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The Bind of Representation: Performing and Consuming Hypersexuality in *Miss Saigon*[1]

Celine Parreñas Shimizu

> . . . [A]ll the Vietnamese women in *Miss Saigon* are prostitutes, either hypersexualized Dragon Ladies in string bikinis or Kim, the single Lotus Blossom—shy, passive, virginal in an ersatz Vietnamese wedding gown. Boasting of her exotic attributes, Yvonne (one of the other prostitutes) promises, "I'll show you/ My special trophy of war," thrusting her hips . . . and the GIs roar with approval. In contrast, Kim is portrayed as unwilling and unpracticed ("I'm seventeen and I'm new here today . . . I've not done this before") . . .[2]

> The persistence of stereotypes is evident in the *Miss Saigon* text. All the featured female Asian roles in *Miss Saigon* (i.e. roles that stand out from the ensemble) are prostitutes. One should not assume that prostitution connotes immorality. In *Miss Saigon*, however, the prostitutes, while allowed to display something of an emotional life, clearly signal desperation and squalor. Paradoxically, *Miss Saigon* also romanticizes the prostitutes' plight: by highlighting Kim's virginity and the vulnerability of the other women, *Miss Saigon's* text employs the "hooker with a heart of gold" scenario that erases the actual circumstances endured by particular women in the sex industry with an image of the "triumph of the human spirit."[3]

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[2] Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 32.

[3] David Schlossman, *Actors and Activists* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 149.

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A fiction of hypersexuality composes the roles of Vietnamese female prostitutes in *Miss Saigon* (1989). I define hypersexuality as the inscription of a pathologically intense and excessive propensity for sexuality as if it were a natural characteristic, one directly linked to a particular raced and gendered ontology.[4] A Western fantasy of a perverse subject position for racial and gendered subjects in popular representations, the production of hypersexuality directly contrasts with normal or standard white male sexuality. While I come to this specific notion through my study of Asian women, this phenomenon powerfully ascribes the sexuality of nonwhite others as aberrant.[5] While hypersexuality is a "fiction" that ultimately fails to capture the sexual subjectivities of raced and gendered subjects as a "factual" or coherent group, the differences between normal and abnormal classifications have values: right versus wrong, knowable versus unknowable, acceptable versus unacceptable, and familiar versus different.

The normal versus abnormal framing of sexuality has important implications for the interpretation of racialized images. To assume that sexuality gives bad impressions of racial subjects keeps us from looking at how these images critique normative subjectivities. Through an exploration of Asian female sexuality in *Miss Saigon*, my essay revisits and re-evaluates discourses of sexual promiscuity, deviancy, and perversity in order to move beyond a one-dimensional understanding of sexual representation as always already injurious, dangerous, and damaging.[6] I argue that Asian women's performance and consumption of racialized hypersexuality provide the terms for resistant authorial and spectatorial relations in the theatre. By utilizing the analytic lens of sexuality towards antiracist ends, I introduce the framework of the "bind of representation" in order to identify how racial subjects undergo hypersexual interpellation, on both sides of the stage, as a productive and formative social and political experience. That is, the bind of representation posits that hypersexual representation is an experience of both power and powerlessness for minoritized spectators and actors. Situated in marginalized histories within the theatre, minority actors and spectators are bound subjects who nonetheless invest in representational forms as contingent and ambivalent, and who engage hypersexual terms as redirectable and changeable. Thus, a kind of "productive perversity" emerges from the performance and consumption of Asian female hypersexuality.

First, I build upon the most recent works published on *Miss Saigon* and specifically examine what is overlooked in the discourse of sexuality in the literature. I evaluate the predominance of race panic logic when addressing Asian female hypersexuality in

[4] See the important psychological and philosophical discussions of the concepts of normalcy and pathology in George Canguilhem, "Do Sciences of the Normal and the Pathological Exist?" (Sections I–III), in *On the Normal and Pathological* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1978).

[5] I argue for the notion of hypersexuality as a bond of mutual recognition in the article "Master-Slave Sex Acts: *Mandingo* and the Race/ Sex Paradox," in *Wide Angle*, 21.4 (Summer 2004): 42–61.

[6] My usage of the term "Asian women" refers to the trajectory of fantastic figures found within representational images rather than "real" women. My study aims to provide evidence for rethinking the interpretation of particular models. Through the specific notion of Asian women as discourse of fantasy, I use race, sex, and gender to show how the production of meaning in the process of representation is complicated. For a genealogy of the suicidal Asian woman in the theatre from *Madame Chrysanthemum* to *The Mikado* to *Madame Butterfly*, refer to Teresa De Lauretis, "The Stubborn Drive," *Critical Inquiry* Summer (1998): 873; see also Marina Heung, "The Family Romance of Orientalism," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 160.

representation. Second, in order to counter the equation of hypersexuality as racist, anti-feminist and anti-Asian American, my essay discusses a specific personal encounter with a San Francisco audience as a collision of competing desires and identifications with the hypersexuality of Asian women on stage. Third, my interviews with Asian female actors performing in the Broadway Theatre provide authorial perspectives regarding the performance of perversity composing their hypersexuality.[7] The actors describe the possibilities for self-fashioning and political critique in ways unaccounted for in established discourse of racialized sexuality in representation. The interviews demonstrate that actors possess the agency to construct multiple understandings of Asian female sexualities through their performances and the descriptions of their own work. Both authorial and spectatorial encounters describe a multifaceted dynamic of bondage within terms of injury and pleasure, in relations spurred by hypersexual representations. Finally, I bring these sites of study together in order to forward a theory of representation that accounts for the bind of being an Asian American actress and an Asian American female spectator, especially in performing and consuming hypersexuality for Asian women.

Discourses of Promiscuity, Immorality, and Perversity for Asian Women

The blockbuster musical hit *Miss Saigon* re-enacts on stage the warring encounter between Vietnam and the US through a narrative of interracial bodies enmeshed in sexual relations. Chris, a "distraught" American soldier, meets Kim, an "innocent" Vietnamese prostitute, in a bar. They have sex and immediately fall in love. She then arranges to marry him in an impromptu ceremony attended by other prostitutes. The couple stays in bed together for days during the fall of Saigon until Chris is abruptly called to the military base. Considering herself his wife, Kim tries to flee Vietnam but fails as Chris reluctantly leaves on the last helicopter. For three years, Kim waits for his return while working as a prostitute in Bangkok and taking care of their child. Upon learning of his son, Chris ultimately comes back with his American wife. The appearance of the "legitimate" wife leads Kim to recognize her "fate" and kill herself in order to give up her child to the American couple.

While the musical mainly follows the life of the virginal prostitute or perversely innocent Kim, the minor female actors play prostitutes who more tacitly accept their hypersexuality in the military rest and recreation sites of Vietnam or the commercial sex tourism scene in Bangkok.[8] Whether innocent or lascivious, Asian women signify extreme perversity against the white female norm, which Lauren Berlant frames as the innocent symbol of reproductive sexuality for white women in American national fantasy.[9] The musical concludes with the American wife as a pillar of motherhood and the proper wife in the family and nation.[10] From the controversial opening scene, the musical itself establishes the hypersexual carnality of the Asian woman.

[7] In November 1999, I met Edmund Nalzaro in New York City's Broadway Theatre. I interviewed him in New York City in October 2000, along with the actors Luzviminda Lor and J. Elaine Marcos.

[8] I believe that the Asian woman's innocence, as opposed to the white woman's innocence, is made perverse when she is also a prostitute.

[9] See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 58–60.

[10] At the end of the musical, the curtains close as Ellen, the American wife, reaches out to Tam, Chris and Kim's biracial son.

In her oft-cited article on the musical's 1991 debut in New York, spectator-protestor-critic Yoko Yoshikawa provides a highly ambivalent, contradictory, and complicated response to the opening scene. She attempts to repress the powerful seduction of the Asian female bodies singing and dancing with sexual fervor. She describes her intense viewing experience as a denial of pleasure.

> The opening number was dazzling—and loud. The musical opens in a brothel in Saigon, where prostitutes vie for the title, *Miss Saigon*. U.S. soldiers buy raffle tickets; Miss Saigon will be the prize. But I was not following the songs—this lusty dance of glistening legs and dark breasts, of ogling eyes and lathered lips in uniform mesmerized me. It pulled me in, as soft porn will. But I also felt sickened and alienated. The show was designed to seduce, flooding the senses with a 3-D fantasy—specifically targeted at a heterosexual man's pleasure center.[11]

In this scene, hypersexuality leads to a traumatic viewing experience. In denying one's own pleasure from the sight of pathologic sexuality, the spectator is made perverse. That is, Yoko Yoshikawa's intensely self-aware analysis reveals confusing feelings of political impropriety for receiving pleasure as an Asian female spectator from images "targeted at a heterosexual man." At an intellectual level, she understands that enjoyment of this image is a deviant act and feels guilty at being "pulled in." The framing of sexual performance on stage as a negative force that dominates and determines racial and gendered beings cannot adequately confront Yoshikawa's experience. Her very thoughtful description evidences the need to further develop a more profound appreciation for the seduction of sexual representation. The occupation of a masochistic position in receiving pleasure from hypersexuality should not be punished, but serve to remind us that there are never any clear choices or easy responses to difficult images.

Conditioned to repudiate sexuality as repulsive and negative, we need to shift our understanding of sexuality in relation to racial representations. Fear of sexuality and representation can lead to a kind of race panic, to appropriate Gayle Rubin's concept of sex panic, in fixing representation as a bad object and prioritizing moralism at the expense of critical inquiry.[12] The bondage that Yoko Yoshikawa's position as a critical Asian female viewer illuminates invites exploration of the coexistence of pleasure and pain in performing and consuming the hypersexual Asian woman.

While the critiques of performance by Asian American scholars enable my work, sexuality as an analytic remains peripheral within the important contributions made by these scholars. Within content analysis, David Schlossman rightly reminds us that the representation of prostitution does not "immediately signify immorality"[13]; yet he offers a critique of the process by which the Asian female actor stands in for actual prostitutes, whose experiences are commodified in the production. In the Schlossman

[11] Yoko Yoshikawa, "The Heat Is On Miss Saigon Coalition" in *The State of Asian America*, Karin Aguilar San Juan, ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 277.

[12] See Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger*, Carole S. Vance, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 297. Using Jeffrey Weeks' term "moral panic," Rubin describes how fervent social fears translate to scapegoating sexual minorities. In this groundbreaking essay, Rubin identifies the limits of feminism and the need to study sexuality as a system of oppression distinct from a gender system that prioritizes the victim status of women in its study of sexuality.

[13] Schlossman, *Actors*, 149.

quote opening this essay, there is an important disjuncture between the actor (a speaking subject) and the character of the "real" prostitute (a subaltern subject erased by the narrative), yet the grouping of prostitutes under the umbrella of victimization indicates a problem.

We must make sure that our definitions of sexuality do not create blanket categorizations of sexual groups. That is, the production of *Miss Saigon* may actually represent prostitutes beyond those enmeshed within conditions of sexual slavery. While sexual slavery indeed exists for Asian female prostitutes, other situations co-exist simultaneously in ways that should be accounted for in our definitions. According to Asian American feminist novelist, critic, and ex-prostitute Tracy Quan, some Asian women prostitutes enjoy the beauty, glamour, and seduction required in their job, at the same time that they endure its boredom.[14] This analysis counters the prevalence of victimization discourses regarding Asian female sex work. In her commitment to humanizing prostitutes in the West and East, Quan asserts that sexuality does not simply victimize prostitutes, in an argument that challenges the coherence and stability of such groups and descriptions of their experiences.[15] Accordingly, analyses of the roles and characters of Asian women in scenes such as Southeast Asian military or commercial prostitution authored by white men can also reflect the complexity of the sexuality—prostitution as well as acting—of Asian women who are further marginalized by sex panic and scopophilia regarding their sexual representation.

Framing sexuality within a non-normative/normative framework, Karen Shimakawa identifies the perverted sexualities of Asian men and women in the musical as directly related to Asian American abjection in the theatre. She describes the collapse of nation, race, ethnicity, and bodily identity that occurs for Asian Americans as constitutive of a normative experience of abjection, or what she defines as a positioning of alien status that creates a productive tension or friction Asian Americans are able to "expose and exploit" in life and performance (188).[16] Shimakawa's analytic of national abjection brilliantly provides a framework for understanding the conflation of role and actor for Asian women, and the tradition of Asian female exclusion and marginality within the performance industry. She argues well that both conditions are directly related to histories of Asian female conquest and colonization. That is, abjection defines Asian women as racially and sexually perverse, deviant and non-normative.

Can the non-normative, aberrant, and deviant position become a politically productive perversity? Analyses of sexuality usually evidence the concrete practices of racism in representation. In the quotes that open this essay, the eagerness to perform

[14] Tracy Quan, Foreword to *Orientalia*, by Reagan Louie (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2003).

[15] In the same essay introducing the photographs of Reagan Louie in the catalog *Sex Workers In Asia*, Tracy Quan accuses white feminists of xenophobia for attempting to contain sexual adventures of Western men. She also critiques the victimized representation of prostitutes, both Asian and Asian American.

[16] Karen Shimakawa builds off of French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection as "both a state and process—the condition/position of that which is deemed loathsome and the process by which that appraisal is made or the means by which the subject/the I is produced; by establishing perceptual and conceptual borders around the self and jettisoning that which is deemed objectionable, the subject comes into and maintains self-consciousness" (188). In my work, I assert that sexuality abjects Asian women as racialized and gendered subjects and this hypersexuality leads to race panic when it comes to discourses of representation.

crotch-grabbing by the character Yvonne is mentioned by Shimakawa, and the erasure of victimized conditions for their counterparts in the sex industry is forwarded by Schlossman. In these illuminating critiques of the hypersexuality of Asian women, however, I am concerned that positing white male sex as normative may condemn Asian female hypersexuality prematurely. If Asian women are perverse against a white male patriarchal and heterosexual standard, political critique possible at that site of performing hypersexuality is ignored. Simultaneously, Yoshikawa's enjoyment of hypersexual perversity would not be explored for its possibilities in articulating a political viewing position.

When Asian women themselves perform and enjoy viewing the hypersexual roles representing white male versions of "aberrant" or improper Asian female sexualities, they should not be relegated to the realm of the inappropriate and improper. We should not stand in fear of the reinscription of white male fantasy; rather, we must mine the performances' potential to undermine racial, gender, and sexual normativity. When we flee the complex power of sexual seduction in representation, identify the deviant and pathologic sexualities of Asians as an endpoint, or identify the disconnection between representation and reality rigidly, we lose sight of using sexuality to pervert the logics of racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

Critical Stage and Scene[17] Encounters in *Miss Saigon*

Almost ten years after its debut, an ethnically heterogenous group of Asian and Asian American girlfriends and I finally saw *Miss Saigon* in San Francisco. I say *finally* because until then I had refused to endure the trauma of paying to see an Asian woman's death on stage. As a first-time spectator of *Miss Saigon*, my experience of a simultaneous recognition and a deep laughter at different moments of the show took me aback. The Asian woman as the ultimate feminine—crying, coy, melodramatic—registered for me differently in a misrecognition or "that is not me" identification.[18] She emerged as a representational construct, more precisely a repository of racial and sexual anxiety in the post-Vietnam era. I could see she was someone else's invention, a fantastic figure linked to ideologies precisely diagnosed by David Schlossman as "imperialism and sexism"[19] on stage. Despite this disconnection, I knew there existed a strong bond between the image and me. It was a relationship that I accepted, then and in my everyday life—as the possibility of my being misidentified for her. But in watching *Miss Saigon*, I refused the interpellation and remade her myself. As I watched

[17] As an expansion of Linda Williams's idea of onscenity—the public saturation of sexuality—rather than the private notion of obscenity in visual culture, I am interested in the scene of spectatorship whereupon these stage figures further live. See Williams, "Pornographies On/Scene, or 'Diff'rent Strokes for Diff'rent Folks,'" in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds. (London: Virago, 1992), 233–64.

[18] Following Jose Esteban Muñoz, who describes the agency of queer spectators and producers of color, my experience may indeed be called a kind of "disidentification" practice. I use the term identification in the psychoanalytic sense of seeing oneself in another in a kind of recognition or in identifying oneself with another on stage as a substitution of the self. Freud defines identification as being directly tied to the original object, undergoing a process of substitution; finally, the meaning of the object becomes tied sexually to the person. See Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Norton, 1959), 50.

[19] Schlossman, *Actors*, 151.

the self-sacrificing, waiting, and dying Asian woman, I instead recognized in myself a life and body responding against this image that hails me.

At the end of the night, our group descended to the lobby, arms interlocked, walking and chatting with the older white folks who had sat behind and laughed with us in our second row, center balcony seats. In the crowded stairwell, a Filipina American woman who had been sitting in front of us suddenly burst forward and accused us of ruining the show. Startlingly vehement for someone who chose to say nothing during the show or the break, she yelled, calling us obnoxious, loud, and the worst people she had ever encountered in the theatre. My friends yelled back. I was mostly shocked. The ongoing confrontation of barbs and retorts, interjecting the movement of the exiting crowds, attracted the attention of the other mainly white middle-class patrons all the way down the stairs, the long hallway, the lobby, and the street. Strangely enough, our cars were parked next to each other in a dark alley of the city's Civic Center, so that the confrontation from deep inside the Orpheum Theatre continued for blocks and blocks as my girlfriends yelled back to her all the while as she walked with her strangely silent and unmoved group. It ended with a frightening spat at the doors of the cars until we all drove off without resolution.

What a huge spectacle of Asian women fighting on the street—loud, crazy, and powerful! My companions, primarily middle-class Asian American female academics, speculated upon her rage. Did she want so much to enjoy the romance of the self-immolating Asian woman? Was her experience that radically different from ours? In the deferred moments of expletives and taunts, all I could finally do was to say to her, at the end, something about how we viewed the thing differently and the problem of policing others' responses. It was really too late for me to do anything more productive than to write this critical response. The fight was not about talking to each other as a community of spectators (much less Asian women), but her need to express rage because we curtailed her enjoyment.[20] Later, my friends and I were more genuinely bewildered. We ruined a melodrama of a desperate Asian woman spurned by a white man who wrote her off as mad. Was it not a show that was already an assault on women like her and me? But Asian and Asian American women spectators do not constitute a coherent viewing bloc. It would be futile to speak for the "Asian American woman spectator" as there is no single desire, projection, identification, or coping mechanism that can be declared for any "us."[21] A more precise question emerges about the relations that form, not only among Asian and Asian American women, but also between larger audiences who perceive Asian woman against a sexy, suffering, and suicidal representation. Like Stacy Wolf, who asks about the visibility of femmes within a visual field saturated with heterosexual women, I ask about the specter of hypersexuality infusing Asian women in representation.[22]

[20] See Slavoj Zizek on enjoyment. I am interested in the politics of pleasure in the experience of enjoyment as a rich and contradictory site that diagnoses politics, power, and resistance. I am especially compelled by his discussion of pleasure at the site of subjugation. See Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As A Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 159–60.

[21] For a theory about the multiplicity of viewing positions, see Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

[22] See Stacy Wolf, *Problem Like Maria* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

After that first performance in San Francisco, I attended the Broadway production six more times in near-capacity houses from November 1999 to October 2000. At one viewing, I met backstage at the Broadway Theatre with some of the main female actors who play the Asian woman prostitutes. While waiting for them, I found myself standing in front of a large group of Filipina American teenage girls. In my brief introduction to one Filipina American actress, she told me immediately that she was rethinking the crotch grab she performs at one point in the musical. She was going to stop doing it. I responded "No, I love it, it works." I tried to remember which crotch grab she performed: the one at the top of the opening act or another performed when encircled by men. The moment was awkward. I don't know what compelled her so suddenly to talk about the raunchy gesture she performs on stage upon seeing my face, someone she's never met. Maybe she assumed I acted as chaperone to the young Filipina fans behind me. It was as though she knew the power of this image as confirming the lewdness ascribed to Asian women as something that tied us together: the multitude of teenage Filipina fans, her, and me. She seemed to speak from guilt or discomfort.[23]

This, however, is an act that the actor performs every night when she embodies the role of the prostitute. What I realized upon meeting her is that what confirms the Asian woman as lewd in popular representation is actually—at least partially—an Asian woman's own creation. How does this stunning act of creation by an Asian woman actor counter the fictional Asian woman's own masochistic self-annihilation? How do we make sense of the Asian woman I fought with and the Asian woman here, who plays the prostitute on stage and expresses a kind of resentment of her role? I bring up these women together, along with myself as a theorist and critic, in order to help me formulate the creative process of spectatorship, criticism, and production as situated relationships essential to the study of racialized sexual images.

Small Acts of Authorship: Performing Asian Female Hypersexuality

My analyses of *Miss Saigon* and *The Making of Miss Saigon* (1991) give special attention to hypersexuality—perverse sexuality—manifested as the large number of sex acts the minor characters,[24] primarily Filipina, perform onstage in relation to the size of their roles.[25] Indeed, few sex scenes are represented between the main characters in *Miss Saigon*. Lights go down on the sex scenes between Chris and Kim and Chris and Ellen, his American wife, also played by a biracial Asian American (*hapa*) woman on Broadway. We know sexual liaisons occurred by the disheveled appearance of Chris and Kim when the lights come up, the content of the songs, and

[23] As I am talking about the fantasy of the Asian woman, rather than measuring what "real" Asian women feel, the case of Filipina American performers and spectators on Broadway provides a specificity of the raced actor who performs against a white male script.

[24] Renee Tajima identifies the minor roles of Asian women as a mainstay of the Asian female stereotype: faceless hordes that signify essential qualities to whole groups of Asian American women. See Renee Tajima, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women," in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women* (Asian Women United of California, 1989), 125–33.

[25] While the contemporary cast is comprised of a varied number of other ethnic Asian women, I note the hugely significant presence of Filipina women. My status as a Filipina American scholar surely enabled my intimate conversation with the actors I interviewed. The historical and social context of constructing Filipinos as "the entertainers of Asia" is yet to be developed more significantly.

finally the interracial son they produce. The minor character Gigi and others perform raunchy sex acts on stage to titillate the audience, establishing the normality of perversity for Asian women and underscoring the heroine's anomalous and singular innocence. While sex is crucial for the main characters, the minor ones perpetually engage sex in the peep show and other acts. I focus on the large presence of women of the chorus as vehicles of hypersexuality. Establishing the norm of hypersexuality through the performance of sex acts, the minor roles burst with potential for recasting the hypersexual Asian woman in popular culture.

The site of performance by Asian American actors is too easily dismissed as complicit with the white men who write the productions. Interviews with actors in *Miss Saigon* recast the terms of the debate and insert the power of acting as creative and political work. The actors demonstrate awareness of their self-authorship on stage as a form of struggle for self-fashioning. In the classic literature on acting by Stanislavsky, Chekhov, and Strasberg, actors have a life and power of their own in terms of fulfilling their work on stage for the audience.[26] The question of central importance to me is the nature of these specific actors' power in light of their performance of roles that serve Western male fantasies of Asian female sexuality. In my interviews with the actors of *Miss Saigon*, I asked how they come to embody their roles in the context of their lives as Asian Americans in the profession. The specificity of Filipina/o American culture also arises in terms of the experience and performance of sexuality by the actors, who are predominantly Filipina American.[27]

My interviewees analyze why their creative choices as Asian actors are not seen as direct engagements with power. They index the tense relationship between the fictional role of the Asian woman and their own more factual subjectivities in order to provide a larger theory of sexuality. The performance of sexuality is framed as transformative to their own subjectivities as actors, as well as within the narrative itself. They render how Asians are, too frequently, merely the objects of the sexual story—but even within the constraints of playing into fantasy, small acts defy, contest, and reshape hypersexual scripts.

[26] I draw from the classic literature on acting by Constantin Stanislavsky and Lee Strasberg in order to describe the authorial process of performance even within a script that requires one's racially and gendered visible body to be authentic or believable. Constantin Stanislavsky describes the relationships in theatre as follows: "Every worker in the theatre, from the doorman . . . and finally the actors themselves they are all co-creators with the playwrights, the composer . . . for the sake of whose plays the audience assembles." See Constantin Stanislavsky, *Building a Character* (New York: Routledge, 1949), 266. In light of the racial and gendered disparities in the theatre, when the words, costume, movements, and songs of the above authors become the words, costume, movements, and songs of the actor in her work, these women do not achieve the role of collaborators in the sense of equal "co-authorship." This is not quite possible, especially so in a scene of racial inequity within commercial theatre. When we investigate the creative process required in acting, however, the industry cannot be said to simply use these Asian female actors to authenticate white male authorships of Asian women. Lee Strasberg's essay "The Actor and the Director" points to the role of the director in "conducting" the work of the actor so that their coming together comes to mean the "totality of the art." Although the director must explain and interpret the role for the actor, the actor must still make sense of the role in her own terms. See Lee Strasberg, *At the Actors Studio* (New York: Theatre Communication Group, 1965).

[27] Again, my focus on Filipina actors is primarily for empirical purposes, since the interviews and anecdotal accounts emerge due to the predominance of *Miss Saigon* actors of this ethnic background and the particular access provided by my own ethnicity.

The opening act, a display of carnality in the context of the Vietnam War and military rest and recreation culture, powerfully captures the actors' creative process. The actors describe the scene of carnal energy as true to the situation of sex tourism in Asia. Within this representation, J. Elaine Marcos, who plays two prostitutes on Broadway, one named Yvette and another Yvonne, describes her famous crotch-grabbing act (as Yvonne) as she sings the lyrics "my special trophy of war" as a gesture that requires "strength of character." It is a gesture that speaks both of the specificity of her character as a person and the kinds of roles prescribed to Asian women. I isolate her emphatic use of the word strength in order to capture the tensions between the agenda of the role and that of the performer. At the same time, I am very cautious about whether we can extract various definitions of strength in terms of diagnosing any form of viable power. I wonder if Marcos's personal declaration of strength reaches others across the stage.

While the crotch-grabbing act seems to submit to the myth of the hypersexual Asian woman, it also authorizes a certain kind of sexuality deployed by the specific actor in her role. If the crotch-grabbing act indexes the fantastic figure of the Asian woman, it is only a representation of reality according to the narrative in place. But J. Elaine Marcos chooses to occupy that role with a different embodiment and a different understanding of sexuality. She plays, or uses her body to perform, the prostitute as refusing to be left behind. She explains this act as part of her character's goal to will or dupe men into saving her. Her own subjectivity as a raced actress is also captured in her creative choice to play sexuality with "strength." Her choices say something about her as an actor and a performer. It is here that the Asian woman can be seen as a triangulation of actor, woman, and role, refuting the idea of simply re-presenting original identities in the performance of such roles. The occupation of hypersexuality, while severely delimited by the industry, is creative and particular to the actor within each performance. Acting is contextual and contingent on performance, as well as reception, for the audience may not even recognize the actor's critique of the text.

According to Luzviminda Lor, who plays a bargirl in the Broadway and Toronto productions, choosing sex also indicates strength in a larger cultural sense. Engaging in sex for Kim, as well as for the actors like Lor who joined the production as teenagers, means an unexpected transformation of the self. Lor highlights a different relationship to sexuality when she describes her reading of the plot. "Kim kills herself in the face of a love she does not want and the man she wants who marries someone else. Her suicide is an act that takes a strong person." She discusses the lack of choices available for women such as Kim, a prostitute in Bangkok. As such, suicide is an indictment of the lack of choices available for Third World women. She asks, was this the same for *Madame Butterfly*? Lor's reading of strength in the contradictory act of self-immolation continues the postfeminist analyses by Tracy Quan as well as postcolonial feminist readings of the *sati* (widow burning) by Lata Mani and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. Mani and Rajan locate the *sati*, and the women's expressions of pain and suffering, as an index of their lack of freedom.[28] The fantastic production, in a sense, functions like a historical documentation and critical diagnosis of the strength of Asian

[28] See Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women* (London: Routledge, 1993).

women actors, within particularly severe constraints, of the bind of hypersexuality in their profession.

To understand acting as simply re-presentation of corresponding phenotypes and national identities is to say that actors play roles as noncreating beings. The way actors occupy their roles and fill them with specific choices helps to determine the roles they play and captures the tension of forging resistances to white male authorial intentions for the roles. If they simply play themselves or absently fulfill the directions of the producers, the work of cultural production is understood as absolute. Acting requires filling the role with parts of themselves: their specific bodies and histories.[29] Such an embodiment allows us to see the ways in which actors such as Luzviminda Lor and J. Elaine Marcos choose to bring themselves into the production. In the process, they articulate a different relationship to sexuality from the one offered by the producers and expected by the audiences. They also present an understanding of their work as a political critique that enables them to engage with powerful producers on Broadway as well as paying audiences.

Both Lor and Marcos identify in the audience a trend of refusing to attribute anger to their performances. That is, they encounter audiences who find anger to be an incongruent emotion for Asian women. Lor describes how the bargirls play the opening scene with an enormous amount of power and anger, so much so that they must look incredibly large on stage. But because the women are small, petite, and Asian, the actors feel the audience refuses to accept what they see. That is, the expression of power is seemingly incompatible with emotions deemed proper to Asian women: servility and passivity. "Why do people miss that it takes a strong person? Is it the way our faces are arranged as Asian women? Or because we are petite? You are so little, so dainty, you cannot be strong."[30] The visual efficacy of Asian women's smallness seems incompatible with popular cultural expectation, so their rage and largeness on stage are refused. It's as if conceptions of their bodies precede and stay fixed regardless of performance; even if actors are visible, they are not seen by the audience. The actors understand this as part of their work and seek to fight such preconceptions at every single performance of strength, every night.

Marcos describes the capacity of actors to author and produce themselves through the concrete bodily processes of acting on stage. "Whoever originates the role sets up the tradition (of the movements performed)—the actions on the stage." As a later actor, performing ten years since the first shows, she asks herself, "Why do I walk there to give that guy a beer? I just have to follow the same traffic patterns on the stage. We have freedom within the practices of the play."[31] That is, the actors have to make choices every time they perform; they receive feedback as to whether their choices make sense in the form of notes from the producers. The actors decide at every

[29] Schlossman points to how Edward Behr reports that "Boublil, Schonburg and Hytner were determined to have as many real-life Asians in the cast as possible; Madame Butterfly-type make-up, though suitable enough for opera, would, they knew, be inadequate, *especially for female members of the cast*" (Behr and Steyn in Schlossman, *Actors*, 141, emphasis added). Further on, Angela Pao describes how Asian women are "exotic songbirds played authentically and Asian men are ciphers for whites to play" (152).

[30] Luzviminda Lor, personal interview, New York City, Oct. 2000.

[31] J. Elaine Marcos, personal interview, New York City, Oct. 2000.

performance if they want to walk fast or slow, or how they should hand over the beer: with a bad attitude or with something else. "It's up to me how I move in the traffic set up. For example, the crotch grab: I do it vigorously because I am saying to myself, in a sense, 'I got balls! I want to show everyone else up!' "[32] But even they, in making the choice, do not control its meaning. Marcos, however, expresses complete awareness that her agenda is different from that of the narrative. "But for me, the story is not what the narrative says." She explains her performances, as a very raunchy prostitute, as a more powerful production:

> I am good enough to work at a bar and not a pathetic whore waiting to be saved. I am a strong woman and men cannot take advantage of me! The opening uses both a sad and happy tone—*it is a bad life but a party too*! (my emphasis) Hey, I might actually meet a GI; I am higher than the menial people. I got a "get myself out of here" attitude.[33]

Marcos's description of "it is a bad life but a party too" captures an important process that must not be lost in our interpretation of the actors' performances of hypersexuality. The actor makes a particular interpretation of the role based on the specific emotional and physical life of the scene. In approaching the scene of sex tourism, she must ask how she would actualize the scene in terms of concrete gesture and feelings. To judge the scene in terms of morality would prevent her creative work of understanding the role. While the previous actress in the role could not grab her crotch with conviction, Marcos herself does so with "strength." She describes the previous actor who did not want to touch her crotch as wimpy, "barely gesturing down there. It takes strength to go there (do that act)—you gotta have guts in real life. To do a choreography move like that takes a tough person."[34] I watch the crotch grab after the interview, and squirm. It is certainly a powerful gesture that requires a conscious decision for it to work. It shows the tension between the Asian American actor and the Asian woman's limited role. The act is an important measure for understanding agency in recording a particular subjectivity for the actor as well as for the character. The actors create a record of their personal subjectivities and struggles within the roles; such small acts of resistance should be accounted for in the analyses and understanding of the production.

Luz Lor understands the limited roles actors play when the producers, director, costume designers, choreographer, composer, and others already delimit what they can do with the material. She describes the depth of their involvement in creating and shaping the show:

> For us, where power comes in, is in performance. It is your story to tell. When you are on stage, no one can tell you what to do. True, that there are parameters set by the writer and decided by the director. But we do and see something else! We are involved with the show long enough that we turn it inside out. We rehearsed for two months in Toronto and talked and worked through every part of the show with the actors and producers.[35]

The actors show a sophisticated understanding of their work that is different from the re-presentation understood and offered by the producers, especially in terms of their

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Luzviminda Lor, interview.

roles' corresponding to some Asian woman "out there." Yet, the actors also acknowledge an awareness of their very constrained resources. Luz Lor continues:

> We ourselves don't know how to dissect the underlying story so much since we are in it. We see the trees not the forest. We do not have the privilege of the director or the freedom of the director. The message is determined by the director anyway—there is only so much you can do to change the story. The big picture is the industry. Look at our little sets, so small unlike other Broadway shows, the hotel scenes—there's lots of space in the back of the stage—Like the production uses only a small stage, we only have small powers.[36]

In their small role within the industry, they work with what they have in giving life to the characters: gestures, bodies, movements, voices, within limited space, pace, and traffic as performers.

The question raised by the actors' articulation of their work and power is how much of the audience is able to read their own authorship of the roles. While the answer would be difficult to measure, what we do know is that they emanate in ways that contribute to the multiple viewing positions occupied by me, by the woman I fought with, and by other audience members who leave the theatre with different meanings. The actors actively and significantly contribute specific emotions and specific contexts. Even if their audiences do not get their redeployments of sexuality, their interactions with sex are telling of a different engagement with their work. They emphasize their critical re-deployment of sexuality as a technology for authoring themselves, not only in the production, but also in writing themselves into history. It is a personal act whose power and resistance is hard to quantify even in light of the actors' descriptions of their life-changing implications. These women's performances allow them to assert more powerful Asian female subjectivities. While the degree of their success may be difficult to ascertain, the ambiguity of the value of their performance introduces the complexity of meanings produced in the show.

The scene of spectatorship and performance is a dialectical encounter in that audiences actively participate in producing meaning through performance. The actors describe how the audiences of *Miss Saigon* help to shape their performance on stage. And the actors demonstrate their awareness of community with the audience in the sense of meaning shared and produced between them. Marcos describes how she sees audiences actively resisting change:

> There are couples I see determined not to clap. Either they don't like the language or the sex. Clapping is a gauging meter. The show has a rhythmic body to it—set up jokes so audiences get it—and the audience is not responding to it; how I have to fix the part . . . or how tight the show is—and doing a good job. Sometimes the audience does not respond at all. It affects people on stage. Emotionally, *Miss Saigon* is draining for the performers. The audience participates, not only in applause [...], but also in affirming our craft.[37]

Marcos shows that the audience sees her, but once again relegates her to a place that refutes her performance. In a sense, they refuse to be changed by her or to learn from her. Luz continues, "Clapping is all you have at times—to see if they take away what you are trying to say [...]. You have the power to shape perception."[38] Actors and

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

audience are in a creative and productive relationship, so that every performance is a unique and interactive discussion between fantasies, real lives, and subjectivities. More than this, what is at stake exceeds these relationships in creating knowledge and culture.

Lor asserts that actors produce roles, not only with their own imaginations, bodies, and minds, but also through their relationships with each other. Acting is creative, relational, and contingent on specific relations with actors, Marcos explains:

> It's different every time. I try to get the feeling—a rush! I try to get that feeling every night when I go on. Sometimes I focus on different body parts to do something new. It's as basic as using my right foot tonight—to re-create energy that would otherwise be the same. The new action re-energizes you. I am doing this everyday for years like any other job—boring for you if not different. When understudies go on, there is a change. I adapt a new character on stage with me. It's like, hey, what's going on here! Sometimes when (Anthony) Foronda plays the engineer, Whoah! He is scary! Luoyang Wang plays the engineer differently; he is a more compassionate man who is nice to Kim.[39]

Marcos reminds us of the actors' craft as creative work that cannot be performed monotonously, but must be continuously nurtured and reinvented. Her description of the two different engineers clearly captures the emotional and psychic life of their relations on stage. Lor adds, "There's another actress who says, 'Tonight I will be a drugged out whore.' Her energy means a subtle change in the ensemble that we can all feel. In long running shows like *Miss Saigon*, I feed from fantasy, imagination, or my real life in acting. You cannot play a part without understanding it."[40] As transformation of the self through acting occurs, whether in individual performances or in terms of their own lives, viewing can also transform audiences. Because the specifics of each night are dynamic, audiences can also be seen to occupy their spectatorship as a role to be embodied differently, depending on which actors they encounter in a particular performance. Thus, the actors also limit the audience in a mutual dependency. That is, they respond to each performance differently as well. The site between the stage and the seats is a dialectical confrontation and a struggle for mutual recognition, every night.

In *Miss Saigon*, the audience and the actors meet and encounter each other through issues and images of hypersexuality. The actors describe how involvement with a highly sexualized production transforms their self-understanding in terms of their families and traditional Filipino backgrounds. Lor narrates:

> You feel embarrassed, not so much because we're portraying something real—the opening number is a different reality represented on Broadway. Very different from Broadway typically: it is a powerful, sad happy scene. But I was raised Filipino: I could not sleep over anyone's house, I had to be demure, no dating. Then, suddenly playing this opposite character on stage. When my mom first saw me she said "*Ay, naku! Anak ko, grabe, kawawa, pinapakita ang singit!*" ("Oh no, my child, how awful, pitiful, showing her snatch (on stage)!"[41]

Both Lor and Marcos discuss how the show opens the door for "safe" discussion of sexuality and "figuring myself out too." Luz describes how sex opens up the self—like

[39] Marcos, interview.
[40] Lor, interview.
[41] Ibid.

Kim in the narrative. Exposed to sex, she decides to pursue a different life—"and goes for it!" The actors all comment on the novelty of the experience for us as Filipinas to talk about sex so openly upon meeting each other for the first time. These narratives are testaments to how involvement with sexuality does not necessarily damage or destroy you—rather, it opens up further definition of particular cultural experiences.

For Asians and Asian Americans organized by hypersexuality in representation, sexuality allows for both pleasure and trauma and for new, local understandings of the self that may seem narcissistic if it were not for telling more about minority positions in cultures of performance. When the actors redeploy sexuality as a technology of personal strength and self-authoring, sex is both the technology that condemns the musical and redeems it. Their discussions of power in sexual performance show the political role of Asian actors within the center of culture industries. Within critiques of *Miss Saigon* as neocolonial technology in globalization, the actors instead describe their work as an everyday encounter with audiences regarding myths about Asians and sexuality. And to understand the political power of acting is to allow for a theory of sexuality to emerge from hypersexual representation as a dialectical encounter among multiple subjects: what I call the bind of representation.

The Bind of Representation: Spectatorship, Authorship, and Criticism of Hypersexuality

Stacy Wolf describes women's relationships to the mythic figure of Cinderella as follows: "Love her, hate her, or ignore her: identify, disidentify or misindentify; desire to be her of desire to have her, most recognize her . . . ."[42] Similarly, Asian women live under the sign of the prostitute in US popular representations from *Shanghai Express* (1932), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), and *The Deer Hunter* (1978), to lawyer Ling Woo (Lucy Liu) owning an escort service in *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) and contemporary Southeast Asian sex tourist pornography. The bind of representation is a term I formulate to describe how actors perform against the normative scripts of hypersexuality limiting them. Similarly, spectators complete the meaning of the production, whether toward normative aims or alternative readings. On- and off-stage representations are specific spaces for experiencing and examining our relations among each other in the world. As such, we are bound to representation as spectators and actors making sense of ourselves and the world in which our experiences are situated, helping us understand the power of cultural production, what logic it installs, and how it generates pleasure. The bind of representation is an analytic framework for understanding the relationship of race, sexuality, and performance/spectatorship as a creative process. By engaging in the limits of hypersexuality, whether as actors or viewers, the possibility for recasting the derivative status of Asian women in theatre and history is opened rather than shut down by sex panic or scopophilia in the status quo.

In this section, I offer an analysis of spectatorial possibilities in watching *Miss Saigon* and connect it to the creative process of performance. Toward extending the definition of "living image" production of racialized sexuality as a set of relationships or as a bind of representation, I now bring up the Asian American woman in the audience

[42] Wolf, *Problem*, 141.

whose pleasure I interrupted. She presumably wanted to identify with the Asian woman on stage through the enjoyment of what may be seen as a "universal" love story. I use identification in the Lacanian sense of "the transformation that takes place in the subject when (assuming) an image."[43] I understand transformation to be a multivalent and unpredictable one in the sense discussed by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer.[44] She may have wanted to be subsumed in the fantasy of the Asian woman as a forgotten love object in an enjoyment of the suturing pleasure of the text (even if the Asian woman eventually dies). Or she may have enjoyed identification with the white wife who represented American women in civilization. Or she may have shared my interpretation.

Regardless of whether or not her true enjoyment can be found in any racial or sexual terms, my presumptions about her protest help me to define the position of identification as a resistant subject position. The wish to be enveloped in romance and pleasure in the Asian woman's death is an act of active spectatorship, and even this masochistic position cannot simply be rendered as passive acceptance. In this viewing position, a reading against the grain occurs so that Asian women find seemingly contradictory pleasure in their own paradoxical subjection. Identification is a particular positioning situated within a context. Her position of identification is valid, whether or not she truly occupies this role. It raises the crucial question of how pleasure can be political even as one enjoys watching or performing one's own symbolic self-annihilation.

The second position is the political platform of privileging boycott, protest, and strike that must not necessarily occlude pleasure or poorly render any participation within the musical as simply complicit. Protest, direct action, and organizing against racist representation and institutional exclusion have an important role in culture. It is an articulation of the need for recognition and an assertion of injustice and inequality that must be heard. Protest should not be dismissed as simple or uncritical. However, there must remain an opening for the work of actors as politically useful as well.

The response of Asian American activist Yoko Yoshikawa, who earlier described her reaction to the opening scene, should not be a traumatic site of refusing her arousal. Succumbing to the seduction should not simply be seen as complicity with the misrepresentation that must be disavowed (in a different form of sublimation). Such a platform does not account for the work performed by all subjects involved in performance—as contextualized within an interdependent relationship. To refuse and disavow one's responses to the process and experience of viewing can marginalize the protest of actors on stage asserting selves excluded from the white male authors of *Miss Saigon*. The political voice, understood in a binary way beyond the stage, should not be privileged in order to stifle the particular struggles for recognition engaged in by actors. Political possibility occurs inside and outside the theatre.

I am invested in naming a viewing practice committed to the inclusion of multiple and contradictory interpretations that accounts for the position of the protestors, actors, spectators, and critics—all as creative subjects. I argue that remembering the creativity of the production should not be disconnected from analyses of representa-

[43] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," in *Ecrits*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Norton, 1977), 2.
[44] See Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *ICA*, London, 1989.

tion and politics. I do not necessarily identify with the intended pleasures or disidentify radically at the occlusion of pleasure, but understand that any representation is always a misrepresentation, and that recognitions or identifications in cultural productions are creative practices that always have the potential to dislodge established tropes. Whether it is the black sidekick in the character John or the perversely innocent Asian female sexual being in Kim, representation can never adequately capture those represented as minority—nor as majority, for that matter. Representation cannot capture real people so much as construct versions of people that change depending on who produces and consumes the image.

Within the bind of representation, representation is understood as misrecognition, especially for marginal subjects. The conceptualization of the bind of representation thus highlights the limitations of demands for positive images in identification and redress in protest.[45] The looking-for-myself approach to popular images is a kind of doomed narcissism—for one cannot find oneself wholly and directly in representation. I refuse the ideology of "I want to become that" or "I refuse to become that unless it looks like me." Popular representation is a site for the powerful to speak through the industries of popular culture and for actors and audiences to insert critical revisions. As such, representation is a conversation from which lessons about power can be extracted and where freedom of the spectator-individual can be exercised even within constraints.

The bind of representation accounts for perception as not only a creative but a political practice. In my case, I did not expect to be moved into a different self-recognition by a production aimed at seducing me into identification with any of its constructions, whether the regretful American G.I. or the suicidal Asian woman whose death the audiences applaud. The problem with investing representation with politics is that the meaning of representation should not be simplified as totalizing. I do not want to conflate protest with simplicity and celebrate representation as complex. It's not as if representation is removed from politics (and vice versa), as is well established by Schlossman, Pao and others. But we must remember the instability of representational forms, in that to speak for anyone will always be a misspeaking. One person cannot stand for a whole, as there will always be exceptions. The only certainty is the importance of intervening inventively in the work of culture—whether as authors, critics, or spectators—which also includes strategic deployments of boycott, when necessary.

What is to be gained by being a part of a discursive conversation in which one is a less than equal conversant? To understand cultural production within a bind of representation is to commit to staying in the conversation, to engage with the industry at all fronts: producing, acting, viewing, and definitely protest and critique, whether in mainstream or independent production. Rather than call for a complete stop to the conversation, the bind of representation understands the contingency of the battle and the multivalency of spectatorial, authorial, and critical positions. The bind of

[45] I am referring to racial discourses of representation criticized by Michele Wallace who points to the limits of negative/positive image demands by communities of color. My theory of misidentification builds upon her critique and offers concrete solutions that account for the complexity of images that she prioritizes in her work. See Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues* (London: Verso, 1989), 1–4.

representation does not invest much in the end of certain conditions that deny full entry of minority subjects in the most mainstream of discourse. Rather, it recognizes the only certainty as engagement with ongoing exclusions and inclusions in cultural industries.

Through the bodily performance of actors and the viewing experience of spectators, I articulate a definition of representation as bondage between audiences, actors, and producers. The production of *Miss Saigon* is itself tied to how we relate to each other as nations, civilizations, and citizens as well as spectators, actors, and theatre makers within the historical moment of its appearance. The bodily and psychic experiences in the consumption and production of culture generate meanings. Actors and spectators, required to help complete the meaning of the production through their bodily expressions, shape and alter intended meanings of film and theatre, at times, in inappropriate and insurgent ways. Through paying attention to the bodies of actors and audiences in production and spectatorship, the power relations within the production of meaning in culture become more apparent. To acknowledge the processes of acting and viewing as dependent upon specific situations is to open up an understanding of the self as engaged by popular cultures of race and sexuality. The self is an actor, a raced woman, and a fantasy figure of an Asian woman simultaneously—and such a figure is a complex formation that recasts existing understandings of the possibilities of resistance at the site of sexualized images.

The bind of representation frames the stage production as a site of power relations—director/actor, director/audience, audience/actor, actor/actor, and audience/audience—as a map of historically situated relations made evident, notably, in the usually propagandistic making-of video, *The Making of Miss Saigon*. Since these relationships consist of subjects who are products of their time, such as the privileged white men who control the means of production and flocks of Asian women hoping for a break, their encounter on stage and in the scene of spectatorship can help us know about more ostensibly material relations. I am speaking of material relations such as the tension between the roles prescribed for Asian women and the persons of Asian American female actors. Meaning is contested and created within the body of the actor. The versions of meaning produced and interpreted vary therein, onstage, backstage, and in the scene of spectatorship inside and exterior to the theatre. Theatres are sites for the study of sociality itself, or how we come together as communities in psychic and bodily ways through culture. To acknowledge the bind of representation is to practice creative engagement and interpretation that engages the politics of cultural production as changeable.

Conclusion: Productive Perversity

Through an examination of the scene of spectatorship, interviews with actors in *Miss Saigon*, as well as analyses of stage corporeality, we can see how the production and performance of sex by actors and their consumption by audiences deploy competing subjectivities. The redeployment of the hypersexual Asian woman in *Miss Saigon* by actors and audiences recasts the political significance of hypersexuality in representation. When the subjectivities of the actors are emphasized, such as the context of Filipina American sexualities as well as the radically competing identifications for Asian American spectators and critics, sexuality is redeployed within racially

conscious contexts. I hope that such a reading opens up the possibilities for representing sexuality in all of its explicit engagements with differing subjectivities and experiences, as sites of study that can be of service to anti-racist and anti-colonial platforms rather than the flight from such images or a negative understanding of sexuality.

When perverse images are consumed, representation must be remembered as a dynamic encounter and a situated experience full of multiple desires and identifications. Perversity in viewing is produced at various sites: the creation of non-normative sexualities in representation, as well as perverse identifications with the themes and characters. Perverse authorships and spectatorships should be accounted for in analyses of racialized sexual representation for their critique of normative subjectivities. That is, sexual proclivities attributed to Asian women actors and their fictional roles in popular culture provide the terrain for asserting productively perverse Asian American female subjectivities. The position of perversity is productive if it creates standards of measurement beyond the acceptable and the normal.

Asian American actors and audiences creatively deploy sexuality in order to destabilize hypersexuality. To close off the possibilities of power garnered through the performance and consumption of perversity would stifle the highly contradictory performances of the prostitutes' sex work as both enjoyed and resented, simultaneously fueled by resignation and boredom as well as vitality. We would also punish spectators who occupy the masochistic position of enjoying hypersexuality. Hypersexuality can be redefined beyond racist injury towards presenting the contradictory ways Asian women have been overdetermined by representation. No matter how minute, Asian American female agency in living image representational processes matters—for Asian women cannot simply be measured by standard definitions of normativity, both in terms of their sexual being or their varied and active participation in the production of culture. The bondage of hypersexuality in representation need not be reviled, because if normality signifies the rigidity of the status quo, perversity may be the opportunity to critique normative scripts of race and sexuality in representation.