue, finally, that it presents us with a radical political paradigm that sutures a real attempt to reject and dismantle oppressive modes of representation to a dynamic, inclusive and insurgent body politic.

### **Masquerade**

The ostensible purpose for Mura’s year-long visit to Japan was to absorb its culture. To this end, he begins to learn the language, participates in various classes (including Butoh and Kabuki), reads Japanese novels and initiates friendships with a cross section of expatriates, intellectuals and artists. An implicit purpose, as we have seen, was to “enter the culture through [the] body, through sight” (28). In the process of this entrance, Mura, perhaps partly because of the limitations of language, writes a number of suspect gestures toward a ‘normal’ visual reciprocity (“they all looked like me”) and quasi-mystical corporeal identification (“suddenly palpable” Japaneseness). Japaneseness, thereby, took on a kind of essential latency, secreted somehow between the cracks in monolithic Americanization, activated by environmental—above all visual—stimulus. This ‘perfectly normal’ Japaneseness, furthermore, was experienced most acutely as a sexually possessive affect: “I looked at the women, found them beautiful, but there was no charge, no feeling of being excluded, singled out. They were not forbidden to me” (149). Mura’s disalienation and his personal remasculination began, then, with a dubious shift in both the subject and object of desire—from pornographic addiction to white women to a liberated appetite for Asian women. Mutual erotic recognition came to signify cultural self-worth and power. These problems in the fashioning of cultural identity are, I think, what makes the Narita episode so remarkable. For there seems to be not a rearticulation but a *reversal* of these blood-bound, possessive racial discourses to one that is more heterogeneous and dynamic.

Among the people that Mura meets in Japan is Matsuo, an American-educated radical. He invites Mura to a protest organized by a number of groups on the 'Japanese left' at Narita International Airport. Mura describes its premise with, initially, a distanced apathy:

I know little about the demonstration, only that the farmers around Narita have protested the building of the airport and the issue has become a rallying point for the Japanese left. Now the authorities are planning to expand the airport and take even more of the farmer's land; according to the left, the airport would then be used for military purposes. (210)

And while he ultimately engages in the march, he complains repeatedly that "I'm getting bored, very, very bored" (211). One of the reasons for this torpor is that he has, seemingly, no significant function in the demonstration—he is merely one of the masses. Moreover, as an American, an outsider, he is given special protection which places him far from the frontlines, from the 'action.' But another, more subtle, cause of Mura's initial disinterest is the ritualized quality of the protest. Having been informed of the coming events he offers a cultural comparison:

Whatever violence occurs at this demonstration, it's not going to be spontaneous. It's not like the demonstrations I participated in at college. There most of the protesters were pacifists, and if violence occurred, it was usually caused by the police losing control, going berserk. Here, the helmeted groups are clearly armed for battle. They expect to attack the police, not simply react.

Everything has been orchestrated, impeccably planned. (212)

Later on Mura refers to the ordered chaos of the battle scenes in Kurosawa's *Ran* and asserts that "the riot had that same ritualized quality" (222). This lack of spontaneity and his demotion to a supportive role on the one hand leaves Mura personally enervated and detached. On the other hand, these features of the protest foster an empowerment of the collectivity by clearly defining not only the oppositionality of the protesters but also the function of each member in relation to the larger proceedings. Another friend, Ken, reasons that "the demonstrations are actually more to solidify the Chukaku"<sup>30</sup> (223). This seeming solipsism, however, does not entail the sacrifice of democratic principles—in fact, a final and somewhat comical cause of Mura's boredom is that the protest is painfully prolonged since "every contingent gets a speaker."

Halfway through the episode Mura begins to take greater interest. He does so not because of a growing sympathy for the plight of the Sanrizuka farmers but through a developing awareness of the implications of the act of ritualized protest itself: "Talking with Matsuo, I've come to feel that the demonstration itself is more important to him than the issues. 'It's like the university intellectuals,' he says, 'You can do so much theory that you lose touch with practice'"

(210). Thus for Matsuo, though not quite yet for Mura, active participation in protest takes precedence over speculation and critique. This privileging of praxis is, of course, commonly associated with 'left' politics and indeed we know that Matsuo is an avid reader of Marx and Gramsci. Mura, however, is partially skeptical and voices concern for the loss of "individual ethics" amongst a group of active and ritualistically defined radicals. And yet, reflecting on the demonstration after the fact, he writes that: "in recent weeks, especially after the demonstration, I'd felt more direct connection to politics than I had since the early seventies, when I marched with others at the state capital, protesting the war" (224). Mura here expresses a phenomenon similar to that which Fanon theorized in relation to Jean Veneuse. Despite his critics, Fanon did not simply prescribe action as opposed to reflection as a cure for colonial inferiorization. Praxis does not translate directly into a restructured world. Rather, Fanon wanted to show how active participation in collective struggle—as in the encounter groups of institutional therapy—can *initiate* critical politicization and *begin* to encourage authentic links amongst members of the group. In other words, social disalienation. Thus, marching with strangers on the Japanese left, partaking in their ritualized protest, Mura comes to feel 'connected with politics' in a way that seemed unavailable through reading Jameson, Levi-Strauss or even Fanon and speculating about 'individual ethics.' We might say that for Mura, contra Matsuo, demonstrations are not 'more important' than the issues but that they come, at least in this episode, to a kind of synchronicity: opposition to material exploitation is intensified at the same time as the group is empowered.

With this new active ethic, this orientation towards a participatory body, and this repositioning of theory and praxis, Mura steps away from the essentialist 'resonances' that troubled his politicization of race. But the Narita protest lays further ground for this departure not in its structural but in its functional dimension. Mura describes the tactical measures that are taken before the protest:

Fifteen minutes from the airport, Matsuo nudges me. We're slowing to a rest stop. Someone hands me a cold mask. . . . Next I'm handed a blue nylon parka with a hood. A white terry-cloth golf hat. Gloves. A pair of sunglasses.

Battle dress, says Matsuo. (207)

Now while the camouflage serves a strategic purpose ("it will prevent you from being recognized in photographs"), we become aware that it has, for Mura, greater implications. The anonymity

conferred by this 'battle dress' is in a sense a reprise of the comforting anonymity Mura enjoyed when he first saw that he was surrounded by Japanese faces. The important aspect to consider here is that anonymity is experienced as affinity: "The ordinary Japanese stare at me. Everything looks dark. I'm one of the group, I feel the solidarity created by the stares of those outside the group" (208). The gaze of the 'other' fixes Mura symbolically but here, for the first time, it is a fixation that links him to active solidarity as opposed to passive abjection. This provides access to a Japanese embodiment without positing its essentiality. As Mura tells us,

I find I like being part of the group. With my invisible man outfit, headed for the airport, I'm doing something a hakujin, a white person, could never do. One giant step for the radical Japanese left, one small step for an American Sansei. (213)

This appaeled anonymity/invisibility has a number of implications for our discussion of race and representation. On one level, the masquerade allows Mura to turn away at least temporarily from the ethnocentric gaze—the body is concealed from static identification and even protected from gendering ('all the demonstrators looked androgynous'). In a sense, the heavy parkas and floppy hats refuse objectification and pornographication of the body. The look from the place of the other can only objectify the group itself and thus may now be felt as a recognition of solidarity and not neurotic alienation. Mura becomes 'part of the group' in a way that seemed impossible for him in his life as a Japanese outsider in America and an American outsider in Japan. On a more abstract level, the protest camouflage creates a performance or *masque* of group identity and belonging that is not based on a biological and static materiality but one that is dynamic, provisional and discursive. Japaneseness here is not some *thing* that can bestow a sense of comfortable embodiment nor is it some *thing* that is 'remembered,' which endows an intuitive cartography of the homeland. In the protest, Mura draws on a Japaneseness that is defined by its groundlessness and lack of identity. Ritual and anonymity shift the locus of group formation from essence to performance.

The dynamism and performativity of this radical body politic also facilitates a shift from a discourse of remasculation to one of empowerment. Instead of figuring Japanese American 'pathology' as an inability to sexually recognize or possess other Japanese Americans, the Narita

episode inscribes that pathology as political powerlessness and estrangement. Ultimately, for Mura, these shifts bear on the responsibility of Japanese Americans in the wake of the internment:

And in a crazy way, I see this as part of my legacy, the legacy of the relocation camps. For I admired the fact that the protesters were doing something; were not sinking back into *sho ga nai* (it can't be helped) passivity. In contrast, the Japanese Americans confronted with the power of the U.S. military and government at the start of World War II did not protest. (217)<sup>31</sup>

We have already seen how Mura has theorized the effects of this passivity on the psycho-sexual lives of Japanese Americans; we saw too how he resorted to the site of the body to recover some original Japaneseness from this repression. But here, instead of grounding that return in a sexually aggressive body, Mura targets what is, in a sense, the source of that repression—the political restraint and pacification of the body. And it appears that the Nisei bear most of the responsibility in this regard:

By assimilating, the Nisei shed what had made them guilty: their Japaneseness. Did they see this shedding as an admission of guilt? I don't think so. . . .  
The nail that sticks up gets hammered down. Assimilation was a way of not sticking up.  
Is it any wonder that the next generation would inherit, instead of Japaneseness, a sense of shame? (218)

Mura even goes on to state more directly that “I am ashamed of their weakness. . . . It is the part of the past that I would disown” (226). With these lines we return to the theme of group pathology and the catharsis of confession that inaugurated this chapter but this time in a markedly different fashion. The healing strategy has now shifted from a desire to fill in the ‘zones of silence’ that pervade Japanese American history with the iconography of Asian virility or the ideal mutuality of racialized corporeality. It has shifted away too from the injunction to confess to guilty pleasures or the amnesiac quiescence of Americanization. Mura begins to find affirmation and empowerment not in exaggerated masculinity or the victimization of his ancestors but in activity and solidarity:

The weakness of the Issei allows me to identify myself as one of the downtrodden, one of the powerless. And yet, as a Sansei, as one assimilated into America, with a sense of myself my parents did not possess, I can escape that powerlessness by my protests, my political engagement. Like a child, I want to have things both ways. (226)

Thus through active political engagement, the son redeems the sins of the father. The exorbitant cravings of this child, however, transpose the implications of those sins. A continuity is struck between powerlessness in the political sphere and the powerlessness of internalized shame. The

empowerment of Japanese Americans, then, is generated not simply through confession to this powerlessness (now read as a 'sin' projected onto Japanese American bodies), nor by appropriating the shamelessness of pornography, but in an attack on the modes and mechanisms of disempowerment. The father, in this reading, is not castrated into silence and passivity but, rather, *encased* in the power effects of a discourse that marks him with emasculation. Active political protest, then, enables the son not to recapture the phallus but to cast off that encasement by catalyzing the body's locomotion. Hope springs in the realization that powerlessness is escapable. "I am not," Fanon wrote, "the slave of the Slavery that dehumanized my ancestors" (230).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The literary evidence for this well-known constitutive matrix (in which race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality are understood and controlled relationally) is discussed by Sau-Ling Wong in her essay "Ethnicizing Gender: An Exploration of Sexuality as Sign in Chinese American Literature" (1992). This influential paper will be discussed further below.

<sup>2</sup> "The angriest Chinaman in America," Frank Chin has directed his most choleric attacks at Maxine Hong Kingston, whose success Chin attributes to an economy of 'white racist love' that 'steals our women' and 'sissifies our men'. See "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and Fake" (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Meaning, I do not feel that it would be productive to argue with someone who sees the world either as ideal in the present state or fundamentally unchangeable.

<sup>4</sup> See his "Technologies of the Self" (1984), one of his latest works where he explores a brief history of practices of the body and truth-making that could be qualitatively different than those that constitute the modern subject.

<sup>5</sup> In his *The Ethos of Pluralization*, William Connolly actually draws up a 'mastery-attunement' matrix that maps out various philosophers and theorists. He argues for example that Charles Taylor's political ontology, with its sense of a 'deep self,' calls for attunement to that self. On the other end he reads Sartre as a philosopher who called for mastery of an indeterminate self. Connolly, an avowed Foucauldian, ultimately argues for an 'agonistic' politics that highlights struggle and ambiguity as opposed to positivity and essentialism.

<sup>6</sup> See Butler's "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions" (1989) and Connolly's "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault" (1993)

<sup>7</sup> See his *Monitored Peril* (1994), the only book length study of Asian American representation on television.

<sup>8</sup> Hamamoto cites a number of legislative and juridical measures taken in the first half of this century to control the population of Asians in North America. Among these, of course, are the Chinese Exclusion Act and lesser known laws restricting the entry of Asians—especially women. Hamamoto essentially argues that the laws that created the 'bachelor societies' of early Chinatowns have vestigial effects on the sexuality of contemporary Asian Americans. He then proceeds to a brief discussion of Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* as a testament to this sexual repression.

<sup>9</sup> This is, granted, a rather crude distinction. I merely wanted to say that it is probably easier to psychoanalyze a film than a law.

<sup>10</sup> As Fung notes, "in my own video work, the stress has been on deconstructing sexual representation and only marginally on creating erotica." (150) A survey of the few videos available for viewing in Vancouver confirms this. Two of the three works, "Way to My Father's Village" and "My Mother's Castle" deal with the Chinese Canadian Trinidadian roots of Fung's family, and the third "Chinese Characters" is a video that explores, in a humorous but devastating way, the same issues at play in "Looking for My Penis."

<sup>11</sup> Wong's major concern in the essay, however, is Chinese-language writing by immigrants and the interesting way sexuality is a 'thematic preoccupation' in those texts.

<sup>12</sup> Specifically, the proceedings from the 1993 conference for the Association of Asian American Studies, *Privileging Positions*, hosted separate substantial sections dedicated to "Sexuality and Queer Studies." I am also aware that a similarly concerted attention was given at the most recent conferences in Indiana and Philadelphia.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Lowe makes this argument in her essay "Materializing Theory." She tries to show how, contrary to some views, poststructuralist theory arises out of identity politics—especially its setbacks.

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<sup>14</sup> In his essay "Identity Crisis and Gender Politics" Jinqi Ling explores more fully how the Asian male as 'eunuch' operates to designate subordinate statuses and to rationalize the historical continuity of such positioning.

<sup>15</sup> I am thinking here of some very interesting work by Amy Ling in her *Between Worlds*, Sau-Ling Wong (her essay "Ethnicizing Gender" in particular) and King-Kok Cheung, who is perhaps most prolific on the subject. Negotiating Asian American male and female subjectivities seemed to hit a watershed with the publication of *The Woman Warrior* where critics started to be more attentive to multiply-inflected identities

<sup>16</sup> This reading obviously owes its orientation to Judith Butler's work. Such a reading is suggested, as I discuss below, by Xiaojing Zhou in her essay "Race, Sexuality and Representation in David Mura's *The Colors of Desire*." The present formulation, however, is borrowed from Stuart Hall's appropriation of Butler's approach in his essay "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?"

<sup>17</sup> Now while his discussion of the function of rigid designators is confined to the realm of ideology, Žižek's formulation of Lacan's theory of retroactive 'quilting' is helpful in understanding this process. 'Asian' as such a designator comes to *explain* phenomena.

<sup>18</sup> This is, of course, a very complex issue. Within the terms of Foucauldian genealogy there can be nothing prior to discourse—it is always everywhere in the construction of identity. But then, how are we to label, say, the somatic response to music or a baby's cry—these are not exactly pre-linguistic but they do not seem to be fully discursive either. I don't mean to argue that these phenomena *are* pre-discursive but I simply can't find a clearer way to articulate them.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Sakurai summarizes the paradigm and reads its work and implications in a handful of Asian American texts in her essay "The Politics of Possession: The Negotiation of Identity in *American in Disguise, Homebase, and Farewell to Manzanar*."

<sup>20</sup> Mura writes that "My whole discovery of sexuality was tied up with finding a *Playboy* in my father's closet, a picture of a naked white woman. I knew her whiteness served as a marker for both my desire and inferiority." (244)

<sup>21</sup> Mura does, of course, write about his own mother, but in a far different light than his father. She is strangely unembodied, and none of the questions Mura directs at her are explicitly sexual. Further, though his wife Susie gives birth to two children, her pregnancy and mothering exist in their own zone of silence.

<sup>22</sup> The best analysis of this problem that I have come across is Rey Chow's "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon." Chow performs an analysis of the structures of group formation. Ultimately, she argues, any group must exclude or object in order to form—in Fanon, femininity is excluded for the sake of an aggressive, masculine solidarity.

<sup>23</sup> This seems to be a counter-intuitive claim considering Fanon's association with 'Black power' movements. But towards the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon writes that "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man. Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible" (231). I return to this passage below.

<sup>24</sup> This passage is of course much more complex than can really be managed here. The most coherent explication of this diagnosis comes from François Vergès who argues that, by locating Veneuse's neuroses in universal psychological terms, Fanon ascribes to the man of color an access to universal recognition while the woman of color suffers from exclusively colonial pathologies.

<sup>25</sup> In his excellent essay "The Black and the Body Politic: Fanon's Existential Phenomenological Critique of Psychoanalysis," Lewis Gordon attentively notes that this English translation of the original French (*L'expérience vécue du Noir*) is dangerously misleading—that it implies that Fanon indeed thought there was such a thing as a 'fact' of blackness. Gordon offers what appears to be a more accurate translation: "The lived experience of the black"

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<sup>26</sup> I take this term from Stuart Hall's "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?"

<sup>27</sup> This distinction between the penis and the phallus is obviously very complex and it has been a rich site of analysis in many discourses, including psychoanalysis and deconstruction. I use 'phallus' here to indicate symbolic authority; thus the white man possesses the phallus that enables him to equate the black man with a mere penis.

<sup>28</sup> This is essentially the argument that Joel Kovel makes in his "The Antidialectic of Porn."

<sup>29</sup> The most powerful criticisms come from Gwen Bergner, Rey Chow and Kobena Mercer.

<sup>30</sup> No translation is provided for this term but I assume that it means either 'protesters' or something more specific like 'socialists.'

<sup>31</sup> We know, however, that there were many attempts to protest the internment. So too must Mura, as Gordon Hirabayashi was among a group of lawyers who took challenged the internment at the Supreme Court level. This non-recognition on Mura's part may stem from the fact that the only Niseis Mura knew intimately were his parents who, in his estimation, were meek in their compliance to relocation.

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