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Course Code: HI31Y

Course of Study: Intimate Matters: Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Global History

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Christine Shipman

Title: Porn studies

Name of Author: Nguyen, T.H.

Name of Publisher: Duke University Press

Name of Visual Creator (as appropriate):

The Resurrection of Brandon Lee: The Making of a Gay Asian American Porn Star

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* In an article in the Asian American pop culture zine *Giant Robot*, journalist Claudine Ko recounts her search for Brandon Lee. She refers not to the son of Bruce Lee, who gained cult stardom after dying mysteriously and tragically at a young age while shooting *The Crow* (dir. Alex Proyas, 1994), but the other Brandon Lee, the gay porn star. Ko reports on rumors that Brandon the porn star had been discovered while delivering Chinese food to a gay porn set. As the story goes, the director asked to see his egg roll and was so blown away by the sight that he immediately cast Brandon in a porn video. Later on in the article, Ko tracks down Chi Chi LaRue, one of the best-known directors in gay porn, who straightened out the story. The drag queen director claimed to have discovered Brandon Lee at a gay bathhouse in Los Angeles. Impressed by Brandon's good looks and ten inches of manhood, she brought him to Catalina, the popular gay video company, which promptly signed him on, and the rest, as they say, is history.¹

I am not particularly interested in ascertaining which version of the story about Brandon's discovery is true. Rather, what I find compelling is the way the two versions can be read as emblematic of how the image of Asian men in gay porn has shifted with the appearance of Brandon Lee.² Before Brandon, Asian porn actors played the roles of karate masters, Chinatown grocery boys, or their cousins, Chinese food delivery boys, which is to say, they served as representations of racialized sexual stereotypes. In his videos, Brandon Lee is frequently portrayed as West Hollywood boyfriend material,

having both mundane roles and pornotopic professions such as real estate agent, young man who inherits a gay brothel, army recruit, porn star, and, most commonly, as West Hollywood twink.³ In other words, Brandon Lee is just another random (American) gay guy one could easily find cruising in a West Hollywood bathhouse. He has left his parents' grocery store in Chinatown and is living in sin with his white boyfriend in the gay ghetto. This movement from one ghetto to another parallels Brandon Lee's transition from ethnic-niched to mainstream gay video pornography.

In his seminal article, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," Richard Fung observes that dominant Western discourses on race and sexuality posit a racial/biological spectrum that attributes to blacks a hypersexuality and relegates Asians to the opposite extreme of asexuality, according to "quantifiable levels" of sexual activities, primary and secondary sexual characteristics, and sexual attitudes. Fung argues that these racialized sexual stereotypes have "permeated the global popular consciousness" (1991, 146), as exemplified in Western popular visual culture such as television and advertising. For example, in Hollywood films, Asian women are restricted to the roles of Lotus Blossoms passively catering to the sexual appetites of white men or depicted as aggressive, conniving Dragon Ladies conspiring with evil Fu Manchus. In contrast, Asian men are portrayed either as harmless wimps and nerds or as threatening kung fu masters; both types are seen as undersexed and feminized. Consequently, Fung asks, "If Asian men have no sexuality, how can we have homosexuality?" (148).

In his analysis of gay male porn videos employing Asian actors—the one arena where Asian men engage in explicit homosexual sex—Fung interrogates the "role the pleasure of porn plays in securing a consensus about race and desirability that ultimately works to our disadvantage [as Asian men]" (158). He describes the feminization of Asian men in gay porn within the context of minority power relations. Looking at the work of Vietnamese American porn actor Sum Yung Mahn, Fung demonstrates how the representation of Asian men focuses on their submission to the pleasure of white men. In these tapes made in the mid-1980s, Asian men almost always adopt the bottom role in relation to a white top. In *Asian Knights* (dir. Ed Sung, 1985), the only exception where an Asian top fucks a white bottom, the Asian character is portrayed as serving the white man domestically and sexually as a houseboy.⁴

The intended audience for these Asian-themed videos is primarily gay white men. A sex scene between two Asian men in *Asian Knights* is edited to conform to the point of view of a white man. What appears to be an Asian-

Asian sexual scenario is undercut when a white man enters the scene and occupies the center of the sexual attention, much the way the male enters into a "lesbian" number in heterosexual porn. Most significantly, in these tapes the white male fear of being fucked is displaced onto the bodies of Asian men. A scene in *Below the Belt* (dir. Philip St. John, 1985) has an Asian actor step temporarily into the role of a white character in order to articulate his anxiety about getting fucked. In this sequence, the Asian male body substitutes for the white male body to receive the punishment represented by anal sex.⁵ Fung emphasizes that "the problem is not the representation of anal pleasure per se, but rather that the narratives privilege the penis while always assigning the Asian the role of bottom" (1991, 153).

Despite the recent critical attention and popularity of Asian male actors in Asian cinema and its successful crossover into Hollywood (represented by such actors as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Chow Yun Fat, and directors such as Ang Lee and John Woo), the representation of Asian men as sexually appealing scarcely figures in mainstream American popular culture. In the realm of explicit sexual representation, one finds that in marked contrast to the overwhelming presence of Asian and Asian American women in heterosexual pornography, there is a notable absence of Asian American men, let alone a "named" straight male Asian American porn actor.⁶ Thus the popularity of Brandon Lee as a gay Asian American porn star represents a startling and unique achievement that demands special attention.

Brandon Lee is the only Asian American porn actor with the distinction of having a *Best Of* video compilation. Starting in 1997, at the ripe age of eighteen, Brandon began acting in gay videotapes marketed for an Asian niche market in Catalina's Far East Features series, in such popular titles as *Asian Persuasion* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1997), *Fortune Nookie* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), and *Asian Persuasion 2* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1998). He then quickly crossed over into mainstream gay porn, appearing in *Dial "S" for Sex* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Stag Party* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Harley's Crew* (dir. Chi Chi LaRue, 1998), *Big Guns 2* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1998), *Throat Spankers* (dir. Josh Eliot, 1998), and *Peters* (dir. Dane Preston, 1999).⁷ I am interested in looking at the racial "packaging" of Brandon Lee in the Asian videos, where he is depicted as "American" in relation to his Asian costars, and how this process changed in the mainstream videos, where he is the only Asian (and frequently the only person of color), while his racial and ethnic difference is not remarked on. I will argue that the making of this gay Asian American porn star is accomplished through the coding of Brandon Lee as an assimilated (Asian) American. And of course, I would be remiss if I did not men-

tion the fact that he is also popular for being a fierce top, which, as Richard Fung has shown us, represents a very significant departure for an Asian actor in the world of North American gay porn. In other words, the case of Brandon Lee the porn star shows how American masculinity underlies topness, which then confers the status of gay porn star. His work serves as an exemplary “border study” of the conflicting categories of “American” and “Asian” as they are enacted and performed in top and bottom sexual roles in contemporary gay video porn.⁸ Through the star-text of Brandon Lee, I trace a history of how these two highly unstable categories have been constructed in mutual opposition to one another as a consequence of political, economic, and social forces, and I delineate the ways in which the “absolute” difference between Asian and American finds expression in terms of sexuality and gender.

To better contextualize and understand the shift in the racialized sexual coding of Brandon Lee, it is necessary to consider how Asian men have been positioned historically in American society. As numerous scholars in Asian American studies have observed, formations of gender and sexuality fashioning the image of Asian men and women in the United States cannot be considered apart from Asian American history. These factors include labor history, patterns of immigration, bachelor societies, exclusion and antimiscegenation laws, female prostitution, Orientalist exoticization, emasculation of men, and hyperfeminization of women. As Yen Le Espiritu has noted, “America’s capitalist economy wanted male workers but not their families” (1997, 17). The necessity of housing, feeding, and educating the workers’ families cut severely into profit margins. Since women and children were considered nonproductive, they were not welcomed. Racist immigration laws did not allow Chinese men to bring their wives from China or to send for them from the United States. Antimiscegenation laws—based on the fear of Asian men as sexual threats, as sex fiends able to attract white women—revoked the citizenship of white women who married “aliens ineligible for citizenship” (Wong and Santa Ana 1999, 178). These exclusionary laws thus resulted in forced bachelor societies. Unequal employment opportunities restricted Asian men to menial and unskilled labor, such as cooks, waiters, laundry workers, and domestic workers, or what is traditionally deemed “women’s work.”⁹ Existing outside of heteronormative gender roles and patriarchal family formation, Asian men conformed to what Robert G. Lee, borrowing from Marjorie Garber, calls “the third sex,”¹⁰ or “a gender of imagined sexual possibility” (Lee 1999, 85). Lisa Lowe has commented

on the historical imbrications of race and gender in the legal discourse of citizenship as it affected the Asian American subject:

Racialization along the legal axis of definitions of citizenship has also ascribed “gender” to the Asian American subject. Up until 1870, citizenship was granted exclusively to male persons; in 1870, men of African descent could become naturalized, but the bar to citizenship remained for Asian men until repeal acts of 1943–1952. Whereas the “masculinity” of the citizen was first inseparable from his “whiteness,” as the state extended citizenship to nonwhite male persons, it formally designated these subjects as “male” as well. (1996, 11)

Lowe’s concise explication shows that U.S. citizenship originally confers the status of maleness, of masculinity, predicated on whiteness. Since Asian laborers were excluded from this subject-citizen status formulated as masculine and white, they were seen as “emasculated” and “feminized.”

Writers in the Asian American cultural nationalist movement of the seventies took up the historical baggage linking Asian (American) masculinity with effeminacy and emasculation. The Asian American literary response to the emasculation of Asian American men involved a reinscription of conventional constructions of masculinity propped up by heteronormative cultural nationalist discourse. The work of Frank Chin and his colleagues in the 1975 anthology, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, forcefully asserts and vehemently prescribes an ideal Asian American subject-citizen.¹¹ As various Asian American feminist critics have asserted, this subject-citizen based on a particular brand of “authentic” masculinity simply apes the dominant version of patriarchal and familial norms and “[prescribes] who a recognizable and recognizably legitimate Asian American racial subject should ideally be: male, heterosexual, working class, American born, and English speaking” (Eng 2001, 209). The defensive move of asserting an identity premised on an overarching emphasis on the domestic space of the nation demonstrates a reaction against the historical relegation of Asian Americans to the status of perpetual foreigners and unassimilable aliens.¹² Hence the legal discourse linking U.S. citizenship with white masculinity, as Lowe described it, is coterminous with the *Aiiieeeee!* group’s positing of an ideal Asian American subject based on the same hegemonic version of masculinity, heterosexuality, American citizenship, and facility with the English language. These two historical forces exerting influence on popular understandings of Asian American masculinity—one state-

produced and the other in resistance to the state's regulation—should be kept in mind as we look at how Brandon Lee's image is consistently coded as American, which in turn enables his rise as a top Asian American porn star. But before zooming in on Brandon's racial packaging in the porn videos, we need to consider another major intervention in the visual representation of Asian masculinity in mainstream American popular culture.

Dance of the Little Dragon: “Remasculinization” and Transformation

It is not insignificant that an Asian American porn star takes as his “nom de porn” the name of Brandon Lee, son of martial arts superstar Bruce Lee. This choice of name clearly activates the one “positive” place Asian men occupy within the American popular imagination. This cinematic genre is set within a visual economy where Asian men are seen as physically powerful, energetic, graceful, and sensual. Yvonne Tasker has noted the importance of a “remasculinization” of Chinese national identity in the star-text of Bruce Lee.¹³ The cultivation of the hard and muscular fighting body counters the view of Chinese men as soft and delicate, and thus foregrounds a Chinese national identity based on a macho muscularity. Tasker recounts a scene in *Fist of Fury* (dir. Wei Lo, 1972),¹⁴ in which a Chinese go-between, a traitorous character affiliated with the Japanese martial arts school, comes to the Chinese school to offer a challenge by taunting the students there as the “Sick Men of Asia.” Responding to this insult, Lee’s character goes to the Japanese school and defeats the students there to proclaim that he and his Chinese schoolmates are not sick men. Tasker writes, “This assertion of nationalism is very clearly inscribed through the revelation of Lee’s body—as he ritualistically removes his jacket—so that discourses of masculinity and nationhood are complexly bound up together in his star image” (1997, 318).

In addition to these textual operations expressing a masculinist, nationalist agenda, audiences of Lee’s films also respond to their anticolonial narratives.¹⁵ Unlike American interracial male buddy films, where the conflict is couched in terms of class antagonism, the conflict in Lee’s films comes from outside threats represented by colonial forces. For instance, in *Fist of Fury*, the Japanese school occupies the role of foreign threat and enemy, while in *The Way of the Dragon* (dir. Bruce Lee, 1972),¹⁶ the villains are Italian gangsters who threaten to destroy a Chinese family restaurant. Lee’s films became popular not only with Asian audiences but also with black and white

working-class audiences in the United States, as well as with Third World viewers because they functioned as fantasies of empowerment.¹⁷ *Enter the Dragon* (dir. Robert Clouse, 1973), a coproduction between a Chinese film company and Warner Brothers, inverts this anticolonial theme by having Lee play an agent working for the British government fighting against a James Bond-type Chinese villain named Han. Stephen Teo has pointed out that the film “conveys the West’s antipathy towards Lee’s nationalism . . . [and] shows a sullen and sulking Lee forced to submit to the West’s perception of him as a mere action hero” (1997, 117).¹⁸

Another important element animating the star image of Bruce Lee is the centrality of his transformation from a dull, shy nerd to an intense, sexually charged martial arts fighter. Lee’s invisibility as a Chinese man, as a common working-class character, functions as a disguise before the moment of conversion. The films build suspense by “teas[ing] the audience,” which eagerly anticipates the thrilling moment when Lee can no longer hold himself back. Stuart Kaminsky argues that this holding back highlights the moment when Lee’s character refuses to continue “to be a respectable working-class ghetto resident. . . . His resolve disappears when his family is attacked and destroyed and he sees that being a good worker and loyal citizen has ruined him” (1976, 63). Finally forced to fight, he abandons the “acceptable route of behavior” and throws off all self-restraint. He removes his shirt and exposes his muscular body, shows off his hidden strength, and exhibits his amazing “fist of fury” (Tasker 1997, 317).¹⁹

Lee’s visual, physical transformation from nerd to martial arts hero is accompanied by a concomitant verbal transformation, the change from an awkward, naive country bumpkin delivering generic, unremarkable dialogue to the explosive emission of his famous cries, wails, and shrieks. These animalistic sounds suggest brute, physical exertion, the release of pent-up rage and energy, and an involuntary bodily “truth,” but paradoxically they also reveal the excessive theatricality of the overdubbed sound as a series of constructed sound effects. Tasker attributes this audio excess to an eruption of the sensuousness of the body, disrupting the usual connection of Lee’s films with aggression (1997, 320). Furthermore, the notoriously inept English dubbing of most of Lee’s films (and Chinese martial arts films in general) explicitly marks them as low-budget foreign movies, underscored by the poorly synched dubbing of “high” formal English with a “low” cultural product.²⁰ Moreover, the kung fu films also appeal to the lower bodily senses of immediate gratification, eliciting verbal calls, cheers, and applause from their viewers.

The kung fu film's solicitation of the spectator's direct bodily engagement, inspiring awe, thrill, suspense, and amusement, calls to mind similar responses to another cinematic genre; the structural resemblances between the martial arts film and the musical prove striking. The two genres possess two primary corresponding features: the first concerns their emphasis on realism, while the second focuses on their reception by audiences. Bruce Lee's innovations to the kung fu genre include the injection of more realism into the martial arts performances. He was one of the first to promote the use of martial artists, rather than actors, in his films.²¹ Skill and expertise took precedence over a pretty face. Lee often employed his own students, including Chuck Norris, Dan Inosanto, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, as his movie opponents. He rejected the industry's "unrealistic" and manipulative utilization of trampolines and cables to depict characters jumping and flying. Instead, like the dance numbers in musicals, long shots of full bodies in "total performance" were favored over frequent cuts and close-up inserts, thus "proving" to the audience that "they were watching genuine kung fu instead of camera deceptions" (Chiao 1981, 33).

Hsiung-ping Chiao observes how Lee's "kicks, turns and elbow movements of kung fu intrinsically resemble dance steps" (34). She draws a parallel between Gene Kelly's "life-is-music" worldview to Lee's analogous "life-is-kung fu" worldview. The physicality and athleticism of their performances—dance for Kelly and kung fu for Lee—define their "ultimate self-expressions." Referring to the tension exerted on the male body subjected to the audience's "admiring gaze" in the martial arts film and in the musical, Tasker remarks: "In Western culture, dance is constructed in opposition to fighting. It is also linked to the feminine, and often explicitly to images of male homosexuality. It is important to note though that this does not mean the *feminization* of the male dancer, a formulation that operates within a simple gender binary. Rather, dance offers the possibility of occupying a feminine position that involves, as with the martial arts film, an explicit location of the male body on display" (1997, 320). While Tasker is careful not to fall into an essentialist (and heteronormative) description of the male dancing body as automatically feminizing, for the *male* dancer an intense anxiety is triggered by the association of dance with the specters of femininity and homosexuality. Writing on *Singin' in the Rain* (dir. Stanley Donen, 1952), Carol Clover describes the Gene Kelly–Donald O'Connor dances as "muscular, apparently impromptu, unrestrained, exuberant, . . . in which the interest lies to a considerable extent in the athletic feats of the (male) body: how fast the feet, sinuous the twists, high the jumps" (1995, 726).²² While

Gene Kelly's dance can be described as "martial," the martial arts of Bruce Lee aspire to the graceful qualities of dance. Various commentators have remarked on the fact that Lee was the first martial arts actor to place great importance on choreographing fight sequences. Like a dance choreographer in the musical, Lee frequently choreographed the battle sequences of his own films.²³ But the feature that most reflects the connection between Lee's martial moves and dance gestures is the frequent use of slow motion for the fight sequences. In the final, climactic confrontation with the Russian archvillain Petrov (Robert Baker, Lee's real-life personal bodyguard) in *Fist of Fury*, the fighting "stops" while Lee is shown gyrating his arms in delicate circles; this intense moment of arrested spectacle is depicted in slow motion and with optical printing, which register the multiple traces of his arm movements across the screen.²⁴

Another point of likeness between the musical and the martial arts film is the way they address their audience. Both Kelly's and Lee's performances are often directed at the camera, which acts as a surrogate audience. For example, dance numbers often unfold on a stage set where the camera stands in for the missing audience. In the same way, Lee's kicks at the camera in *The Way of the Dragon* are shot from the point of view of his opponent, thus interpellating the viewer quite directly into the fight sequence. Additionally, audiences of musicals and kung fu focus on and appreciate performances, rather than quality of plot. The fight scenes function not as mere interruption of narrative by spectacle, but actually represent the crucial element for the propulsion of the narrative. Because kung fu is affirmed as the resolution to all conflicts in the films, the fight scenes "become the real force carrying the narrative flow" (Chiao 1981, 35). The special attention to the martial arts sequences, set off from the rest of the film textually and through audience expectation, supports Kaminsky's suggestion that performance represents the "essence of the Kung Fu film" (1976, 57).

The most striking feature of the Bruce Lee star image in relation to our present discussion of the eroticized representation of Asian men is his portrayal in the films as an ascetic, sexually naive, and repressed working-class hero. His relationships with women in the films remain platonic and without any sexual tension. In *The Way of the Dragon*, the main female character is his cousin, who first doubts Lee's ability to help her fight against the Italian gangsters. Once she sees him in action, however, she develops a soft spot for him; but their relationship stays on a tender, familial level. The asexuality of the Lee character becomes especially pronounced in a sequence from *Enter the Dragon*. In a brothel scene, while Lee's cohorts John Saxon and Jim

Kelley readily pick out several women from a lineup to join them for the night, Lee requests only one woman to come to his room. This "prostitute" turns out to be a fellow secret spy; needless to say, no romance ensues between them. Hsiung-ping Chiao (1981) has observed that sex in the Bruce Lee oeuvre is seen as the "corrupting force" associated with decadence and linked with brothels, prostitutes, and slave trafficking. Lee's films subscribe to a puritan sexual morality, continuous with traditional Confucian values. Yvonne Tasker (1997) has called attention to the fact that while the martial arts genre, like the American western and the action film, allows for the traditionally taboo looking of men at other men, Western critics' overemphasis on the aggression of Bruce Lee's films relegates the sensuous and homo-erotic force of his performances to the background.²⁵ In addition, Tasker suggests that another mechanism of displacement occurs in these films, whereby racially marked bodies customarily acting as screens "for the projection of a range of fantasies, come into intimate physical contact" and take on the function of "deflect[ing] anxieties around their implicit homoeroticism" (318). Nevertheless, a contemporary viewer, who may already be cognizant of the work of recent Asian male action actors such as Jackie Chan, Chow Yun Fat, or Jet Li, can still be struck by the awesome sexual intensity of Lee's on-screen presence, which remains uneclipsed by the other Asian actors working today. Chiao comments on the way in which audience reception undercuts the desexualization of Lee's fictional characters at the thematic level:

Puritan sexual morality have [sic] been paradoxically decoded by audiences as sexual stimulants. . . . It has been pointed out that his fights resemble sexual behavior. The open-legged posture before attacking, the slow-motion shots of his tense body, and the expression of excitement and elation intermingle to imply sexual provocation. The subtle tie between violence and sex thus transcends the overt layer of sex-inhibition and becomes emotional retribution for Lee's ill-fated destiny and plight (1981, 40–41).²⁶

Finally, Bruce Lee is figured as a solitary, individual hero. In his films, frequent close-up inserts and fast zooms of his intense face punctuate the fight sequences, offering brief pauses between the dazzling fight choreography and expressing his surveillance of his surroundings and the movements of his opponents. While he is supposed to be on the side of the people, visually he is not shown as a part of the crowd, but as a unique and spectacular fighter in the spotlight (41).

From Kicking Ass to F***** A**

Like the masculinist project of the martial arts film genre, the question of remasculinization in gay Asian American pornography occupies a central place in our discussion of Brandon Lee. As indicated above, Richard Fung has charted the ways in which male sexual potency is very much racially inflected in Western pseudoscientific and popular discourses on sexuality. Whereas the black man's savage hypersexuality is "proven" by his big black dick, the asexual Asian man possesses nothing "down there." Positioned as passive bottoms, "Asian and anus are conflated" (1991, 153). Hence, Brandon Lee's claim to porn-stardom as an exclusive top and as the instigator of sexual activity in his videos challenges the dominant view of Asian men in gay porn as forever bottoms. Brandon's remasculinization in gay porn videos creates a space in which he plays a performer who acts on the bodies of other men, in the narratives of videos, as well as outside of them, in the reception of the tapes.

Parallel to Bruce Lee's shift from nerdy country bumpkin to powerful kung fu master, the transformation in gay pornography takes place when the motivating porn narrative gets established and the sexual episodes begin to unfold. In the case of Brandon Lee, the transformation from asexual Asian man to porn star comes at the thrilling moment when he finally exposes his "hidden" asset. In the words of the *Adam Gay Video Directory*, which details his contribution to any video he appears in: "He can act, he's good sex, he's a top, and in case you hadn't noticed . . . that dick" (2000, 52). While the kung fu movie builds up the viewer's anticipation of the moment when Bruce Lee finally decides to fight, gay pornography provides only minimal buildup leading to the performance of sex and thus offers the viewer little in the way of suspense. The gay porn viewer bypasses even the most skeletal narrative framing by simply fast-forwarding and/or rewinding to the hottest parts of the tape. One gay Asian viewer describes his viewing habit: "I just zoom to the sex scenes. I zoom through all the stuff where there's no sex happening and I stop at the sex scene and watch for a bit to see if I think it's exciting. If it's not, I zoom to the next" (qtd. in Fung 1993, 362). The selective mode of concentrated *and* distracted viewing, the fast-forwarding and zooming in to where the real exciting sexual performance is happening, calls to mind the kung fu viewer's anticipation of the moment when Lee exposes his muscular upper body and demonstrates his masterful martial arts skills.

Accompanying Bruce Lee's exhibition of powerful and visually stunning

movements is the “involuntary” eruption of convulsive grunts and wrathful yells, which evoke intense rage and piercing sensuality. The overdubbing of Bruce Lee’s films at these impassioned moments echoes the porn convention of post-dubbing dialogue and sex sounds, such as generic dirty talk and repetitive moans in gay pornography. The porn soundtrack offers evidence of authentic sexual pleasure, provides proof of the final delivery of satisfaction, and adds realism by fleshing out the visual performance. But, as in the martial arts movie, the low-budget, lack-of-synch, and poor verbal performance also exposes the sex sounds as fake and unbelievable. Nevertheless, in Brandon Lee’s Asian porn videos, the heavily accented English and the slow, awkward, and sometimes unintelligible delivery of lines by his Asian costars accentuate their limited facility with the English language. This lack of a perfect match between the audio and visual tracks paradoxically fits into the thematic of the porn narrative, which is premised on the foreignness and exoticism of the Asian actors. In other words, their poor English actually enhances the Orientalist authenticity the tapes hope to achieve.

In my discussion above on the structural similarities of the musical and the kung fu film, I propose that performance commands more attention than narrative complexity in both genres, in their textual operations as well as in audience reception.²⁷ At the risk of stating the obvious, I suggest that most viewers of gay porn concentrate on the spectacle of gay sex rather than on the role of the sexual numbers in working through narrative conflicts. For example, in a review of a recent porn video in the San Francisco gay weekly, *Bay Area Reporter*, critic John F. Karr faults a video for its “overwrought plotting,” which, he claims, “stifle[s] the spontaneity of the sex act, distancing the performers from the naturalness they need to bring to sex.” To get a sense of what he means by “overwrought,” in the next paragraph Karr complains of a video which “drowns in plot scenes of five-minute duration” (2001, 35; emphasis mine). While there are structural correspondences between the martial arts genre’s focus on the amazing battle scenes and gay video pornography’s spotlight on sex sequences, it is important to note that the extreme episodic structure of the latter contains much less of an organizing narrative than the kung fu film. In fact, recent mainstream gay porn productions from Falcon Videos, such as *Absolute-Arid* (dir. John Rutherford, 2000) and *Absolute-Aqua* (dir. John Rutherford, 2000), have no explicit narrative framework; their sexual activity is united only by the fact that they take place in a natural environment, the desert and the beach, respectively.²⁸ To be sure, as in all fantasy, the scene where the sex occurs holds great significance and erotic purchase, as can be seen in gay porn’s (re)appropriation

of homosocial spaces—locker rooms, mechanic's garages, college fraternity houses, military barracks, and prisons—as the “stages” where sexual fantasy unfolds. However, the narrative motivation (one might say “silly excuse”) leading to the sex is often extremely formulaic. Indeed, any regular gay porn viewer can attest to the predictable yet enjoyable manner in which characterization and narrative setup frequently serve as unconvincing pretense in order to get to the real matter at hand, the sex.²⁹

Another marked contrast between the genres of martial arts and porn is their point of view in relation to the eroticized imaging of Asian male bodies. Whereas the sensuality of Bruce Lee is produced by the viewer's resistant reading, going against the grain of the narrative, the homoeroticism of Brandon Lee constitutes the central element of his status as a gay porn actor.³⁰ However, as stars commanding “top” billing (one an international martial arts superstar, the other a porn star in the smaller realm of gay male popular culture), both figures are set off narratively from the characters surrounding them. A “respectable working-class ghetto resident,” Bruce Lee nevertheless transcends his downtrodden status through the performance of martial arts virtuosity. While Lee is presented as a man of the people who fights against imperialist forces, he stands out from the swarms of Asian male bodies that fight alongside him or, more often, get beaten up by him. Similarly, Brandon Lee remains a recognizable, “named” actor, a fierce top among the nameless hordes of interchangeable Asian bottoms.³¹ Though Brandon is one among other men of the “Asian persuasion,” he is marked off as different: he is an American real estate agent to the Japanese house buyer; he is the new owner of the boy brothel, where other Asians are sex workers; he is a porn star, a role model for another Asian character's porn ambition. These multiple differences are premised on an imbalance of power based on a higher economic, social, and cultural status. These power differentials relate to factors of nationality (Americanness), race/ethnicity (unfixed, unstable), age (youth), size (dick, muscle), language (English-speaking), and region (West Hollywood),³² all of which contribute to his star status and top position. In what follows, I will look more closely at these various components that go into the making of this gay Asian American porn star.

The Making of a Gay Asian American Porn Star

Asian Persuasion opens with a scene of Brandon Lee and his boyfriend Brad Davis Mikado awakened in bed by a phone call. The caller is a client who wants to see a house in the Hollywood hills that Brandon, the real estate

agent, is trying to sell. Before Brandon leaves, Brad makes comments about the sexual nature of Brandon's job, which requires meeting strange men at empty houses. Brandon denies entertaining any sexual possibilities and suggests that Brad, who is in the pool cleaning business, probably has more opportunities for sex with *his* clients, charges that Brad also denies. Immediately, the viewer notices that the framing narrative of the video revolves around the two main characters' professions, what they do for a living.³³ Brandon is boyish, clean-cut, well built, middle-class, and relationship-oriented. Most important, he is an (Asian) American. In the following scene, we see Brandon, dressed in a pink Hawaiian shirt, finish showing the house to an older Japanese man.³⁴ The scene begins with Mito saying, "I like it. The neighborhood's great. And it's large." He looks down meaningfully at Brandon's crotch. Brandon responds, grabbing his crotch, "Yeah, it is large. And it gets bigger when somebody's lips are around it." The Japanese man proceeds to suck Brandon and then gets fucked by him. Mito's comment about largeness refers first to the neighborhood and the house, then to Brandon's cock, and we can infer from the context—a Japanese buying property in California—that the term also connotes the spaciousness of America in general. Throughout the scene, the sex is punctuated by Mito's broken, heavily accented English emphasizing the big size and hardness of Brandon's cock, crudely narrating how it acts on him: "Big cock. You've got big cock"; "I feel your hard cock"; and "Your dick makes me come!" On the other hand, Brandon's verbal expression is limited to generic moans and stock phrases like: "Oh, baby, feels so good" and "Yeah, baby, suck it." In this scene, the position of top is aligned with Brandon's coding as an American, associated with his Valley Guy English, youth, butchness, muscularity, and big dick, in relation to the bottom's broken English (hence marking him as non-American), older age, femme-ness, skinny build, and smaller dick. Although the Japanese client may belong to a higher class—he is a potential buyer of the property—in the world of gay porn, other factors, such as physical endowment of muscle and genitalia, confer greater status than wealth. The other Asian actors in the video are the pool boys who work for Brad's pool cleaning company, playing the roles of working-class immigrants.³⁵ None of them gets to fuck the two white special guest stars, well-known actors Mike Nichols and Sam Crockett.

The portrayal of Brandon's Asian costars as working-class foreigners/immigrants also occurs in *Fortune Nookie*, another tape in Catalina's Far East Features series. In this tape, Brandon plays a young man who has inherited a fortune from a recently deceased uncle (figure 1). The problem is that the



1. Brandon Lee's young and charming face (from *Fortune Nookie*).

white lawyer, Jacob Scott, refuses to tell him what the fortune is unless Brandon pays him legal fees. Brandon protests desperately, "But I have nothing! . . . Lawyers suck." To which Scott replies, "Yes, we do." Thus Brandon finds himself "coerced" into having sex with Scott in order to receive his fortune. Scott, dressed in a gray suit, orders Brandon to take his clothes off and perform for Scott's pleasure.³⁶ The fortune turns out to be a brothel, where the sex workers are Asian men. They are managed and mistreated by a vicious white drag queen—dressed up in bad Japanese geisha drag—named Pixie (*Vida de Ville*). The Asian boy prostitutes are forced into working there for economic reasons. One of them, Niko Time, complains to Pixie that he wants to quit; but she reminds him that he has nowhere else to go. Tishiro Ho tells his coworker Erik Tenaka that he fears Pixie will fire him. Ho worries about his job security, especially since he has two kids to support. After taking over the whorehouse, Brandon tries to make friends with Time, who also fears losing his job. Brandon tells him, "I have a new job for you." Time replies, "Okay, let's get it over with." But what Brandon has in mind is giving Time the pleasure of firing the bitchy Pixie. They bond over this expulsion of the drag queen. Time agrees to have sex with Brandon and gets fucked by him. But unlike his previous scene with a white client (Paul Morgan), the sex with Brandon is coded as "consensual."³⁷

Sexual coercion and consent in *Fortune Nookie* are directly thematized around class-inflected power relations. Whereas Brandon is coerced into having sex with the tie-wearing white lawyer (who tells him, "You have a lot of fees to work off, boy. . . . I'm pretty expensive"), after inheriting the brothel, Brandon occupies the position of power over Niko Time and the other Asian boy prostitutes. This tape makes a direct connection between lack of money and power and the necessity of performing sex for money.

Though he is poor at the beginning of the video, Brandon's inheritance affords him a promotion in the economic and sexual hierarchy. On the other hand, the status of the foreign, immigrant sex workers under his charge remains unchanged. Sex in *Fortune Nookie* is tied to economic necessity, not utopian fantasy, sexual expression, or "free" choice. In addition, the use of Asian actors with heavy accents and FOB (fresh-off-the-boat) appearance gives this viewer an uncomfortable awareness of the coincidence/overlapping of the actors' "real-life" situation with their characterizations in the porn narrative. Their actual low economic position and tenuous immigrant status resonate with their characters' marginalized positioning as sex workers threatened with unemployment. As bottoms in the political, sexual, and representational economies, the actors get fucked (and fucked over) by white American tops, porn directors—and eroticized as such by viewers of the video. This dynamic corresponds with what Richard Fung has described as the lack of an empowering subject position for the gay Asian porn viewer: "I may find Sum Yung Mahn attractive, I may desire his body, but I am always aware that he is not meant for me. I may lust after Eric Stryker and imagine myself as the Asian who is having sex with him, but the role the Asian plays in the scene with him is demeaning. It is not that there is anything wrong with the image of servitude per se, but rather that it is one of the few fantasy scenarios in which we figure, and we are always in the role of servant" (1991, 158).

Here I want to sound a word of caution against the uncritical embrace of Brandon Lee, a big-dicked Asian American butch top, as the answer to what Asian American and other politically progressive gay porn fans have been waiting for. For although his work does invert the passive houseboy-bottom paradigm critics like Fung have protested against, this new and improved "positive image" of the Asian American top comes about at the expense of relegating other Asian men to the same old, tired, abjectified position of unassimilable, forever bottomhood. Though the Asian penis has been found, there are only a few inches of it to go around, or it comes to resemble another white pink dick, tinted yellow.

Even though I have been discussing the Americanization of Brandon Lee in relation to his Asian costars, it is noteworthy that a similar process is at work in the mainstream gay videos that he appears in as well. *Big Guns 2* is a generic Catalina gay video taking the military as a sexual background. Porn star Steve Rambo begins the tape by introducing the cast through a voice-over, read as if from a journal entry. While conventional descriptions of white, macho, army-porno types comprise most of the voice-over charac-

terizations, descriptions of the men of color in the tape exploit racial stereotypes. For instance, Rambo describes the three black men as one group. (Tellingly, the sex scene with the three men is segregated; they do not appear in any other scene with the other actors.) The three blacks are portrayed as hypersexual studs; Rambo's voice-over makes references to a "six-foot-five monster of muscle and a tool between his legs that would make anyone's knees weak" and "a chest as hard as a rock and lips that could make a dead man come when he puts them into action." One Latino character is described as "streetwise from East L.A." while another is said to possess a "burrito [that] was jam-packed with sour cream [and] was constantly being munched on." Whereas the black and Latino actors are ascribed racist characteristics, Brandon's Asianness is not explicitly commented on: "And finally there's Brandon. You might call him our mascot. I guess when you're as youthful-looking and cute as he is and feature a giant, fucking dick to boot, everyone wants to be your friend." There are no crass references to his egg roll, teriyaki sauce, smooth, hairless skin, or his Oriental exoticism. The video begins with everyone being awakened in boot camp by Brandon's moans while masturbating. Taking his role as mascot seriously, Brandon here acts as the instigator of the orgy action that ensues. Not only is he portrayed as just another army recruit, he is painted as a special member of the unit, someone who gets along with everyone *and* who everyone can get off to. In addition, it is also significant that before the video even begins, Brandon appears with Rambo in a public service announcement encouraging viewers to practice safe sex. The PSA functions as a paratext that further constructs Brandon as a porn star.

Although one could argue that the phrase "youthful-looking and cute" does not play off any Asian markers, a closer (and more anal) reading uncovers the connection between age and size that conventionally animates a specific popular American conception of Asian men. Various critics have highlighted the way in which Bruce Lee's small stature operates as a disguise—for instance, as a harmless, naive bumpkin—which contrasts with and intensifies the moment of transformation when he finally exhibits his spectacular fighting skills. Part and parcel of this revelation of agility coupled with sensuality is the pairing of Lee with huge opponents, such as Robert Baker in *Fist of Fury*, Chuck Norris in *The Way of the Dragon*, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in *Game of Death* (dir. Robert Clouse and Bruce Lee, 1978). This contrast in size produces in the audience the pleasure of seeing Lee's small, lithe body performing high kicks and knocking down his big opponents. For marginal audiences whose relationship with Lee's image is based

on a primary identification, which is to say, an identification with a more perfect hero who “ultimately triumphs” despite extended duress and suffering, visual pleasure comes from watching the victory of the small and down-trodden over the giant, menacing other. In the same way, the uniqueness of Brandon Lee surfaces in references to his big dick. Numerous commentators have registered surprise and pleasure at the sight of such a dick on a small Asian man. Josh Eliot, the head director at Catalina who has directed Brandon in several videos, recalls being impressed by his cute face, but his great surprise came at the first sight of Brandon’s dick, which inspired Eliot to add another scene for Brandon in *Asian Persuasion*. The porn magazine *Adam Gay Video xxx Showcase* puts it this way, “18-year-old Brandon has a hard-on almost as big as he is” (Lawrence 1998, 45). While this comparison stresses the large size of his cock, the comment implies that he has a small body out of proportion with his dick. Consequently, it mobilizes the image of Asian men as small and youthful. Hence the choice of vocabulary in “youthful-looking and cute mascot” in *Big Guns 2* does indeed call forth the picture of Asian men as boyish and youthful-looking, thus conjuring up the notion of a hidden disguise, of the Asian face as a mask: they might look youthful, but they’re really not. This false appearance of youthfulness implies, nevertheless, that Asian men are not quite men, being neither manly nor masculine.³⁸ In *Fortune Nookie*, Jacob Scott, the white lawyer, comments repeatedly on the size of Brandon’s big, hard cock, as if indicating a mild shock. He articulates in detail what he wants Brandon to do, telling him to show him the big dick and to stick it up his sweet little ass. The ultimate controlling bottom, Scott commands Brandon to get his cock hard so he can fuck Scott with it. But most striking, Scott repeatedly calls Brandon “boy.” After asking Brandon whether he wants to fuck him like a man or like a boy (Brandon breathlessly responds, “Fuck you like a man”), Scott cranes his neck around and barks directions and orders while getting fucked by Brandon: “Fuck me hard. Yeah, harder! Fuck me like a man. C’mom, harder. That’s a boy. Faster. That’s it. Good boy!” While getting fucked like this, Scott is naked except for the tie that continues to hang loosely around his neck, signifying his “superior” position. The dynamics of this scene complicate any easy attribution of topness/fucker to masculine power and exceed the simple connection of bottomhood/fuckee with feminine passivity. Even though Scott gets penetrated, he remains in control, administering orders, but also visually and verbally dominating the sexual activity.

In spite of the fact that so many commentators both inside and outside the videos keep remarking on the size of Brandon’s penis—which “ranges”

from 8.5 to 10 inches, depending on which source one believes (based on visual evidence from the videos, I would say the former)—it must be pointed out that in the world of gay pornography, the size of Brandon's dick is not that extraordinary. The exaggeration and hype around Brandon's sizeable equipment, I would contend, can be attributed to its attachment to the body of an Asian man. As suggested in the *xxx Showcase* citation, the big dick attached to the body of a five-foot-seven Asian man is considered out of proportion. This question of weight-to-height proportion does hold a positive valence in the gay male sexual marketplace, judging from the frequent invocation of this requirement in personal ads in gay newspapers and on gay Web sites. Another, even more famous example of a relatively short porn actor with a weight-height-proportional body nicely setting off his humongous genitals is Jeff Stryker. However, we never hear remarks that Stryker's dick is out of proportion with his body or that it is as big as he is. Creative camera angles can easily correct any anomalous pairing of actors that might expose the secret of the vertically challenged yet well-endowed porn actor. A moment of mild shock and surprise registered for me when I watched Brandon Lee in a four-way scene from *Dial "S" for Sex*. He is standing next to Sam Crockett and merely reaches Crockett's shoulders. This medium long shot is held only for a minute or two before switching to a low angle underneath their cocks. From this worm's-eye view, Lee and Crockett, standing side by side, appear to be the same size; photographed this way, their similar stature thus implies their status as peers, as equal participants in the sexual scenario, objects of desire standing upright while getting their cocks serviced by kneeling partners (figures 2 and 3).³⁹

The living room in which this four-way orgy from *Dial "S" for Sex* takes place is the same setting and actually the *exact set* for another of Brandon's videos, *Stag Party*. It is a typical southern California bungalow living room with French doors opening up onto a sunny backyard or balcony. This setting typifies most of the settings of Brandon's other videos—the middle-class, gay, white milieu of West Hollywood. As I suggested above, this constitutes a significant shift from the ethnic ghettos where previous Asian-themed porn videos were based.

Daniel Tsang, in a discussion of the mise-en-scène of recent gay Asian videos, has noted the prevalence of the vague, timeless space of a remote land in the majority of these tapes. These fantasies of the sensuous East, of “lands far away from urban life,” position the viewer as either an actual or a virtual sex tourist. Tsang observes how the unmarked, unspecified “hotel rooms in unnamed cities or countries” in which the videos are filmed sug-



2. Brandon Lee, Sam Crockett, Brian Hawke, and Drew Andrews (clockwise from left) enjoy each other in *Dial "S" for Sex*.

3. In this shot from *Dial "S" for Sex*, Brandon Lee and Sam Crockett appear to be the same height.

gest the use of underpaid actors from Third World countries (1999, 474–75). Christopher Ortiz, writing about gay videos featuring Latino/Chicano men, has proposed that these tapes rely on racialized sexual fantasy by “[framing] their objects of desire within already culturally familiar codes” (1994, 84). Latino/Chicano porn titles exploit locations such as prisons, warehouses, restaurants, kitchens, and Latino/Chicano neighborhoods (i.e., the barrio). Whereas mainstream gay porn videos show characters fantasizing about performing specific sex acts set in specific pornotopic locales, the fantasy structure underlying the Latino/Chicano tapes depends on the exotic differences of race and ethnicity, even when these videos do not locate themselves explicitly in ethnic ghettos. Echoing Tsang’s description of timeless, unlocatable Asian hotel rooms, Ortiz comments, “The bed that is not part of a recognizable setting reduces Afro-American men and Chicano/Latino men to their sex” (84). Though I previously described the secondary role of narrative in gay pornography, I feel it is still crucial to look at the racially marked motivation of the staging of sexual fantasies in the Brandon Lee videos. In

other words, the viewer of a video like *Asian Persuasion* is not just watching sex between men, but what the bodies and the sex with/between Asian men look like. The racial and ethnic coding of the actors occupies a central place in the sexual fantasy.⁴⁰ For example, watching the excerpt of a sex scene between Brandon Lee and Brad Davis Mikado in the *Best of Brandon Lee* compilation, one entirely misses the point that Brad Davis is supposed to be read as Asian in this video. Seen outside the original context (*Asian Persuasion*), Brad Davis appears as just another white porn actor. The logic of these tapes bespeaks the need to exoticize/eroticize racial difference by conjuring up a generic, slapdash Orientalia that, paradoxically, aims to reference vague notions of cultural authenticity. Consequently, we see credits in chopstick fonts, East Asian names, and characters having sex for money in settings like Chinatown, Hong Kong, or Bangkok. Or, as Tsang notes, even when they are set in a no-place like anonymous hotel rooms in nameless countries, we are aware that this document of "fantasy" depends on the fact that the actors come from somewhere else, not from here in the United States, but from an ahistorical, unspecified Orient.

Along this same line, the text for the video box packaging of *Fortune Nookie* is written on white elongated rectangles made to resemble paper strips from fortune cookies: "You will travel soon to the Far East for a pleasurable experience you won't forget"; "Your love for men of Asian persuasion will increase and intensify"; and so on. The second-person address replicates the phrasing of fortune cookies, but also positions the viewer as not of the Asian persuasion—a Western (and most likely) white viewer. The video promises to deliver the Far East to the viewer or to bring him there virtually, thus confirming Tsang's point that the ideal viewer of these tapes is the sex tourist. However, though it does not explicitly announce it, the setting of *Fortune Nookie* seems to be contemporary Los Angeles. We can deduce this from such clues as exterior shots of a Silverlake neighborhood, the use of a white drag queen to play the role of the bitchy madam, Pixie, the southern California architecture, "guppie" furnishings, and the kitschy porno-set decoration of the rooms. Similarly, *Asian Persuasion* mobilizes references to the Far East in its video box packaging: "Do you need some persuading to experience a far east encounter? How about letting 8 1/2 luscious inches make up your mind? How about smooth supple chested men giving you their eager, far east cocks standing firm in sweet scented nests of jet black hair. Super-hung Catalina discovery Brandon Lee has what it takes to persuade you. Just in case you need it!" The punning on the word *persuasion* activates two levels of meaning. The first refers to belonging to a religion or, in this

case, a racial group, while the other meaning is a play on the verb *persuade*, implying a sexual seduction.⁴¹ While one can appreciate the cleverness of the double entendre and the gimmicky rhyming, this emphasis on the viewer's *needing to be persuaded* to try a "far east encounter," to find Asian men desirable, to buy the video, depends on the "common" view of seeing Asian men as undesirable and unsexy. The video box text must provide evidence—such as "8 1/2 inches" of "far east cocks standing firm," "smooth supple" chests, and "nests of jet black hair"—in order to persuade the potential (white) porn consumer to lust after Asian men. Again, like *Fortune Nookie*, *Asian Persuasion* is actually set in contemporary Los Angeles, as we can see from the exterior shots of the L.A. skyline in the credit sequence, in the "house in the hills" that Brandon shows the Japanese buyer, and the fancy southern California home where Brad and his pool boys go to work cleaning pools. What the discrepancy between video packaging and actual diegetic setting suggests is that even when Asian men are removed from the ethnic ghetto of Chinatown and placed in the generic porno locales of West Hollywood, in conventional, pornographic historical time and space, they are still seen as carrying the timeless, mysterious, mystical Orient with them. Their inscrutable, exotic sexuality continues to hold hidden, unexploited "Far East" pleasures unknown to the white man.

In contrast to the persistent emplacement of Asian men in sexual encounters that can take place only in the Far East, Brandon Lee's crossover into the mainstream of gay porn videos concomitantly allows him to travel outside of the ethnic ghetto once and for all and set up residence in the contemporary urban gay male ghetto of West Hollywood. These tapes simply portray Brandon as a West Hollywood twink whose Asianness is never commented on. In *Dial "S" for Sex*, Brandon comes home to find his white boyfriend, Drew Andrews, jerking off while talking on the phone with an anonymous caller. Brandon and his boyfriend proceed to have sex together, and they are later joined by two (white) friends who drop by unexpectedly for a four-way orgy. At the end of the scene, we find out that Brandon came home on a lunch break and must go back to work. Before doing so, he reminds his boyfriend, "Don't forget that Mitch is coming by to pick up those papers. Don't forget to call him, okay? Gotta go. Bye." Neither the preceding sex scene nor anything that comes after narratively motivates this line. Its only purpose, it seems to me, is to establish Brandon as a regular guy living in generic pornotopia, in a tame coupledom occasionally spiced up by kinky sex. In *Stag Party*, Brandon plays one of the guys at a straight stag party, where participants watch straight porn videos while waiting for a female stripper

to show up. Bored with the scene, Brandon goes into the bedroom to seduce another young partygoer, Sandy Sloane, who has passed out from too much drinking. These two twinks have sex in the bedroom, while the older men in the living room end up releasing their pent-up sexual energy in a group orgy. The only features that mark Brandon and Sloane off from the rest of the men at the party are their boyish looks and smaller size; their exclusion from the massive orgy seems to turn on these two differences of physical appearance. The video that locates Brandon most firmly in the West Hollywood gay scene is *Peters*, a porn remake of the Winona Ryder vehicle *Heathers* (dir. Michael Lehmann, 1989). Brandon plays the Winona/Veronica character, here called Daniel Sawyer. This typical American name erases any connection to a "Far East" identity. After throwing up on one of the Peters at an "exclusive" sex club, Chandler rebukes Daniel/Brandon and threatens to reject him from his West Hollywood in-group by telling him, "Might as well move to the Valley, Daniel."⁴² Another reference to the West Hollywood gay world is invoked when Daniel/Brandon and his cohort Jack Long (who plays the Christian Slater role) make a rendezvous with the two bullies Buzz and Rahm at the Hollywood Spa, the largest gay bathhouse in Los Angeles. Taken together, these narrative elements demonstrate how Brandon Lee's appearance in mainstream gay porn recodes him into just another gay pornographic character, carousing within the central space of gay, white, male, affluent West Hollywood. The color-blind casting of Brandon in the starring role of Daniel Sawyer in *Peters* signals the most extreme instance of his legitimization as an American.

In a context dominated by white, American, masculine physical perfection, what is it about Brandon that has enabled him to enter into the segregated world of mainstream gay pornography? I propose that Brandon's crossover is made possible by a certain degree of racial instability accruing to his star image. This ability to penetrate into the mainstream forms part and parcel of an undecidable (inscrutable, unfixed) Asian ethnicity.

In addition to their name, the other "coincidence" between Brandon Lee, cult star of *The Crow*, and Brandon Lee, porn star of *Fortune Nookie*, is their racial ambiguity. The son of Bruce Lee was hapa (half-Asian, half-white), a fact seldom mentioned as a result of Hollywood's typecasting of Brandon Lee as a martial arts actor. Consequently, most commentators are invested in establishing a patriarchal lineage and emphasizing the connections between father and son (the "Little Dragon" and "Son of the Dragon"). The racial/ethnic ambiguity of Brandon the porn star proves a bit trickier. For example, he first appeared in a gay porn video entitled *Glory Holes of L.A.*

(dir. Bianco Piagi, 1997) under the name of Sean Martinez. It was not until his second video, *Asian Persuasion*, that he took on the name Brandon Lee. In the context of mainstream gay video pornography, where young, white, well-built actors are the unquestionable norm, any departure from this type represents a “special niche,” a context in which differences such as race become heavily commodified.

The “trouble with Asians” is the difficulty of telling them apart. But, as Richard Fung has noted, in the world of gay video porn, it is not necessary to discriminate the “minute” differences among Asians—he mentions national flags and martial arts schools. Rather, it suffices to connote cultural authenticity by conjuring an all-encompassing Orientalia. Thus most Asian actors have East Asian, or more specifically, Japanese-sounding names, such as Tenji Mito, Hiro Sukowa, Erik Tenaka, and Niko Time. Other actors take on Japanese first names and Chinese last names, like Tishiro Ho. Others Orientalize their names for an Asian tape, as in the case of Brad Davis Mikado and Jean Russo Chen. The former usually goes by Brad Davis in his other videos. The addition of “Mikado” implies a “hidden” Japaneseness in his person. Josh Eliot, director of *Asian Persuasion 1* and *2*, suggests the practical necessity of using “not quite Asian” actors like Davis in the Asian-themed videos in order to safeguard against the risk of Asian actors changing their minds and reneging on their commitment to appear in a video on the day of the shoot.⁴³ This bit of extratextual information notwithstanding, I think that the mixed-race reference in these actors’ names also exploits the exoticism traditionally associated with interractivity in the United States. This transgression draws on the historical taboo, threat, and punishment against miscegenation. For instance, Gina Marchetti has called attention to Hollywood cinema’s depiction of Eurasians as evil, deceitful, and dangerous. In the context of gay porn, the bi-/multiculturalism of mixed-race actors also provides a form of “the-best-of-both-worlds” exoticism, invoking difference but also similarity—threat and spice, as well as comfort and familiarity.

Far from being merely camp and kitsch (like the short, butch names taken on by white actors), naming in the Asian-niche videos plays a large role in the racial packaging of the tapes, since the producers are selling eroticized-exoticized racial and ethnic difference. Quentin Lee, who played Peekay Chan in *Shanghai Meat Company* (dir. Tony Chan, 1991), claims that the white producers of the video gave themselves Asian names in the credits in order to sell it as an authentic “by-Asian-for-Asian” videotape. Along these same lines, we can appreciate Brandon Lee’s assumption of a recognizable Asian American name from a recent cult martial arts celebrity. This

choice of name exploits the cultural association of Asian men in the popular imagination with the kung fu action genre. Inadvertently, he may have conjured up the racial ambiguity of the real Brandon Lee as well.

My friend John told me that his friend John ran into Brandon the porn star at a gay Asian club in L.A. (appropriately called *Persuasian*). John's friend spoke to Brandon and found out that his real name was also John and that he was "really" Filipino. Since acquiring this crucial bit of information through hearsay gay gossip, I have been able to ascertain the "fact," indirectly, from a forwarded e-mail from another Brandon Lee fan who claims to have received an e-mail from Brandon/John himself confirming his Filipino ethnicity. (He "remains" American; according to a gay video guide I consulted, Brandon/John was born in Mobile, Alabama, on March 18, 1979.) If we take Brandon/John's Filipino identity to be true, I propose that Brandon's previous appearance in gay porn as Sean Martinez reveals an attempt to present himself as a Latino, hence drawing on the closer association of Latinos/Chicanos with hypersexual appeal.⁴⁴ After deciding to appear in Asian-themed videos, it seems very significant that Brandon/John would choose a porn name aligned with East Asian and Asian American connotations. In the United States, there is an automatic association of Asia with East Asia. The Far East/East Asia axis grounds the Orientalist fantasies of gay pornography. To support this observation, I mention here, in addition to the Brandon Lee titles, several others in Catalina's Far East Features series: *Pacific Rim* (dir. Mitchell Dunne, 1997), *With Sex You Get Egg Roll* (dir. Peter Romero, 1999), and *Chew Manchu* (dir. Mark Jensen, 2000). In the discourse of Oriental sexuality—based on an *ars erotica* (erotic art), with its connotations of Eastern repression covering over kinky sexuality—the sexuality of Filipinos does not figure strongly. Regarded as dirty and impure, too mongrelized and Westernized from four hundred years of colonial contact with Spanish and American cultures, Filipinos are excluded from this exotic framework.

In an article about the taxi dance halls in Filipino immigrant communities of the 1920s and 1930s, Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (1998) refers to the threat posed by the interracial mingling between the "little brown monkeys" (the male Filipino laborers) and "white trash" (women who worked at these dance halls) to the hegemonic American discourse around racial purity represented by the eugenics movement. Jinqi Ling has noted that the classification of Filipinos as U.S. nationals and as Malays (rather than Mongolians) in the same period allowed Filipino men relative freedom of movement and interaction with white women.⁴⁵ Ling writes, "The invention of Filipino males' threatening sexuality is thus bound up with white men's

concern about securing their social power, a concern brought to the point of crisis by Filipino workers' participation in the labor movement" (1997, 319). My brief references to Filipino male labor history in the United States aim to emphasize the historical coding of Filipino men as sexual threats to white American manhood. Along with the "corruption" of the Philippines by Western colonial forces, the image of the Filipino male as an "irresistible stud" prevented the incorporation of Filipinos into the exoticized, feminized, and domesticated (*because* distant and elsewhere) discourse of Orientalist, racial fantasies. It is this particular, historically inflected, racialized sexual dynamic that forces the transformation of John X to Sean Martinez—identities couched in the threatening, opaque, and vexed framework of Filipino American sexuality—to the more culturally intelligible (and easier-to-consume) Brandon Lee.

In his essay "Written on the Face: Race, Nation, Migrancy, and Sex," David Palumbo-Liu, looking at American social scientific discourse of the 1930s, explores how assimilation into American society was thought to enact both somatic and psychic transformation in the immigrant's body. Citing the work of anthropologist Franz Boas and the federally sponsored Immigration Commission, Palumbo-Liu shows how this discourse asserted that presence on "American soil" brought about changes in the European immigrant's head form. For instance, the European Jew's round head elongates, while the southern Italian's long head transforms into a shorter length. Whereas the faces and bodies of Eastern European and Mediterranean immigrants were amenable to appreciable changes once in the United States, "'orientals' . . . were not susceptible to such transformation, no matter how intense or lengthy their exposure" (1999, 86). Thus the Immigration Commission believed Asians should be excluded from the nation since they were seen as unalterably foreign and unassimilable. Palumbo-Liu discusses the work of sociologist Robert E. Park, who suggested that Asians could erase the physical signs of racial difference, and thus assimilate into the nation, through intermarriage with white Americans. Interestingly, Palumbo-Liu also cites Albert Palmer's *The Oriental in American Life* (1934), which claims, contra Boas and the government report, that American life did indeed affect the Asian body. In addition to noting the increased height of the American-born children of immigrants, Palmer remarks, "Changes in eyelids and eyelashes are also evident, but the most noteworthy adjustment is in the shape of the mouth and the general openness and responsiveness of the countenance. . . . [S]ooner or later, an enlightened and intelligent American public opinion will discover that . . . the Oriental masks are looking more and more like

American faces" (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 1990, 90). Twenty years later, in the fifties, the long process of intermarriage advocated by Robert E. Park to biologically efface racial difference was rejected in favor of the more immediate technology of plastic reconstructive surgery to speed up what before would take generations. In the terms of this medical discourse, the “‘narrow’ eyelid [of Asian people] betrays ‘dullness,’ ‘stupidity,’ ‘passivity’” and gives the impression of the Asian face as an inexpressive mask, as if hiding behind a disguise (90). By creating a “double-eyelid” and a higher bridge for the flat nose, the face is “opened up” and “a new ‘person’ emerges” (100). As a result, the physical reconstruction also ensures an attendant psychical transformation, thus making one’s interior conform to the new Americanized face. Significantly, plastic surgery cannot turn Asian subjects into white Americans; they are transformed, rather, into white *ethnics*. They resemble Mexicans or Italians; their facial mimicry remains “not quite, not white.”

Adapting the insight from Palumbo-Liu’s very rich essay, I contend that the conventionally handsome face of Brandon Lee functions as a product of a “mongrelized” Filipino American interracial mixing after many generations. The colonial and imperialist legacies of the Philippines have produced what some of my Filipino friends jokingly refer to as a “mutt,” a mixture comprised of indigenous Filipino, Malaysian, Chinese, Spanish, and American biological and cultural, somatic and psychical ingredients. One can “see” this “mutt” mixture reflected on the face of Brandon Lee as a set of hybridized, Westernized facial features: most meaningfully, the double eyelid, the tall nose bridge, and the brown skin. It is also this “un-place-able” face that permits a crossing of ethnicities. Because “all Orientals look the same,” the face of Brandon animates a variety of racial connotations, going from John X to Sean Martinez to Brandon Lee. John, Sean, and Brandon’s ability to *pass* resides precisely in exploiting this “hidden” disguise of the exotic, inscrutable Asian mask in order to put forth a legible, real, average American face.⁴⁶ As my friend John, a hapa, points out, “Compared to the other Asian guys he’s with in the videos, he’s definitely a better watch. The other guys usually aren’t cute. . . . They make funny noises when Brandon Lee fucks them and have that annoying Asian edge to them—kind of like my brethren that I shy away from at gay Asian clubs.”⁴⁷ In contrast to the “closed,” slanted, single-lidded eyes and foreign, FOB demeanor of his Asian costars with their often unintelligible verbal recitals, Brandon’s open American face is “a better watch,” and the viewer can understand him and relate to his Valley Guy accent without great effort. Furthermore, doesn’t the register of surprise and pleasure at seeing an “American” dick attached, out of

proportion, to the face and body of an Asian American man, doesn't this attention, blown out of proportion—on what are after all only eight and a half prime inches of cut meat—indicate another *passport*? Isn't this big (enough) dick the appeal and the prerequisite, the *pass* for admittance into the world of white gay mainstream pornotopia? Is this the dick that is finally big enough to rival, and with which to fuck, white men?

Pinups, Porn Stars, FOBS

In her essay on the 1991 Asian Pacific Islander Men's Calendar, Sau-ling Wong offers a critique of the project which seeks to contest the image of Asian men as asexual "geeks and nerds" by focusing on Asian men's "virility and sexuality." Wong observes that by rejecting one set of "negative stereotypes," this sincere and earnest intervention inadvertently reinscribes another set seen as more "positive," that of the model minority. Conforming to its politically progressive stance, the calendar presents "real," sexy Asian American men by depicting a group of pan-ethnic, respectable, professional men who have successfully assimilated into American society. They are all college-educated; most possess impeccable activist credentials; and all are hard at work on their respective careers. The calendar represents sexy Asian male bodies in the mode of arty erotica by deploying the codes of black-and-white studio portraits and tasteful seminudes; thus it distances itself from any association with the crass, colorful beefcake of pornography. Wong writes:

In the process of dissociating itself from the soft porn aspect of the pinup genre, the denerdification project of the APIM calendar cannot help invoking—and reinforcing—precisely the discourse that it claims to contest [namely the model minority myth]. . . . [It] replicate[s] a rather one-dimensional, consistently class-biased portrait of the Asian American male: urban, college-educated, upwardly mobile, white-collared or black turtle-necked. Conspicuously absent are grocers, waiters or blue-collar workers whose physically demanding work, I imagine, must be conducive to muscular development without benefit of Nautilus machines. (1993, 68)

One can see clear parallels between the privileging of the sexy, urban, college-educated, middle-class Asian American male over the unassimilated grocer, waiter, and blue-collar worker in the APIM calendar and the making

of Brandon Lee as a desirable West Hollywood twink in contradistinction to his less-than-appealing Asian costars with their working-class status, Chinatown address, bad accent, bad hair, flat face, small dick, and propensity for bottomhood. My preceding analysis of the star-text of Brandon Lee has repeatedly foreground its insistence on the construction of Brandon as an assimilated American and as a masculine top, qualities which accord him the status of gay (Asian) American porn star. One important lesson to be learned from the foregoing discussion is the limited potential of reversing the paradigm of the passive, Oriental, skinny, houseboy bottom by replacing it with one claiming that Asian men are *really* active, American, big-dicked, butch tops. In other words, by linking sexual dominance and desirability with porn stardom, topness, and hegemonic white American masculinity, one risks relegating Asian men again to the same position of sexual submission and abjection, with its reinscription of anonymity and bottomhood.⁴⁸ In addition, this essentialist and binary coding of white American/top and foreign Asian/bottom serves to further foreclose any consideration of the pleasures and agency of the bottom, whether white, black, Latino, or Asian. To be sure, a more critical consideration of the dynamics of top and bottom would trouble any easy equation of topness with masculinity and dominance and bottomhood with femininity and passivity.

In his book *Racial Castration*, David L. Eng offers a new model for critically intervening in the Asian American cultural nationalist project centered on a homophobic, misogynist, heterosexual male subject-citizen. In the place of Frank Chin and his colleagues' assertion of an Asian American identity based on the domestic and the national, Eng articulates a transnational and diasporic critical methodology for understanding the complexity of Asian American subject formation at the turn of the century. Instead of a whole, pure, and heroic male subject, Eng proposes the concept of a split subjectivity, divided between "over here" and "over there." This suggestion for broadening the scope of Asian American studies is politically necessary as we take into account the ongoing interpenetrations between the United States and the Pacific Rim in transnational capital, immigration, and labor. Eng reminds us that we cannot adequately understand patterns of migration and immigration from places like Vietnam, South Korea, and the Philippines without taking into consideration past and present neo-imperialist practices perpetrated by the United States in these countries. In addition, the fact that the majority of Asians living in the United States are foreign-born speaks to ongoing social, cultural, economic, and political

connections between “over here” and “over there” for many contemporary Asian American subjects. Eng writes, “If earlier Asian American cultural nationalist projects . . . were built on the political strategy of claiming home and nation-state through the domestic and the heterosexual, a new political project of thinking about these concepts in Asian American studies today would seem to center around queerness and diaspora—its rethinking of home and nation-state across multiple identity formations and numerous locations ‘out here’ and ‘over there’” (2001, 219).

What I find extremely provocative about Eng’s formulation is the political necessity and productive strategy of thinking about the politics of Asian American sexuality and identity beyond the borders of an American context. While I understand the need to assert the claim of Asians as Americans, *without* the hyphen, in the face of our being seen as unassimilable aliens, an overly defensive gesture of disavowing any connections to Asia runs the risk of “whiting” us out entirely and fails to capture the complexity of our collective histories. In looking at the more positive and progressive depiction of Brandon Lee as Americanized, we can see how this is accomplished at the expense of the business-as-usual, Orientalist marking of other Asians as being forever foreigners, exoticized and repudiated, and presented as forever bottoms for the white sex tourist’s consumption. Instead of the usual focus on the Asian male as the object of somebody else’s fantasy, of the body that is *acted on* by another, the proposal to think about identification and desire beyond white masculine homonormative configurations of the nation-state might entail a challenge to place the gay Asian American male *immigrant*-subject at the center of the pornographic fantasy scenario. This does not mean creating and prescribing more politically palatable positions for the Asian subject as either a butch top, a controlling bottom, or a bland, versatile, polymorphous sexual performer. Rather, it aims to mobilize, in a self-reflexive manner, a multiplicity of sexual scenarios where the Asian American immigrant figures as the central desiring subject, all the while retaining and exploiting the sexual turn-on of power differentials. As queer experimental video artist Wayne Yung—born in Hong Kong, raised in Edmonton, living in Hamburg—expresses it:

Myself, as a potato queen [Asian who dates white men], or at least right now as a potato queen, I would really be interested in seeing gay white men on screen who somehow expressed desire for Asian men but in a way that would turn me on as an Asian. That would mean a guy who wasn’t into dominating me or making me submissive or stereotyping me

basically. That could be sexy too, true, but I guess the only way to get around that is to have producers, writers and directors create the porn they would want to see as gay Asian men. (qtd. in Cho 1998, 62)⁴⁹

Family Reunion: Blood, Cum, and Tears

I would like to end by staging a fantasy scenario of my own, from my position as a queer Asian immigrant-spectator invested in the production of a gay Asian American male immigrant pornography. In this fantasy sequence, the long-dead father, international cult martial arts hero Bruce Lee, is reincarnated in order to meet his illegitimate gay son, porn star Brandon Lee. By reading the exhibition of Bruce Lee's martial body alongside Brandon Lee's pornographic one, I wish to challenge the commonplace view of the martial arts genre as a threatening and violent arena stripped of all sensuality and eroticism. Conversely, juxtaposing Brandon's pornographic positions next to Bruce's martial arts moves brings back the *difference* of Brandon's performance as an Asian American porn actor. The first fantasy clip is drawn from Brandon's video *Asian Persuasion 2*. The scene shows Tommy Lin, an aspiring porn star, seated in the waiting room of Catalina Video watching Brandon Lee, the porn star, perform a solo-jerk on the tv monitor. Brandon directly addresses Tommy (and by implication, the porn viewer), throughout his masturbatory performance. In this scene, a great deal of pressure is exerted between his position as the top—the subject acting on the viewer—and as bottom—as the object of someone else's desire. While on his stomach humping a pillow, Brandon looks at the camera: "I want my ass eaten out really good. . . . Nice tongue in my hole." He fingers and spreads his hairless asshole. But then he shifts from this bottom position (getting eaten out) to top: "Bend your knees so I can fuck you. . . . I need a tight ass for my cock." However, what we immediately see is his spread butt cheeks. At the end of the scene, he turns over on his back, shoots on his own face, and ends by wiping his cheeks and eating his own cum, while looking directly at the camera (figure 4). The second clip shows Bruce Lee in his final showdown with the evil Chinese villain, Han, in *Enter the Dragon*. In this film, Lee is recruited by the British government to enter Han's martial arts tournament in order to investigate Han's female sexual slavery ring and heroin trafficking. While Lee agrees to be sent as a secret agent, he is also there to avenge the death of his sister. In the final confrontation, Lee tells Han, "You have offended my family. And you have offended the Shaolin Temple." During their final face-off, Han claws Lee's face and naked torso with his



4. Brandon Lee swallows his own cum in *Asian Persuasion 2*.

5. Bruce Lee tastes his own blood in *Enter the Dragon*.

metal-bladed prosthetic hand. In response, Lee wipes the blood from his mid-torso wound and licks the blood, all the while sustaining intense eye contact with Han (figure 5). After performing a high kick to Han's face, Lee lands on his feet, stands upright, and forcefully spits out the blood.

Bruce Lee's dramatic tasting of his own blood signifies an acknowledgment of his body as clawed, wounded, suffering—the hardness of the muscle-bound body finally penetrated. The touching and licking of his own blood, while emphasizing the body in pain, powerfully express his lifeblood, the reinvigoration of his physical strength. The menacing shrieks and grunts also call to mind the aggression of a wild animal that has "tasted blood." The licking represents a challenge to the opponent, a retrenchment of masculine power, and his ultimate triumph over pain. By contrast, Brandon's ejaculation indicates a sign of authentic satisfaction and pleasure. But complementary to Bruce Lee's bloodthirsty gesture, his coming in his own mouth suggests a recycling of Brandon's own man-juice, of his virility. It also recalls the practice of ingesting one's partner's cum in the pre-AIDS era gay

porn of the seventies, where the act signals sexual passion at the end of a sex scene. In the context of the post-AIDS solo-jerk, the eating of cum represents a resignification of risk and sexual taboo associated with the exchange of bodily fluids. The scene thematizes the importance of masturbation and the important role of pornography in affirming this sexual practice in the age of AIDS.⁵⁰ Most significantly, however, as with Bruce and his blood, Brandon's ingestion of his own cum points to the destabilizing of his body as hard and impenetrable. Yet while Bruce Lee's ingestion of and spitting out blood indicates an acknowledgment of the body's porousness, it simultaneously recuperates this vulnerable moment into a demonstration of how this body endures and triumphs over the violation. Conversely, Brandon's self-facial dramatizes the enormous pressure brought to bear on the racially inflected fantasy of an Asian top porn star performing for another Asian man who desires him and desires to be like him. Moreover, the coming and shooting on his own face can be seen as a complex negotiation of the way in which an Asian American top porn star must also accommodate and submit to the desire of a white spectator. Finally, the fact that this transpires in a scene where an Asian man is performing sexually for another Asian man points to the new, liberatory possibility of our desires finally being addressed, for and toward one another. And yet this invocation of a self-conscious "sticky-rice" (Asian-into-Asian) scenario within a highly mediated scene—through the separation of porn viewer (Tommy Lin) from porn star (Brandon Lee) on the TV screen—suggests that sex between Asian men remains a self-contained, narcissistic, and ultimately solitary masturbatory practice; it remains an impossible, pornographic fantasy.⁵¹

Notes

I would like to extend my gratitude to Linda Williams for her invaluable support of this project from its inception. I would also like to thank Thomas Waugh, Eve Oishi, Jake Gerli, Minette Hillyer, Doug Au, and Dredge Byung'chu Kang for their helpful suggestions on how to clarify and strengthen my arguments.

¹ Throughout the essay, I frequently refer to Brandon Lee the porn star by his first name (instead of his last name as convention dictates) in order to prevent confusion with the other major Lee figure in my paper, Bruce Lee. More significantly, by using "Brandon," I wish to foreground the Americanness of this forename over the more Chinese-sounding surname "Lee." As I argue, the American coding of this first name is essential to this porn actor's legibility as a porn star. Calling a man by his first name draws on an association with youth, another element that is central to Brandon Lee's image. In addition, my use of "Brandon"

- alludes to the practice in fan cultures (including gay male porn fan culture) of referring to celebrities by their first names, as if stars were just ordinary next-door neighbors instead of extraordinary fantasy objects endowed with beauty, talent, wealth, and renown. In adopting this same practice, I register my position not merely as a distanced critic of this porn actor's work, but also as an avid fan.
- 2 Brandon Lee may not be the "first" gay Asian American porn star. Hapa (half-Asian, half-white) stars like Jordan Young have been quite successful and even more prolific. However, these stars have never been explicitly coded as Asian, but instead have appeared only in mainstream gay videotapes.
 - 3 Gay slang for a generic, cute, boyish young man, implicitly coded as white.
 - 4 Conducting close readings of only three videos in his essay, Fung restricts his analysis to American-made videos with Asian themes because the Japanese and Thai productions "come from cultural contexts about which I am incapable of commenting. In addition, the fact that porn from those countries is sometimes unmarked racially does not mean that it speaks to my experience or desires, my own culture of sexuality" (1991, 164). I adopt an approach similar to Fung's in my analysis of Brandon Lee's videos. Writing in 1991, Fung considers the work of "the only Asian to qualify as a gay porn 'star,'" who goes under the names of Brad Truong or Sam or Sum Yung Mahn. Below I explore the importance of names and the naming of Asian American porn actors in a more in-depth manner.
 - 5 The scene in question has Robbie, a white karate student, telling a fellow classmate his sex dream about their karate teacher, Greg. In the dream, shown as a cutaway, Greg rescues Robbie from "an evil samurai." As part of his expression of gratitude, Robbie lets Greg fuck him. While Robbie appears as himself (that is, white) in the video up to this point, during the fucking scene, he "turns Japanese": Sum Yung Mahn plays Asian Robbie in the bottoming sequence.
 - 6 Darrell Y. Hamamoto locates one rare instance of an appearance by an Asian American man in the porn film *Once upon Annette* (dir. Annette Haven, 1978). Hamamoto writes: "A White woman (Tina Orchard) and her mate (James Fong) are shown blithely romping through a meadow, both wearing only animal skins, in Neanderthal fashion. As pseudo-Sinitic music plays in the background, the couple pause to caress each another [sic]. Across the way, a similarly clad White caveman (David Blair) spies the couple making out. He sneaks up on the two and, shouting caveman gibberish (the inter-title translation reads, 'Eat Chinese —and half-hour later you want more'), runs off the Yellow man with a club before he can deposit Asian genetic material into the White woman" (2000, 74).
 - 7 Although two of the directors of Brandon Lee's videos remain the same (Chi Chi LaRue and Josh Eliot) and there is an overlap in the time of production (1997–98), the crossover I am suggesting has less to do with Lee jettisoning one market/audience for another over a period of time. Instead, I am arguing that there exists a shift in the casting and coding of his image from the Asian-themed videos to the mainstream productions. The relatively small size of the gay porn industry and its rapid production schedule allow for the simultaneity of

Brandon Lee's appearance in both the Asian-themed and mainstream tapes, or rather, their contemporaneous release on the market. I shall argue below that it is precisely the (il)legibility of this porn actor's racial coding that makes possible his cross-appeal to both mainstream and Asian-niched audiences. His racially mixed face and body make him desirable to both white and Asian men.

- 8 The concept of *border cases* comes from Valerie Smith, who uses it to describe "issues that problematize easy assumptions about racial and/or sexual difference, particularly insofar as they demonstrate the interactions between race and gender" (1990, 272). Thanks to Eve Oishi for bringing this term to my attention.
- 9 Similar racist, exclusionary immigration policies and the legal frameworks maintaining them existed in Canada as well. See Richard Fung's impressive experimental documentary, *Dirty Laundry* (1996), for an imaginative exploration of the homoerotic bonds between Chinese men usually suppressed in conventional, heteronormative accounts of bachelor societies in late-nineteenth-century Chinese immigrant communities in North America.
- 10 The term *the third sex* originates from the German gay movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Magnus Hirschfeld and his colleagues in the sexual emancipation movement, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, believed that lesbians and gay men represented a "third sex," or an in-betweenism, due to their difference from "real" (read heterosexual) women and "real" men. This term has been self-consciously reclaimed by modern-day gays and lesbians to articulate a queer radical politics and activism. An interesting example of this tendency can be seen in a popular dyke punk band from Olympia, Washington, which calls itself The Third Sex.
- 11 In their violent repudiation of the image of Asian men as effeminate sissies—"closet queens like Charlie Chan and . . . homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu" (qtd. in Eng 2001, 34)—Chin and his colleagues sought to reclaim and recover a lost Asian American masculinity premised on an "original manhood that is U.S.-centric and thus derived from a historical and mythological context of early Asian immigrant laborers," as seen in romanticized western figures like the "adventurous cowboys," the "indomitable pioneer," and the "brawny working-class laborer laying the railroads" (Wong and Santa Ana 1999, 191).
- 12 For example, we can see how the conflation of Asian Americans with Asians was cruelly enacted with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. In April 2001, the same dynamic was played out in the American responses to the U.S. spy plane–Chinese fighter jet standoff, in which American talk show hosts called for the internment of Chinese Americans and boycotts of Chinese restaurants.
- 13 While I look at the complex coding of Brandon Lee as an (Asian) American at length below, it is worth noting that the dominant perception of Bruce Lee as a *Chinese* martial arts superstar is not altogether accurate. Bruce Lee was born in 1940 in San Francisco, California, to a Eurasian mother and a Chinese father (who was touring with the Cantonese Opera Company). Lee's family returned

to Hong Kong when he was one. He began his film career as a child actor in Hong Kong, appearing in films from the late 1940s through the 1950s. When Lee turned nineteen, his parents sent him back to the United States due to his street fighting and also in order to retain his U.S. citizenship. At twenty-one, he enrolled at the University of Washington and studied philosophy. In 1964, his stellar performance at a karate championship in Long Beach, California, led to a "discovery" by William Dozier, the producer of the television series *Batman*. In 1966–67, he appeared on American television as Kato in *The Green Hornet*. Although cancelled in the United States, the tv show made Lee a huge star in Hong Kong. In 1971, on a return trip to Hong Kong on family business, Lee was offered a starring role in a movie, an offer he readily accepted. The film, *The Big Boss* (dir. Wei Lo, 1971), became a phenomenal success in Hong Kong. In the same year, he was rejected for a role in an American tv series (later broadcast as *Kung Fu* [1972], which featured the white actor David Carradine). It was not until after the immense success of two additional Hong Kong productions (*Fist of Fury* and *The Way of the Dragon*) that Hollywood's Warner Brothers decided to capitalize on Lee's box office draw by collaborating on a coproduction with a Chinese film company. Ironically, Lee died under mysterious circumstances one month prior to the release of *Enter the Dragon*, the film that established him as a worldwide superstar and instant cult hero.

- 14 This was Lee's second film; it was also released as *The Chinese Connection*.
- 15 I don't mean to suggest that *all* of Lee's films should be read as "anticolonial." For example, in his first kung fu feature film, *The Big Boss*, Lee's character, Cheng Chiu-on, and his cousins are employed as (presumably illegal) migrant workers at an ice factory in Thailand; the villain in the film is their drug-trafficking boss. Thus the narrative conflict against a tyrannical oppressor is couched in terms of class.
- 16 The film was released in the United States as *Return of the Dragon*.
- 17 Commenting on the appeal of the kung fu genre to the black American audience, David Desser observes how "kung fu films offered the only nonwhite heroes, men and women, to audiences alienated by mainstream film and often by mainstream culture. This was the genre of the underdog, the underdog of color, often fighting against colonialist enemies, white culture, or the Japanese" (2000, 38). Jachinson Chan and Gina Marchetti have argued that the violence in Bruce Lee's films can be read as a metaphor for the Vietnam War, in which the small Asian underdogs battle successfully against the technologically advanced American imperialists. See Chan 2001, 87–88. For another interesting account of the African American reception of kung fu cinema, see Ongiri 2002.
- 18 For a more thorough discussion of the nationalism of Bruce Lee's films, see Teo 1997 and Fore 2001, 117–22.
- 19 An interesting instance of how this buildup of suspense sometimes backfires is *The Big Boss*. In this film, Lee's character has promised his family that he will give

up fighting; tension mounts in different scenes where he witnesses rowdy young men inflict abuse on innocent people around him, yet he must restrain himself. Contemporary viewers' comments on the Internet Movie Database about the film complain of the "agonizingly slow" pacing of the first half of the movie, due not only to the poorly constructed story line and badly dubbed dialogue but primarily because Bruce Lee doesn't "kick ass" until halfway into the movie.

- 20 Kwai-cheung Lo asserts that Bruce Lee's films were dubbed in Mandarin at first release due to the Hong Kong Cantonese film industry's competition with Mandarin films at the time. The English dubbing in the American prints thus represents a second translation from the Cantonese original. In the same article, Lo also offers a novel reading of Lee's famous shrieks. As part of his wider argument about "Hong Kong identity . . . derived from an ambivalent emotional attachment to a fictional China," Lo interprets Lee's animalistic verbal eruption as a "hole" in this "new symbolic center for identity construction": "Though Lee's mouth is moving, the shrieks do not come from a particular source or a subject. The animal-like voice is all pervasive and free-floating, unfixed to any definite visual object on the screen. . . . Disembodied, this animal voice, this sound from nowhere, seems to have a life of its own, even as it is, conversely, looking for a body to fill out" (1996, 111).
- 21 In the 1950s, Kwan Tak-hing, famous for his portrayal of the Cantonese kung fu legend Wong Fei-hung, was also a highly trained martial artist who performed realistic, well-choreographed kung fu sequences on-screen. Stephen Teo maintains that Wong Fei-hung is the prototype for Bruce Lee's characters in the 1970s (1997, 51).
- 22 In fact, Clover refers to a television program produced in 1955 in which Kelly establishes direct connections between dance moves and the sports moves of such "hardy" American male sports as baseball, football, boxing, and basketball in order to counteract the "stigma of effeminacy" that has always been attached to dance (1995, 726).
- 23 Chiao has called attention to the "dance-like choreography" of Lee's movies, in which the solo number corresponds to the sequence where Lee performs with the nunchaku, the duet is analogous to the final showdown with the archvillain, and the chorus numbers resemble the fight scenes with hordes of disposable opponents (1981, 34).
- 24 The strobing effect setting off this climactic sequence finds a neat parallel with 1970s pornographic films' formal exhibitionism (e.g., the fireworks). Both straight and gay porn films from this era employ such innovative and then-avant-garde techniques as slow motion, optical printing, and repetition from multiple camera angles in order to build up and lengthen the climactic money shot. For example, the Mitchell Brothers pulled out all the stops during the unforgettable final money shot in their classic *Behind the Green Door* (1972); they exploited such visual pyrotechnics as extreme slow motion, superimpositions,

continuous dissolves, psychedelic colors, and solarization, effects worthy of the most celebrated of the American avant-garde filmmakers. I am indebted to Linda Williams for suggesting this interesting formal parallel.

- 25 It is important to note that Lee's films *do* contain extreme violence. One infamous scene of Lee sawing a man's head open and another showing him sticking his fingers into the villain's torso from *The Big Boss* had to be edited out of the U.S. version of the film in order to escape an X-rating. Nevertheless, I agree with Tasker's perceptive critique that Western critics' exclusive attention to the gory violence in his films is used to offset and disavow the homoeroticism of Lee's handsome face, on-screen charisma, and his half-naked body under duress.
- 26 However, the issue of Bruce Lee's "asexuality" is complicated by the fact that Chinese codes of masculinity (*wu*, or martial masculinity) stipulate that involvement with a woman indicates weakness, "losing control," for a martial arts hero. Thus "manliness" in Chinese contexts becomes translated as "asexual" in Asian American critical analyses of Bruce Lee. Thanks to Chris Berry for bringing the Chinese archetype of *wu* masculinity to my attention. The complex cultural and historical codings of Asian and Asian American masculinities suggest the necessity of situating discussions of Asian American masculinity and sexuality in a transnational context, something that I am unable to undertake here due to space constraints. See Louie 2002.

I understand the muting of Lee's sexual intensity as a recontainment of the threat posed by Asian male sexuality (for example, as part of the same process of the Asian male body's policing we saw in antimiscegenation laws and employment discrimination in nineteenth-century North America). Lee's virile, powerful presence is tolerated (indeed, celebrated) precisely because it remains untainted by the domain of sexuality. The uncorrupted, puritan asexuality of the naive country bumpkin sets Lee off from the crowd and precludes any sexual contact with either women *or* men. In his chapter on Bruce Lee as a Chinese American male object of desire, Jachinson Chan rereads Lee's asexuality in terms of sexual indeterminacy and "ambi-sexuality." He notes that while Lee's nationalistic masculinity is posed against the traitorous effeminacy of the homosexual characters, Lee's character does not reject outright the (homo)sexual objectification of his body. Chan points out that in fact both female and gay male characters sexualize Lee's body in the films; yet because he does not commit "himself to any form of sexual union, Lee exhibits an ambi-sexuality that is characterized by an indeterminate sexual identity" (2001, 78).

- 27 In *Hard Core*, Linda Williams establishes connections between the genres of the musical and the feature-length heterosexual porn film. However, the direct transcription of Williams's generic formulation to gay porn would be tenuous due to the negligible role of narrative elaboration in contemporary gay videos.
- 28 In "Coming to Terms," Richard Dyer famously argues that narrative forms the basis of gay pornography. He maintains that there is narrative even in the most

minimal pornographic loop: the narrative drive toward coming. While in complete agreement with Dyer's important analysis and groundbreaking critique of the central thrust of gay pornography (and male sexuality in general) as being fixated on "visible coming," I am underscoring the lack of narrative *elaboration* in gay porn videos in comparison with kung fu cinema.

In spite of its advertised premise, *Absolute-Arid* actually has only one scene set in the desert; the other scenes take place in pastoral landscapes. Interestingly, *Absolute-Arid* received the Best All-Sex Video award at the Adult Video News "GayVN" Awards in 2000. The inclusion of such an award category bears out my point regarding the secondary role of narrative in recent gay video porn. It is also worth noting that two of Falcon's recent popular titles, *Out of Athens—Parts 1 and 2* (dir. John Rutherford, 2000)—shot "on location" in Greece—are loose porn remakes of the Matt Damon homosexual thriller *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (dir. Anthony Minghella, 1999). However, reviews of this two-part video (TLA Video Web site's reviews at www.tlavideo.com offer a typical example), like most gay porn video reviews in general, focus almost exclusively on the sexual performances—the physical pairings and permutations among the well-known and up-and-coming actors—and give the story line only lip service.

- 29 In his experimental videotape, *Let's Just Kiss + Say Good-Bye* (1995), artist Robert Blanchon re edits 1980s porn videos in order to retrieve and reenvision these moments of narrative before and in between the sexual numbers, moments when these appallingly bad actors—with their feathered hair and pastel muscle shirts—deliver their dreadful lines of dialogue. Backed by the popular title song (recorded in 1976 by the Manhattans), the pornographic found footage—in its new, campy juxtapositions—evokes the bittersweet, "innocent" interstitial period between the wild sexual abandon of the gay seventies and the tempered grimness of the AIDS era of the eighties and nineties. Blanchon's recathexis of early 1980s gay pornography bespeaks a certain poignancy in "saying good-bye" to an important period in the history of gay sexuality in the United States, and it also serves as a memorial and tribute in its bid of farewell to the unnamed, forgotten actors in the porn videos who passed away as a result of the AIDS pandemic.
- 30 The link between martial arts, or more specifically, Bruce Lee, and pornography (albeit heterosexual) is casually made in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997). In a footnote to his article, Darrell Y. Hamamoto cites this link as "a breakthrough of sorts, [whereby] the exclusion of eroticized Asian American men in the dominant media is subverted" (2000, 82). In the film, Mark Wahlberg's porn actor character, Dirk Diggler, idolizes Bruce Lee and performs "karate chops" in front of the dressing room mirror before his porn shoots.
- 31 The explanatory power of juxtaposing Bruce and Brandon Lee next to each other resides in the fact that both represent border cases in which overlapping signifiers of "Asian" and "American" are expressed through performances of masculinity, violence, and sexuality. On the one hand, Bruce Lee's overt sexuality is sublimated into a visual display of masculine power in his struggles against

unjust, oppressive domination. As we shall see below, in the case of Brandon Lee, sexuality is the alleged focus, but the top-bottom positions in the sexual scenarios mask other cultural articulations. Both figures represent rare cases of virile Asian (American) male subjects, yet the two actors embody the enduring inequalities and contradictions between popular understandings of *Asian* and *American*, terms historically and culturally articulated through constructions of gender and sexuality. These two Asian (American) male stars, then, are symbols representing American popular culture's inability to accommodate a masculine, desiring Asian male subject in cultural narratives invested in viewing "Asian" and "American" as two unintegrated and incommensurable cultures. Most significantly, their status as exceptional, masculine Asian (American) media figures requires that the full range of sexual possibilities accruing to their images must ultimately be muted and contained: Bruce Lee through the overemphasis on the violence of his martial arts, Brandon Lee through the contradictions underlying his "passive autoerotic topness." (For an elaboration on this point, see especially my discussions below of *Fortune Nookie* and *Asian Persuasion 2*.) I am grateful to Eve Oishi for her help in fleshing out and making explicit these important connections between Bruce and Brandon Lee.

- 32 In my use of *West Hollywood* throughout this essay, I wish to mobilize the full range of connotations associated with this term in the popular imagination; that is, West Hollywood—like the Castro in San Francisco—has come to stand in for a specific "brand identity" or "gay lifestyle" constituted by a set of features such as race (whiteness), economic class (upper middle class), gender (male), body and fitness consciousness (gym-bunny), and attitude/worldview ("southern California" superficiality), features that construct this sexual minority not only as an extremely profitable consumer demographics for corporations but also as a shorthand expression used within the gay community to reference a certain type of gay male identification. In this manner, *West Hollywood* exceeds the physically demarcated zone of this southern California city denoted by "region" and instead signifies what Thomas Waugh has noted as an "intra-sexual identity/class/subculture." I am grateful to Waugh for bringing this critical point to my attention (personal communication, April 23, 2002).
- 33 The characterization of Brandon Lee and Brad Davis Mikado by their professions in this first scene signals another key departure from earlier gay male porn videos with Asian actors analyzed by Richard Fung. Fung observes that the "occupations of the white actors are usually specified, while those of the Asians are not. The white actors are assigned fantasy appeal based on profession, whereas for the Asians, the sexual cachet of race is deemed sufficient. In *Asian Knights* there are also sequences in which the characters' lack of 'work' carries connotations of the housewife or, more particularly, the house boy" (1991, 162). While it is interesting to take note of the "promotion" of Asian men from unpaid house boys to more respectable occupations (such as pool cleaning businessmen and real estate agents), a class-inflected sexual hierarchy based on the charac-

ters' professions can be discerned in the newer videos, as we shall see below in my discussions of *Asian Persuasion* and *Fortune Nookie*.

- 34 We assume the character is supposed to be Japanese from the earlier credit sequence, which informed us that his name is Tenji Mito.
- 35 Except for Brad Davis Mikado and Broc Hiyashi, the other two Asian actors, Hiro Sukowa and Tishiro Ho, speak with pronounced accents.
- 36 In response to Scott's aggressive commands, Brandon strips naked and poses in different positions (standing, bending over, sticking up his ass) while Scott remains clothed, rubbing his cock through his business suit trouser. After an extended sequence of Scott's dirty talk and Brandon's bodily display, Scott finally goes down on his knees and shows that lawyers indeed *do suck*.
- 37 Whereas the sex between Brandon and Time is mediated through class inequalities, another Asian-Asian scene in the same tape mobilizes the "transgression" of sex with straight men. The sex scene between two of the sex workers, Erik Tenaka and Tishiro Ho, occurs right after the viewer is told that Ho engages in sex work in order to support his two kids. This portrayal of Ho as a lower-class immigrant family man "forced" into having sex with men for money invokes the sexual frisson and taboo connected to the gay male fantasy of seducing an allegedly impossible object of desire, namely straight men, into gay sex.

While the sexual turn-on of straight men is a common feature in gay pornography of the seventies, it has since been abandoned (or deployed only infrequently) and discredited as enacting a politically incorrect sexual scenario based on an internalized homophobia. It is important to note that in addition to the historical coding of straight men in gay male subculture as working class, or trade, they are also often marked as racially other. As Christopher Ortiz points out, "One pervasive stereotype in gay pornography is the desire to be fucked by the Black or Chicano/Latino stud who does not reciprocate and may even be straight. . . . The fantasy of the straight macho Chicano/Latino man who fucks 'me' (a white man) allows for sexual relations between two men and at the same time excludes the Chicano/Latino man from being framed as a member of a gay community" (1994, 39).

If Ho is coded as straight and engaging in homosexual sex for economic reasons, what motivates his sex scene with a fellow worker? The attempt to depict Ho as a macho straight man in this scene—in order to reference his desirability for Tenaka and, by implication, the viewer—remains unconvincing in that his acting does not succeed in projecting a hetero-butchness; his voice is soft and hesitating, while his body type and gender style connote a boyish and femme quality. In other words, he does not "measure up" to the clean-cut, all-(Asian) American, masculine image of Brandon Lee.

- 38 Of course the word *mascot* itself already mobilizes political and racial connotations. In the United States, Native Americans have been protesting for years against the use of indigenous peoples as mascots, nicknames, symbols, and logos by various sports teams, for example, the Washington Redskins, the Cleve-

land Indians, and the Golden State Warriors. Thanks to Dredge Kang for bringing this point to my attention.

- 39 An interesting difference between the star image of Brandon, an Asian American porn star, and other mainstream white gay porn stars can be seen in a product “tie-in” that follows the video *Chew Manchu*. Though Brandon does not appear in the video, he is shown on the box of the “Samurai Penis Pump,” a “prop” used in the video. (The tag line is “As Seen in ‘Chew Manchu.’”) The Orientalist marking of Asian male sexuality is neatly condensed in this sexual aid. Whereas white gay porn stars like Jeff Stryker and Ryan Idol endorse “life-sized” dildos cast from their own penises, Brandon Lee—though allegedly possessing a cock *too big* for his own body—is used to sell a “hollow” device for the purpose of inflating the user’s/viewer’s penis. The use of Brandon in this ad conjures up two possibilities revolving around the question of spectatorial desire and identification. Either Brandon has acquired his big dick by using the Samurai Pump, and the intended consumer (a less-endowed porn viewer) desires to attain Brandon’s big dick by employing the pump; or Brandon is naturally well endowed and the intended consumer can become like him by purchasing this equipment.
- 40 I am drawing on Ortiz’s perceptive reading of gay Chicano/Latino porn videos and adapting it to the Asian American videos. Discussing *Soul and Salsa* (dir. Frank Jeffries, 1988), Ortiz writes: “The text, then, is structured so that the fantasy is not only that of watching men perform specific sexual acts with each other, but that the spectator watches racially coded men—Afro-American and Chicano/Latino men—engage in sexual acts with one another. The text provides an idea of what sex between hot men of color might possibly look like” (1994, 84–85).
- 41 Of course the term also activates the word *Asian* embedded in *persuasion*. This assonance has been creatively deployed by at least one (now defunct) gay Asian club in Los Angeles, which calls itself Persuasion. The simple change in spelling constructs the club as a queer Asian space where Asian men are the objects of “pursuit”—by white men as well as by other Asian men.
- 42 In this West Hollywood context, and in hip L.A. parlance in general, the San Fernando Valley represents the social death of the dreaded suburbs.
- 43 Due to space and time constraints, I am unable to sufficiently explore the reasons for the lack of Asian actors in gay pornography. In addition to Josh Eliot, Chi Chi LaRue also bemoans the difficulty of finding Asian actors: “Now it’s very hard to find Asian models. . . . They’re very private. I think maybe they’re worried, maybe their culture doesn’t condone this kind of thing, maybe Asian guilt, like Catholic guilt. That’s why they’ll come and do one or two films and they’ll disappear” (qtd. in Ko 1999, 85). Similary, Oggi, an Asian American producer-director of Exotic Videos, suggests, “It would take me forever to find models here; that’s one reason why I don’t make them in the U.S. . . . The ones I interview, sometimes they will chicken out. When it gets right down to production, they get scared. Asians aren’t very brave, not like (non-Asian) American people

who don't care. What if my friends or parents see it?" (qtd. in Ko 1999, 85). Whether the paucity of Asian actors in gay porn can be attributed to cultural difference or the lack of demand (and adequate rewards) for them, I would reject the individualist and psychological explanations of guilt and timidity. Though he does not provide any "hard evidence" or theoretical elaboration, Hamamoto attributes the lack of Asian men—or what he refers to as the "exclusion of the Yellow man from video porn"—working *in front* of the camera to the "pervasive White-supremacist race/sex/power ideology": "The absence of Asian American men in video porn has nothing to do with having the 'right equipment' and the 'desire' to be in the business. The reason is found in the obdurate anti-Asian racism of the dominant society, which is reproduced intact by the thematic conventions of U.S. video porn" (2000, 75). Although I agree with Hamamoto's politically based diagnosis, I still wonder about the dismal show of Asian men in American porn, an industry riddled with niched and specialty markets always ready to exploit "sexual novelties."

- 44 The name Sean Martinez may also be read as Filipino, though I do not think most American porn viewers are savvy enough to be cognizant of the tremendous influence of Spain on Filipino culture. In spite of the fact that Oh Man! Studios' synopsis of *Glory Holes of L.A.* identifies Sean Martinez as an "Asian newcomer" on their Web site, I would contend that a viewer watching the tape without this extratextual information might not automatically make the assumption that Sean Martinez should (only) be read as Asian, let alone specifically Filipino.
- 45 That is, up until riots broke out in communities like Watsonville, California, where white men killed Filipino men for attracting white women at taxi dance halls.
- 46 See Stuart Gaffney's fascinating examination of another, even higher-profile queer Filipino mestizo in his experimental video, *Cunanan's Conundrum* (1997). Gaffney's brilliant reading of the mixed-race gay serial killer considers how this hapa's chameleon-like ability to "pass" and to "pass himself off" as many different identities troubles and defies traditional racial, ethnic, class, and gender categories. The media simultaneously portrayed Cunanan as white, Cuban, Arab, and Filipino, as well as a man who might be dressing up as a woman. During the FBI manhunt, Cunanan sightings were reported from all over the continental United States and Alaska. Cunanan, because he "looked like anyone of us," was spotted everywhere, yet he successfully eluded capture. An ironic note in light of my discussion at hand is the fact that Cunanan committed suicide by shooting himself in the face; his positive identification was ascertained through his fingerprints. According to Gaffney, the threat represented by this racially and ethnically illegible serial killer was read as a "natural" expression of his "deceitful" hapa Filipino identity (born of a Filipino American father and an Italian American mother) and was further attributed to his pathological, s/m-inflected, predatory homosexuality.
- 47 John Wirfs, personal e-mail, April 26, 2001. A big shout to John for recount-

ing his Brandon Lee sighting to me and for sharing his perspective on the porn star.

- 48 The fact that an Asian American gay porn star must be set off in clear opposition to the Oriental fobs in these videotapes demonstrates the decisive part that Brandon Lee plays in maintaining border divisions (Asian/American, bottom/top), even as he embodies their blurring.
- 49 Throughout this essay, I have argued that the ideal viewer constructed by the Brandon Lee videos (and Asian-themed gay video pornography in general) is a gay white man. However, the insertion of my own experience and reactions to these tapes in these pages—in addition to my citations of Richard Fung, Wayne Yung, and my friend John—do offer some evidence that there exists an active gay Asian audience intellectually engaged with (and getting off to) this pornography. My personal interest in explicit sexual representation (of which gay moving-image pornography occupies a central position) arises from my own experimental video practice concerning issues around queer Asian American sexuality and identity as they intersect with and are articulated through popular cultural productions (e.g., Hong Kong pop stars, high-fashion supermodels, Vietnamese American popular music). More specifically, my attraction to Brandon Lee comes out of my previous artistic work on the politics and pleasures of sticky-rice (Asian-into-Asian) desire, explored in my videos *7 Steps to Sticky Heaven* (1995), and *Forever Bottom!* (1999). Presented as a pseudoinstructional “workout” video, *Forever Bottom!* gently pokes fun at the notion of Asian men as passive bottoms in gay sex. Instead of proffering the more “positive” corrective that Asian men are “really” butch tops, I embrace the pleasures of unrepentant bottomhood by presenting a humorous look at the insatiable appetite of an Asian boy bottom who “gets fucked” everywhere (in the shower, in the kitchen, on the carpet, on the balcony, on the front lawn, at the park, on the beach, in the car). Through parodic performance and repetition, I mount a critique as well as a celebration of the politics of queer Asian bottomhood. The question of recentering the desiring Asian immigrant-spectator is dealt with in my videotape *PIRATED!* (2000). In this work, I employ pirated footage from such diverse sources as *The Crimson Pirate* (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1952) with Burt Lancaster, *Querelle* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1982) with Brad Davis, and Vietnamese American music videos, in order to rewrite the official account of my boat escape from Vietnam in the late 1970s. In place of a linear and coherent documentary narrative, this experimental video imaginatively transforms my personal tale of perilous escape as a young boy into one about homoerotic fantasies about Thai pirates and German sailors, fantasies reenacted and performed by me and my friends on a California beach. Working against the nostalgic notion of finding oneself by going back (to the motherland), the restaging of my “formation of identity” takes place on the high seas, during the boat journey, an in-between queer space/time not to be found again or recaptured, but only reimagined and relooped.

As these brief comments regarding my own art video practice intimate, the

most sustained interventions into the arena of homoerotic Asian American visual representation at the turn of the century have taken place in the realm of queer experimental film and video. In the place of an amateur or commercial practice, something akin to a queer Asian American “counterpornography” seeking to muddle the mono-vision of the white sex tourist’s gaze, the realm of low/no-budget queer Asian experimental film and video constitutes the one key area where the problematic depiction of the Asian male body in gay video porn comes under interrogation. It is also where more alternative and complex—not to mention smart, campy, and sexy—accented voices and “slanted visions” (to invoke a title from Ming-Yuen S. Ma) are articulated and mobilized. In addition, venues such as lesbian and gay film festivals around the world, Asian American (and Asian Canadian) film festivals, and the few remaining nonprofit alternative art exhibition spaces continue to lend support and offer exposure for this critical work. Some of the most exciting film- and videomakers engaged in these issues include Richard Fung (*Dirty Laundry*, 1996), Wayne Yung (*The Queen's Cantonese*, 1998; *Field Guide to Western Wildflowers*, 2000), Stuart Gaffney (*My Lover's Aunt Porn*, 2000; *Transgressions*, 2002), Ho Tam (*Season of the Boys*, 1997; *99 Men*, 1998; *Matinee Idol*, 1999), Michael Shaowanasai (*Exotic 101*, 1998; *To Be . . . or Not to Be: The Adventures of Iron Pussy III*, 2000), and Ming-Yuen S. Ma (*Slanted Vision*, 1995; *Sniff*, 1997).

On recent queer Asian American experimental film and video, see Oishi 2000. For a brief overview of queer Asian American cinema and the politics of curating such work in Asian American film festivals, see Han 1998.

- 50 This crucial point about the affirmative relationship of gay porn and masturbation (as a “reeducation” of desire) in the AIDS era is eloquently made by Richard Dyer in the conclusion of his essay “*Idol Thoughts*”: “The most exciting thing of all about porn is that it affirms the delights of that most common, most unadmitted, at once most vanilla and politically incorrect of sexual acts, masturbation” (2002, 202).
- 51 My conclusion does not attempt to take issue with Dyer’s valuable observation regarding the validating role of gay porn in promoting the “safest sex” of all, masturbation. What I am contesting is how this specific porno encounter between two Asian American men, one in which the Asian American porn star directly acknowledges and solicits the gaze and the desire of another Asian American viewer, can only be represented at a “once-remove,” in a technologically mediated fashion via the *mise-en-abîme* of the porn viewing situation: the imaginary Asian American porn viewer at home watching Tommy Lin, the porn character, watching Brandon Lee, the porn star, playing (with) himself. It is worth noting that while Brandon Lee gets off by shooting on his own face and mouth, Tommy Lin does not reach orgasm. A white male Catalina Video office worker—who can be seen as part of the white gay porno-industrial apparatus—suddenly appears (conveniently right after Brandon Lee’s cum shot on the monitor) to inform Lin that the producer is ready to see him, thus causing Lin’s *onanismus interruptus*.

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