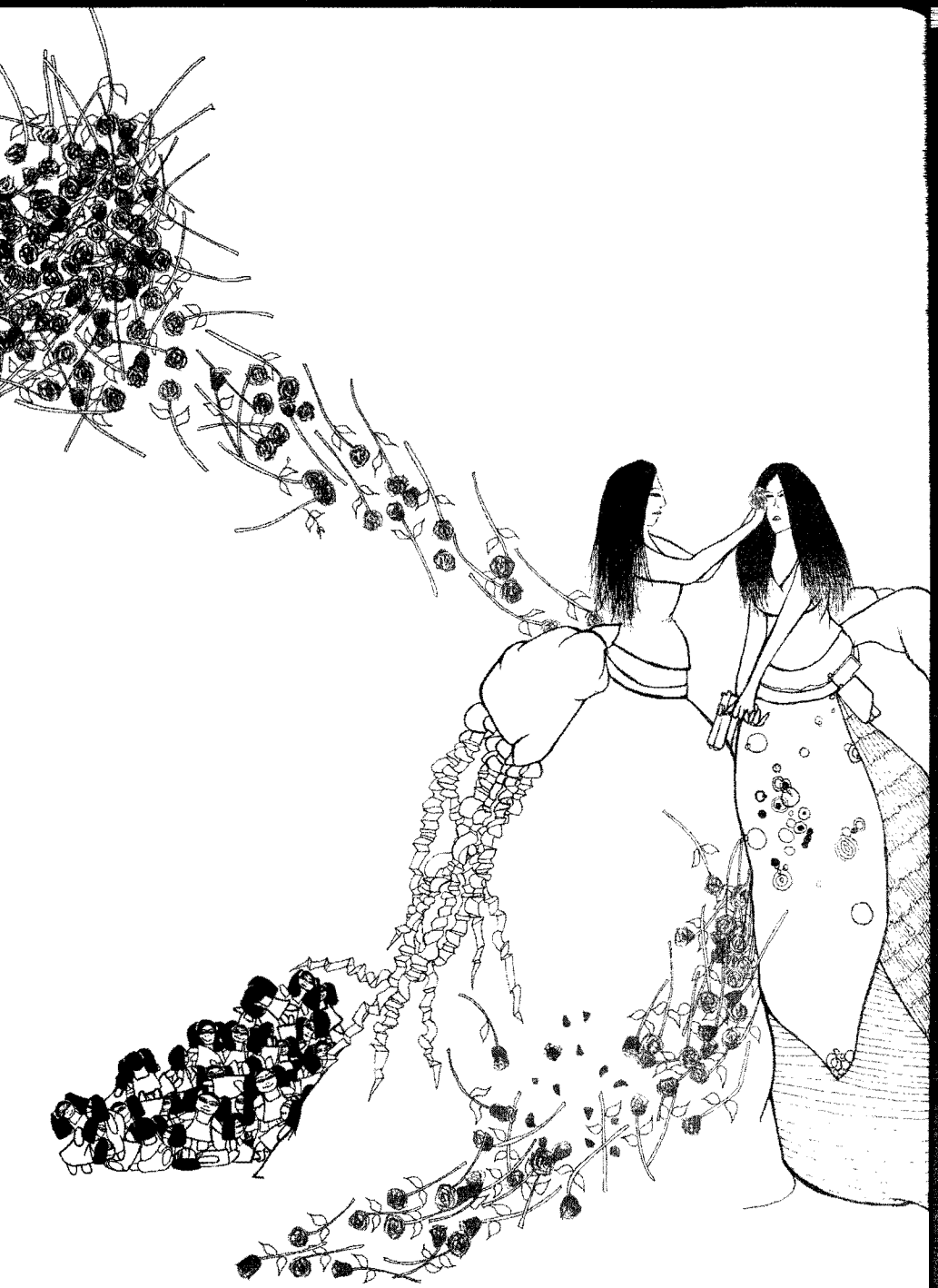


DAVID L. ENG

The Feeling of Kinship

QUEER LIBERALISM AND THE RACIALIZATION OF INTIMACY

Duke University Press © Durham and London © 2010

Printed in the United States
of America on acid-free paper ♾
Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan
Typeset in Chaparral Pro by
Keystone Typesetting, Inc.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-
Publication Data appear on the last
printed page of this book.

Frontispiece: Michele K. Carlson

"You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven!—I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be."

Then did the little Maid reply,
"Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree."

"You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five."

"Their graves are green, they may be seen,"
The little Maid replied,
"Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,
And they are side by side.

"My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them . . ."

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH,
"We Are Seven" (1798)

❦ ❦ ❦

I remember having this feeling growing up
that I was haunted by something, that I was
living within a family full of ghosts.

—REA TAJIRI,
History and Memory (1991)

TWO

The Structure of Kinship

THE ART OF WAITING IN *THE BOOK OF SALT* AND *HAPPY TOGETHER*

The photographer could rehearse the efforts to picture these men in the usual ways, but there was always a remainder. The men resisted all attempts to order them, no matter the orthodoxy of conventions brought to bear in arranging and deciphering them. They had their own desires.

—ANTHONY W. LEE, *Picturing Chinatown*

Two American ladies wish—

—ALICE B. TOKLAS, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*

How might we imagine otherwise? How might we visualize loss and the forgetting of race? How might we imagine a psychic landscape beyond Schreber's mental gymnastics, a social terrain beyond the limits of queer liberalism?

This—and each subsequent—chapter of *The Feeling on Kinship* turns to the concept of queer diasporas as a rejoinder to the political and psychic dilemmas of queer liberalism. As a methodological tool, queer diasporas directs our attention to other communities—to other humanities within modernity and its received traditions of liberal humanism. In doing so, it moves us beyond identity-based frameworks in order to emphasize the epistemological coordinates of how we are thought—in order to focus on the politics and problems of racial knowledge. As a structure of feeling, queer diasporas also indexes lost and forgotten desires, those stubborn remainders of affect that individuate through their ardent refusal of the orthodoxy of conventions, the great expectations of social agreement. Lastly, in the binding force of the what-can-be-known, queer diasporas suggests how we might think the unknowable, and indeed mourn, as William Faulkner writes, "a might-have-been which is more true than truth."[1] Queer diasporas thus opens upon a landscape of other histories and knowledges, preserving in the process a space for social and political reinvestment.

Monique Truong's novel, *The Book of Salt* (2003), and Wong Kar-wai's film, *Happy Together* (1997), tell such stories of lost and forgotten desires.[2] Truong and Wong focus on that stubborn remainder—a reservoir of insistent, queer desire—that individuates their protagonists through the singularity of their longings. Truong and Wong rethink the what-can-be-known by drawing insistent attention to the epistemological as well as the ontological limits of a liberal humanist tradition that affirms particular subjects while excluding others from historical consideration. They imagine those who have yet to be visualized or articulated within these restricted paradigms of knowing and being—others who constitute and haunt, but are nevertheless foreclosed, from the domain of the properly historical. Truong and Wong thus saturate the what-can-be-known with the persistent, melancholic trace of the what-might-have-been, the what-could-have-been. This chapter focuses on queer Asian migrants in the diaspora. Unlike queer liberals today, who appear before the law demanding rights and legal protection for their intimacies, these queer Asian migrants remain subjects in waiting. Waiting structures the temporal and spatial logics of the dis-appearance of their communities of intimacies in the global system. In this manner, queer diasporas functions as a critical tool that interrupts the contemporary emergence of queer liberalism.

The Book of Salt, set in early 1930's Paris, and *Happy Together*, set in late 1990's Buenos Aires, bookend the twentieth century through their sustained attention to the figure of the Asian coolie, toiling anonymously in global streams of migrant labor. Bình, the narrator of *The Book of Salt*, is a Vietnamese colonial, an exiled queer and a queer exile, who is forced to leave Vietnam after an illicit love affair with the young French chef who oversees the kitchen of the governor-general of Saigon. Eventually, after various travails at sea as a galley cook, Bình ends up employed as household chef to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas during the couple's famous residence in Paris as American expatriates and

icons of the Lost Generation. Bình is a fictionalized composite inspired by two historical figures—two Vietnamese cooks who appear briefly in the pages of the eponymous *Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* (1954). Though richly imagined, Bình is ultimately an unverifiable presence, conjured forth more by American desire, by the call for hired help that Toklas places in the local newspaper: "Two American ladies wish—"[3]

Bình's dim presence in the archive compels Truong's fictional narrative as a historical supplement. It invokes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's caveat that "the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic."[4] Yet *The Book of Salt* is less an instance of the subaltern writing back than an exploration of the limits of such writing for the politics of history. Through the course of Truong's novel, the eloquence of Bình's queer desires comes to entangle and reconfigure the domains of both history and fiction by drawing insistent attention to who and to what must be forgotten so that the high modernism exemplified by Stein and Toklas might come to be affirmed.

Set in early-twentieth century Old World Paris, *The Book of Salt* rewrites the narrative of the inscrutable Asian bachelor-laborer, insisting that we consider how the colonial subtends the emergence of the modern. Set in late-twentieth century New World Argentina, *Happy Together* follows an underclass of queer Asian migrant workers who struggle under the shadows of globalization, demanding in turn a reflection on how the postcolonial subtends the development of the global. Two lovers, Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing), depart Hong Kong a few years before the colony's 1997 retrocession from British to Chinese sovereignty. They travel halfway around the world, to Buenos Aires, in order to jump start their failing relationship—in the words of Ho, to "start over."

The affective intensity of the couple's queer diaspora—their impossible psychic attachments to one another—negates any generic story of the anonymous Chinese bachelor-laborer quietly toiling away in effeminized celibacy. Indeed, so compelling is the force of Lai's and Ho's inexorable desires that, ultimately, we come to witness a social and psychic reconfiguration: we witness the emergence of an alternative structure of family and kinship, a social organization and belonging not running under but alongside the normative mandates of the Oedipal. If historicism's charge is to legislate a privileged way of knowing and being in the world, *The Book of Salt* and *Happy Together* present, to borrow from Martin Heidegger, a "worlding" of the colonial and postcolonial subject in terms other than modernity's social contract.[5] Truong's novel and Wong's film thus represent two exceptional archives for a critical investigation of the dialectic of affirmation (of freedom) and forgetting (of race) that both constitutes and confounds the emergence of queer liberalism.

Naming

In chapter nine of *The Book of Salt*, Bình recollects a curious meeting with a fellow Vietnamese colonial he encounters one evening on a bridge over the Seine. It is 1927, over two years before Bình will find his Madame and Madame and join the Stein-Toklas household in their renowned 27 rue de Fleurus home, the illustrious literary salon of 1930s Paris. The "man on the bridge," as Bình refers to him, is an enigmatic figure. Wearing a "black suit, coarse in fabric, too large for his frame, and many years out of fashion," the stranger, whose name we never learn, tells Bình that he has also been a cook, as well as a "[k]itchen boy, sailor, dishwasher, snow shoveler, furnace stoker, gardener, pie maker, photograph retoucher, fake Chinese souvenir painter, your basic whatever-needs-to-be-done-that-day laborer, and . . . letter writer."[6]

Over the course of a shared evening and meal, Bình learns that this handsome fellow is thirty-seven years old, that he left Vietnam at age twenty-two, and that he has not been back since. Now just a visitor to *la ville lumière*, the unnamed man had once resided in Paris for almost four years. Their supper ends with a steaming plate of watercress, wilted by a flash of heat and seasoned perfectly with a generous sprinkling of *fleur de sel*, "salt flowers." Bình observes a "gradual revelation of its true self, as I was beginning to learn, is the quality that sets *fleur de sel* apart from the common sea salt that waits for me in most French kitchens. There is a development, a rise and fall, upon which its salinity becomes apparent, deepens, and then disappears. Think of it as a kiss in the mouth."[7] Thus inspired, Bình shifts his attention once again to his attractive dinner companion, wondering if this anonymous stranger might, indeed, be the long-lost scholar-prince for whom he has been tirelessly searching.

Bình's encounter and Truong's chapter concludes with a slow after-dinner stroll in the Jardin du Luxembourg, and the hint of a mutual desire fulfilled:

> A kiss in the mouth can become a kiss on the mouth. A hand on a shoulder can become a hand on the hips. A laugh on his lips can become a moan on mine. The moments in between these are often difficult to gauge, difficult to partition and subdivide. Time that refuses to be translated into a tangible thing, time without a number or an ordinal assigned to it, is often said to be "lost." In a city that always looks better in a memory, time lost can make the night seem eternal and full of stars.[8]

Bình's encounter with this stranger is "lost" to time, their desire and brief affair untranslatable "in between" moments of laughter and moaning, movements of shoulders, hips, and lips. Unmatched to any cardinal or ordinal assignment that would render it a "tangible thing"—unmatched, that is, to the abstract time of capitalism or to its calculated wages—their fleeting liaison confounds the domain of historical understanding if we come to recognize the biographical details Truong sparsely scatters across this ephemeral meeting: that the unnamed scholar-prince is one Nguyen That Thanh, also known as Nguyen Ai Quoc.[9] Readers familiar with the public life of Nguyen will know that nearly fourteen years later he will finally return to his homeland, Vietnam, and under the name Ho Chi Minh ("He Who Enlightens") will become the political leader of a successful anticolonial revolution that will humble the Western empires of France and the United States.

I begin with this episode of the man on the bridge not only to raise the specter of a scandalous, perhaps unthinkable, desire that binds Bình and Ho Chi Minh in their shared queer diasporas but also to emphasize how queer desire is not peripheral, but indeed central, to the narration of race, modernity, and the politics of history in *The Book of Salt*. More specifically, how does queer diasporas as a conceptual category—outside the boundaries of territorial sovereignty and in excess of sanctioned social arrangements—bring together dissonant desires with the political, thereby forcing in the process a crisis in historicism, in the idea of history as "the way it really was?"[10] Queer desire in Truong's novel enables a productive reading practice that, in Walter Benjamin's words, would "brush history against the grain."[11] Such action, mobilized through the politics of naming and misnaming in Truong's novel, is what I call historical catachresis.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed. 1989) defines "catachresis" as the "improper use of words; [the] application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote; [or the] abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor." In refusing to name the handsome stranger on the bridge, Truong insists on a consideration of how the politics of *naming* and *misnaming* works to stabilize—indeed, to justify—the historical order of things. Through the problematics of naming, historical catachresis works to dislodge a particular version of history as "the way it really was" by denying the possibility of a singular historical context in which the past has transpired and reemerges in the present as a reified object of investigation. Truong's refusal to name the man on the bridge presents us with a dialectic of affirmation and forgetting: How is it that Stein and Toklas can appear in history as the iconic lesbian couple of literary modernism and historical modernity while Bình can never appear and Ho Chi Minh must wait to appear? How is it that Stein and Toklas are placed in history while Bình and Ho Chi Minh are displaced from it?

In her analysis of historical catachresis in the context of modern Chinese women, the historian Tani Barlow stresses the temporality of its grammar: the future perfect tense. By focusing on what Chinese women "will have been" in the "what was" of sanctioned Chinese history, Barlow seeks to destabilize the force of historicism's documentary evidence.[12] Drawing attention to the what-will-have-been challenges the what-can-be-known by asking who must be forgotten and what must be passed over, homogenized, and discarded, in order for history to appear in the present as a stable object of contemplation. In this manner, the what-will-have-been reopens the question of the future in a settled past. It simultaneously transports that past into what Benjamin describes as a "history of the present," which is the recognition that history is always and insistently re-presented to us, mobilized for present political purposes. In the same breath, it recognizes the fact that there are, as Michel Foucault argues, "multiple time spans, and each one of these spans is the bearer of a certain type of events. The types of events must be multiplied just as the types of time span are multiplied."[13]

Reflection on historical catachresis in this scene from *The Book of Salt* highlights the imperial ambitions of modernity's deployments of empty homogeneous time and space—the endless flow of past, present, and future—in the name of historicism. Truong's refusal to attribute a proper name to the man on the bridge who will have been Nguyen That Thanh—and Ho Chi Minh only after returning to Vietnam—underscores the logic of waiting that structures European modernity in relation to its colonial

others: the what-will-have-been of the Vietnamese nationalist independence movement in relation to the what-was, and is, of European modernity, liberal progress, and capitalist development.

Even more, Truong's refusal of the moniker Ho Chi Minh declines a process of nomination, dislodging the proper name from its referent; indeed, it allows the problem of historical referentiality to interrupt and reinhabit the accumulated weight of documentary evidence accrued around this famous revolutionary name. (Significantly, we also learn that Bình is a pseudonym the narrator chooses for himself when he first ships out from Saigon; the proper name is one that no one can own.) Through the irruption—indeed, the interruption—of queer desire, Truong stages the emergence of an alternative historical time and space discontinuous with the sanctioned historical development, conventional historical narratives, and authorized historical representations of this hallowed revolutionary hero.

We might also observe that historical catachresis more broadly understood implies that every naming is also a misnaming. Truong's stranger without a name responds to the what-will-have-been of Ho Chi Minh by keeping open a permanent space of differentiation between the proper name and its intended referent. Here, the query, "Did Ho Chi Minh *really* sleep with men?" is lost; the impossibility of the question and a response opens up a tear in historical time, a space of disappearance and forgetting in which time never quite coincides with itself. Through this slippage in time, Truong not only draws attention to the limits of historicism's idealization of presence and progress, but also creates a queer time and space outside teleological histories of state and family, infused with heterogeneity and intractability and lacking proper historical destination or documentary intent. In short, Truong opens up an epistemological space for a consideration of the unknowable and unthinkable—other possibilities and other possible times and spaces—that inhabit and saturate the emergence of modernity's now.

In this regard, we might consider how Truong's crossing of fiction into history and history into fiction is the condition of possibility for the epistemological exploration of subalternity as the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic. Since the establishment of ethnic studies in the late 1960s as a political movement as well as scholarly endeavor, the ethnic literary text in the U.S. has often been said to function as a proxy for history. This has placed particular pressure and urgency on the literary to perform what is "missing" in history and to represent otherwise unrepresentable communities. Here, the burden of authenticity and the evidence of experience inveigh against the bind and sting of injurious racial stereotypes as well as the lack of minority presence and power in the academy.

With the unnamed stranger on the bridge, however, we encounter a critical project focused less on recovery of what is a lost and irrecoverable past or on the correction of historical error through the positing of unvarnished truth—history the way it really was. We encounter less the real story of Ho Chi Minh than one in which the unknowable and unthinkable mobilized under the sign of the literary, under the sign of queer diasporas, become the conditions of possibility by which the "properly" historical, the what-can-be-known, is consolidated and affirmed. In short, by refusing to name, Truong asks us to reflect on what it means to answer forgetting and disappearance with new and ever more narratives of affirmation and presence. She encourages us to reconsider the binds of authenticity central to liberalism's affirmation of identity and its politics of recognition. Through historical catachresis, she shifts our attention from the problem of the real to the politics of our lack of knowledge—to the dialectic of affirmation and forgetting through which historical knowledge and reality are constituted, named, and established.

Indeed, Truong's emphasis on a scandalous queer desire binding this stranger without a proper name to Bình, the servant-cook, shifts our temporal grammar altogether. It raises the specter of the what-could-have-been in relation to the what-was of European modernity, liberal progress, and capitalist development, as well as the subsequent Vietnamese independence movement, its revolutionary discourses of postcolonial subversion and resistance, and its gendered discourses of aggrieved masculinity.[14] The past conditional inflection of what-could-have-been indexes a space of melancholic loss and forfeiture, a privileged time of the possible, albeit unverifiable, and a privileged space of the forgotten, albeit persistent.

By enveloping the lost stranger in his desirous embrace, Bình opens up a permanent space for the ghostly in the real.[15] He preserves room for thinking the what-could-have-been in the what-can-be-known of historicism. We might say that Bình's queer desires, his melancholic attachments to this stranger without a name, highlight another realm of historical possibility altogether. Disturbing rather than stabilizing identity, Bình's queer desires stage another time and space of historical *becoming*. They supplement the dialectic of affirmation and forgetting

that subtends historicism's now, its empty homogeneous time and space. "Although we strap time to our wrists, stuff it into our pockets, hang it on our walls, a perpetually moving picture for every room of the house," Bình reminds us in the closing lines of chapter nine, "it can still run away, elude and evade, and show itself again only when there are minutes remaining, and there is nothing left to do except wait till there are none."[16] The moments in between, though desirous, are evanescent. Lost and forgotten, they saturate the what-can-be-known.

Waiting

Considering such moments in between draws attention to the temporal and spatial heterogeneity that both conditions and cuts the what-can-be-known of historicism, bringing us firmly into the folds of haunted history, one in which ghosts and spirits, as Dipesh Chakrabarty emphasizes, "are not dependent on human beliefs for their own existence."[17] Such a critical insight demands reflection on the ways in which historicism serves, to borrow from Heidegger, as a type of violent "worlding" process through which certain creatures and things are brought into the time and space of European modernity ("worlded") while others are consigned to wait, excluded and concealed ("earthed").[18]

Chakrabarty observes that historicism enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century through a particular logic of time and space, embedded in the philosophical mandates of political modernity, in everyday habits of conscious as well as unconscious thought. "Historicism," he writes, "is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This 'first in Europe, then elsewhere' structure of global historical time was historicist; different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, replacing 'Europe' by some locally constructed center. It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the 'country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.' "[19] The development of European modernity and liberal capitalism over time, as well as their globalization across space, beginning in Europe and then spreading to the New World and beyond, make the possibility of imagining alternative modernities—different knowledges, alternative political possibilities, and other social communities—exceedingly difficult. They universalize the centrality of European political, economic, and aesthetic thought in relation to its colonial others, while presuming that progress and development in the non-West must invariably take place through mimetic fidelity to European images and ideals. Rendered an obsolete remainder of a superseded past, the perpetually anachronistic non-West is forced to play catch-up with an exalted European present and presence invariably constituted as the here and now.

Chakrabarty explores how historicism employs an analytic tradition (exemplified for him by Marx) that abstracts heterogeneity and particularity by sublating them into a universalizing narrative of European historical consciousness. But he also stresses the necessity to contest and supplement the analytic tradition through consideration of a hermeneutic tradition (exemplified for him by Heidegger).[20] The hermeneutic tradition, relentlessly dominated by the inexorable temporal march of modernity and the globalization of capitalism, operates both within and beyond historicism's epistemological reach. It generates "a loving grasp of detail in search of an understanding of the diversity of human life-worlds. It produces what may be called 'affective histories' . . . [and] finds thought intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life."[21]

These structures of feeling, to return to a concept from Raymond Williams, are those emergent social forms, ephemeral and difficult to grasp or to name, that appear precisely at a moment of emergency, when dominant cultural norms go into crisis.[22] They evoke one important way by which hauntings are transmitted and received as an affective mood, communicating a sense of the ghostly as well as its political and aesthetic effects. The evolution of modernism in the interwar years might be characterized as such a moment of political and aesthetic upheaval in the face of total war. Nevertheless, it remains crucial to examine how this emergency not only signals a crisis internal to European thought and its history of consciousness but also marks the irruptions of race into a privileged narrative of European modernity and progress, the interruptions of a sublated and spectralized colonial world into the European universal. Here it is important to emphasize how race functions beyond the realm of the visible and the protocols of the empirical. Race, that is, is more than just an epiphenomenon of Euro-American capitalism's differentiation, division, and management of Asian and African bodies in New World modernity. As Vilashini Cooppan points out,

race "mirrors one logic of capital (the body as commodity) while interrupting another (the stages of capitalist development)."[23]

In *The Book of Salt*, queer diasporas emerges as a conceptual wedge in the homogenizing march of the analytic tradition, while affective history marks the ghostly and the evanescent of a spectralized in-between. Bình, whose queer desires and narrative voice illuminate an alternative human life-world, reveals the return of the subject. This position is precarious, however, and hardly inured to the annihilating intents of anachronism: its discourse of citizenship and rights, its mantra of capitalism and consumption, its protocols of "Repetition and routine. Servitude and subservience. Beck and call," in Bình's words.[24] The disciplining intent of historicism, its abstracting and atomizing of heterogeneity into empty, homogenous time and space, is revealed in a fascinating scene of travel in the middle of Truong's novel. Here, Bình tells us about Stein and Toklas's yearly sojourn in their country home in Bilignin, a trip he is enjoined to facilitate. "When summer comes to Paris," Bình relates,

> my Madame and Madame pack their clothes and their dogs into their automobile, and they drive themselves and their cargo down to the Rhône Valley to the tiny farming village of Bilignin. I am left behind to lock up the apartment and to hand the keys over to the concierge, whom I have always suspected of being overly glad to see these two American ladies go . . . With my Mesdames already on the road for over a day, I pack up whatever warm-weather garments I have that year, and I go and splurge on a hat for the hot summer sun. If I find a bargain, then I also treat myself to lunch at an establishment with cloth on the table and an attentive waiter who is obliged to call me "Monsieur." I then take what is left of the money that my Mesdames gave me for a second-class train ticket, and I buy a third-class one instead. I sleep all the way down to Bilignin, where I open the house and *wait* several more days—as my Mesdames drive at a speed that varies somewhere between leisurely and meandering—before I hear the honking of their automobile and the barking of the two weary dogs. I *wait* for them on the terrace.[25]

Bình packs away whatever warm-weather garments he has for that year, locks up the Stein-Toklas residence, and hands the keys over to the custodianship of the French concierge. Bình's human life-world outside the beck and call of domestic servitude—his new hat, his lunch at an upscale bistro where the waiter is obliged to call him "Monsieur"—emerges only in between the time of his Mesdames' departure and arrival, their disappearance and re-appearance. Here the in-between is configured as a privileged and paradoxical key to a hermeneutic tradition, a structure of feeling that defies the temporal and spatial logic of modernity's ceaseless progress, its homogenous march from before to after. Affective history—a structure of feeling—appears both before *and* after: in between the time before Stein and Toklas's arrival in the rural French countryside and after their departure from the city, in between the space before Bilignin and after Paris. In the process, an alternative human life-world is given shape and form, a worlding of the colonial subaltern that Johannes Fabian might describe as the emergence of "coevalness."[26]

Focusing on modernity's persistent denial of such coevalness, its disciplining of time and space into the political logic of liberal humanism and the economic logic of liberal capitalism, Chakrabarty observes that John Stuart Mill's historicist arguments "consigned Indians, Africans, and other 'rude' nations to an imaginary waiting room of history. In doing so, it converted history itself into a version of this waiting room. We were all headed for the same destination, Mill averred, but some people were to arrive earlier than others. That was what historicist consciousness was: a recommendation to the colonized to wait. Acquiring historical consciousness, acquiring the public spirit that Mill thought absolutely necessary for the art of self-government, was also to learn this art of waiting. This waiting was the realization of the 'not yet' of historicism."[27] The "not yet" of European historicism governs Bình's narrative of simultaneous migration, a process in which the servant-cook is relegated to the imaginary waiting room of history. Through the disappearance of other possible pasts as well as the forgetting of other possible futures, the colonized can only await the colonizer. Bình must learn this art of waiting. And while both must necessarily be "headed for the same destination," Chakrabarty emphasizes, it is the colonizer who must invariably arrive first, the colonized trailing behind, an anachronistic relic of the not yet of modernity's now.

In this passage from *The Book of Salt*, however, we are presented with a further twist of colonial logic: even when the colonized arrives early, he *still* must wait. That is, even though Bình is ahead of his Mesdames,

he still must work and he still must wait. The first to reach Bilignin, the servant-cook is compelled to resume his domestic duties of beck and call. He opens up and prepares the house for the arrival of Stein and Toklas, waiting "several more days" for his Mesdames to arrive at their appointed (historical and aesthetic) destination. The couple, he tells us, are motoring "somewhere between leisurely and meandering," making their way through the French countryside, on their own schedule, according to their own sanctioned time. In between these moments and movements, the details of Bình's life appear only to disappear.

The logic of the ghost characterizing Derrida's analysis of capital applies equally to the racialized dialectic of affirmation and forgetting that structures Bình's appearance and disappearance within the Euro-American modernity of Stein and Toklas. Like capital, race ultimately *exceeds* the logic of presence and absence, while evading the sequencing of before to after.[28] I would like to describe the paradoxical effacement of Bình's human life-world in between the visible and the invisible as a type of *queer* worlding. As cook and caretaker in the couple's residence and inner sanctum, Bình exemplifies the world division of labor that both institutes and queers the very distinctions separating public and private, as well as the spheres of work and home, labor and affect, productive and reproductive labor. These are the fundamental oppositions upon which the dialectic of European modernity is constructed, but it is only *in between* the time and space of these oppositional terms that we also come to apprehend the contours of Bình's other life-world, a site of affective density where history and subjectivity are remade as a ghostly structure of feeling. Here we come to recognize the in-between as distinct and separate from, indeed beyond but nevertheless within, modernity's dictates of time and space.

"What would it mean," asks Brian Massumi, "to give a logical consistency to the in-between? It would mean realigning with a logic of relation," indeed endowing the in-between with "an ontological status separate from the terms of relation."[29] Paying greater heed to the logic of the in-between in *The Book of Salt* facilitates an understanding of how it comes to accrue its own ontological status, its own ontological consistency, separate from the liberal humanist terms of relation that frame but cannot fully determine it. Brought together with the epistemological effects of historical catachresis, the in-between gives way not only to alternate ways of *knowing* but also, and equally important, to alternative ways of *being*, indeed of *becoming*, in the world. Through this simultaneous realignment of epistemology and ontology, a queer "worlding" of lost and forgotten desires comes to exceed the dialectic of enlightenment, the dialectic of affirmation and forgetting in *The Book of Salt*.

Mirroring

Bình eventually takes up with one of Stein's winsome acolytes, Marcus Lattimore, a gentleman from the American south but not, as Lattimore avers, a "southern gentleman."[30] In the course of the novel, we learn that Lattimore is a man of dubious racial origins. Passing through 27 rue de Fleurus, he also passes for white, his black mother having sold away his birthname; he gains financial security for her silence.[31] Likewise, his on-again-off-again relationship with Bình slips in between the cracks of an Enlightenment compulsion to evaluate and interrogate, to organize and know. Hired by Lattimore to be his Sunday cook, Bình is outsourced as a borrowed servant by Stein and Toklas for only one instrumental purpose: their desire to identify, to taxonomize, and to name—that is, to turn sameness into a manageable difference, and to turn difference into a manageable sameness. "Is Lattimore a Negro?" Stein asks Bình. This, Bình tell us, "is what they [Stein and Toklas], in the end, want to know."[32] And here the question of liberal humanism's racialized past in the colonial slave societies of the New World, and its ghostly return in the present of 1930s Old World Paris, appears as an open secret, an institutionalized regime of passing and privilege, produced but passed over by historicist disciplining.

Let me turn to one last scene from *The Book of Salt*—Bình's initial encounter with Lattimore in the famous Stein Salon. Of Lattimore, Bình recalls:

> I will forget that you entered 27 rue de Fleurus as a "writer" among a sea of others who opened the studio door with a letter of introduction and a face handsome with talent and promise. You stood at the front of the studio listening to a man who had his back to me. I entered the room with a tray of sugar-dusted cakes for all the young men who sit and stand, a hungry circle radiating around GertrudeStein. After years of the imposed invisibility of servitude, I am acutely aware when I am being watched, a sensitivity born from absence, a grain of salt on the tongue of a man who has tasted only bitter. As I checked the teapots to see whether they needed to be replenished, I felt a slight pressure. It

was the weight of your eyes resting on my lips. I looked up, and I saw you standing next to a mirror reflecting the image of wiry young man with deeply set, startled eyes. I looked up, and I was seeing myself beside you. I am at sea again, I thought. Waves are coursing through my veins. I am at sea again.[33]

For Bình, this mirror image does not produce a reflection of the self-same. Moreover, it does not present what, after Jacques Lacan, we are accustomed to describing as the poststructuralist advent of the "I is an other," one mocking and coherent, trapped on the other side of the looking glass.[34] This disjunctive mirror image is not simply about the ways in which individuated, egoic subjectivity is given over to *méconnaissance*, a temporal mode of anticipation that Jane Gallop observes is oriented toward the future perfect tense, the what-will-have-been of the mirror stage, or as Lacan puts it, the "what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming."[35]

Instead, Bình's reflection brings together two disparate spaces in the salon, as well as the two disconnected lovers occupying them, aligning Bình and Lattimore beside each other in the mirror image. By displaying a curious and handsome Lattimore reflecting an astonished Bình (a "wiry young man with deeply set, startled eyes"), Truong indexes through this mirror image an alternative space and time, another human life-world within the hallowed space of the Stein salon. In Truong's reconfigured mirror stage, the temple of high modernism does not reflect on itself. Difference does not return as sameness. Historical understanding is thus transformed into a process of what Ranajit Guha describes as capturing "an image caught in a distorting mirror."[36] In Bình's distorted mirror stage racial difference endures as that which remains irreducible to the dialectic of enlightenment, a human life-world other to the space and time of "the young men who sit and stand, a hungry circle radiating around GertrudeStein."

As Bình slips from the simple past to the past progressive and finally into the present—"I *looked* up . . . I *was seeing* myself beside you . . . I *am* at sea again"—he carves out through these grammatical shifts a *racialized* space and time that he and Lattimore share. This alternative modernity summons the epistemology of the oceanic, shifting our attention to the sea as history, from "roots" to "routes," in Paul Gilroy's famous reading of the black Atlantic—indeed, working to queer the black Atlantic.[37] This is a queer diaspora in which the gentleman from the American South and the Vietnamese servant-cook can both appear, despite their very disparate class positions; it is a racialized space and time they can collectively inhabit and share within and beyond the sanctioned time and space of Bình's Mesdames. For, as Bình reminds us, the weight of Lattimore's eyes on his lips transports him to the sea, which as he later tells us, becomes the alternative space and time of belonging itself: "[At] sea, I learn that time can also be measured in terms of water, in terms of distance traveled while drifting on it. When measured in that way, nearer and farther are the path of time's movement, not continuously forward along a fast straight line. When measured this way, time loops and curlicues, and at any given moment it can spiral me away and then bring me rushing home again."[38]

This space and time of non-mimetic racial identity is radically other to standard poststructuralist understandings of the mirror stage as a narcissistic self-other dialectic, which underpins the fracturing of Western subjectivity and consciousness. From a slightly different perspective, we might say that calibrated against Lacan's future perfect, the what-will-have-been of Bình's mirror stage in the what-was of Stein's modernity questions how race is managed and effaced not just in the development of Enlightenment liberal humanism, but specifically through modernism's vanguard and oppositional stance to this very tradition, one dependent on and developed during the height of European colonialism. We might say that what Truong presents us with here is a reconfigured mirror stage in which the spectrality of race emerges as the repressed image of liberal humanism itself.

From a different angle, we might ask how the fracturing of Western subjectivity and consciousness, of which Stein's high modernism is a paradigmatic example, is made possible precisely through this colonial detour, through the forgetting of both Asia and Africa. As an Asian American, postcolonial, and queer text, *The Book of Salt* insists on a contemporary investigation of race as a comparative project across what Fernand Braudel calls the *longue durée*.[39] In such an investigation, the U.S. is not configured as a point of arrival in a teleology about immigrant assimilation and settlement. Neither is it valorized as a melting pot or a rainbow coalition undisturbed by cleavings of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Truong does not romanticize the shared or imagined intimacies among Bình, Lattimore, Stein, and Toklas. (Indeed, Lattimore later abandons his young lover after convincing Bình to steal for him one of Stein's unpublished manuscripts, the ironically titled "The Book

of Salt.") Instead, Truong highlights their contingent and ever-shifting intersections, facilitating in the process a more sustained consideration of the histories of exploitation and domination that unevenly bind Asian indentureship and African slavery to Euro-American modernity.

The Book of Salt thus demands a critical conversation among ethnic, postcolonial, diasporic, area, and queer studies, one bringing together the intimacies of four continents through scrupulous attention to questions of sex and sexuality. Exerting particular pressure on the processes of historicism, the problematics of queer diasporas in Truong's novel illustrates what Carla Freccero describes as "the affective force of the past in the present, of a desire issuing from another time and placing a demand on the present in the form of an ethical imperative."[40] In this manner, Truong's novel resists any simple slide—any development "continuously forward along a fast straight line"—from modernism to postmodernism as either a political or an aesthetic movement. Instead, it insists on not just a material and psychic but also a formalist investigation of the ways in which the shift from modernism to postmodernism is constituted through disavowed and sublated colonial histories of race. In short, Truong's ghostly matters rearrange conventional understandings about the dialectic pairing of the modern and postmodern, as well as its constitutive dissociation from the colonial and postcolonial. This disappearance and forgetting is the historical foundation of our colorblind age and its racialization of intimacy.

What, we might further consider, is the relationship between the *aesthetic* inscription of Stein as the doyenne of literary modernism in her time and the current *political* inscription of Stein and Toklas as the iconic lesbian couple of historical modernism in our time? Given the temporal lag between these two historical inscriptions, how is it that the once debased status of Stein and Toklas as Jewish lesbians in early twentieth century Paris can now serve to underwrite the current folding in of normative gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects into the authorized time and space of the nation-state? In other words, without discounting the radicality of Stein and Toklas in their time, we still need to ask how they are conscripted today as the poster children for queer liberalism. What possible pasts and what possible futures must be denied in order for this particular narrative of queer freedom and progress to take hold? Indeed, how does queer liberalism not only depend on but also demand the completion of the racial project, the triumph of a colorblind U.S. society as an achieved and settled past? At a moment when discourses of colorblindness evacuate all racial content in favor of a re-ascendant form of the abstract individual—the liberal human—*The Book of Salt* insists on a consideration of what remains unassimilable, unrecognizable, and untold in the making of the political and aesthetic realm of Euro-American modernity.

At the same time, *The Book of Salt* resists any simple affirmation of racial identity or any easy positivist recovery of a lost and effaced racial past. It asks how we might move beyond the dominance of the visual register itself, one overdetermining so many of our contemporary debates on race and the politics of recognition. By creating a mirror image of non-mimetic racial identity—Bình and Lattimore's asymmetrical reflection in the mirror stage of Stein's modernity—Truong opens up a queer terrain of racial belonging outside the authorized terms of dominant representation. She unfolds, that is, a viewing practice that obviates the unremitting demand for mimetic fidelity to universal Euro-American aesthetic and political ideals. At the same time, she refuses to substitute such demands with authenticity, with the visibility of race and racial difference. Instead, Truong conceptualizes an alternative time and space—other forms of racial knowing and being—that are more than just a negation or reversal of the dominant terms of relation. She focuses on the politics of our lack of knowledge, the more extensive forms of disappearance and forgetting that configure the aesthetic and political story of modernism in Stein's time and colorblindness in ours.

Bình and Lattimore's relationship—their history—is of another time and space. It is a history not of affirmation but a history of disappearance, a history of ghosts. The cook's Mesdames come to represent the iconic modern lesbian couple of the early twentieth century, paving the way for queer liberalism today as the latest incarnation of "the rights of man." Bình and Lattimore's relationship cannot assume the lineaments of modern subjectivity or identity. Theirs is a private without a public; through a similar logic, the history of Ho Chi Minh will come to be a public without a private. (As one of the dominant historicist narratives available to decolonization, Marxist revolutionary discourse comes to repress queerness, much as queer liberalism comes to repress race.) While Bình's Sunday pleasures with Lattimore mark a sphere of intense intimacy rivaling that of his bourgeois Mesdames, it is consigned to Benjamin's dustbin of history, stretching back to coerced colonial migrations of black slaves and Asian coolies, and reaching forward into the ubiquitous circulations of migrant labor under the con-

temporary shadows of global capitalism. Bình and Lattimore index the intimacies of four continents, but their ghostly presence also signals the incompleteness of their temporal and spatial transformation under historicist disciplining of time and space.

And so they must wait.

Closet as Waiting Room

The Book of Salt proffers a critique of historicism by exploring the time and place of the colonial in the modern. *Happy Together*, in turn, extends this line of analysis by focusing our attention on the time and place of the postcolonial in the global.

Happy Together, Wong Kar-wai's sixth feature film and the only one of his productions to be shot outside of Asia, is an eloquent disquisition on the contemporary conditions of an underclass of queer Asian migrant laborers hustling in the global system. Wong's film is a compelling investigation of the material as well as the psychic conditions that make queer diasporas inhabitable or—perhaps more accurately in the case of Lai and Ho—uninhabitable. *Happy Together*, which earned Wong the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival, has garnered well-deserved critical acclaim, yet few reviewers or scholarly critics have focused on the sexual politics of its queer diaspora.

Indeed, many commentators eschew issues of sexuality altogether, describing Wong's portrayal of homosexuality as incidental to the film's central emphasis on emotional deadlock. They note that Wong Kar-wai avoids "cultish gay stereotyping"; that Ho and Lai are "lovers who happen to be homosexual"; that "what was widely pre-billed as a gay-themed movie is only peripherally concerned with such matters."[41] *Boston Globe* critic Jay Carr observes that the film is not "concerned so much with sexual politics as with the existential tedium attached to love's movements from embers to ashes."[42] And writing for *Daily Variety*, Derek Elley aptly summarizes this pattern, contending that although "the universe in which the main characters move is exclusively male, the abstract feelings the movie evokes . . . are transfigured to a universal, sexually neutral level."[43] I would like to suspend for a moment these summary pronouncements on the "existential" or "universal, sexually neutral" nature of Lai and Ho's impossible relationship. Such judgments abstract homosexual particularity in the name of universal (heteronormative) love and disconnection, as well as beg the politics of sexuality and culture

as they travel across different global spaces. Furthermore, they level disparities of race and coloniality that underwrite the project of liberal humanism and the contemporary emergence of queer liberalism—its racialization of intimacy and its domesticating of same-sex relations.

What might be at stake were we to think about homosexuality not as peripheral, but as central, to Wong's film and to disparities of race and (post)coloniality that mark neoliberal governmentality in our current moment? Like Bình in *The Book of Salt*, Lai and Ho do not—indeed, cannot—appear within dominant modes of knowing or being that frame the modern (gay) subject and its history of consciousness. Under this threat of racial disappearance, *Happy Together* illuminates other epistemic and ontological coordinates. Through its queer diaspora, Wong's film scrambles our normative cultural and narratological expectations. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, for instance, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the closet as "the defining structure for gay oppression in [the twentieth] century."[44] In *Happy Together*, however, there is no closet from which to emerge. There is no familiar scene of "coming out," no unveiling or shedding of a past lie in order to embrace the truth of (homo)sexual identity and belonging. Stranded in Argentina, there is no familial or social structure into which the indigent Lai and Ho can come out.

In this regard, it is useful to contrast *Happy Together* with Ang Lee's 1993 film *The Wedding Banquet*.[45] A more recognizably gay film, *The Wedding Banquet's* entire narrative drive, conflict, and resolution is organized around Wai-tung's (Winston Chao) coming out to his family and the reconciliation of his "modern" Western homosexual lifestyle in New York with his lover Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) to the "backward" traditional culture of his Chinese parents. Unlike *Happy Together*, Lee's film configures the closet as the defining structure for gay oppression across the globe, while simultaneously revealing it to be a site for the emergence and development of minority subjectivity and racial identity—as the waiting room of history from which the gay Asian subject must struggle to emerge. In Lee's film, the question of queer family and kinship becomes a racial metric for the not-yet of modernity's now. In other words, Wai-tung's sexual development, his cultivation and claiming of a homosexual identity and agency, becomes a barometer for Chinese modernity and progress itself—that is, the what-will-have-been of Wai-tung's coming out to the what-was of gay and lesbian liberation in the West.

Mark Chiang describes *The Wedding Banquet's* underlying parable as

one that realigns national (Chinese) patriarchy with transnational (postmodern) patriarchy through the flexibility of global capital.[46] The narrative resolution of Lee's film hinges on the ability of the wealthy Taiwanese Wai-tung to produce a male heir, a task accomplished precisely by the exploitation of the undocumented mainlander Wei-wei's (May Chin) reproductive labor.[47] (It would not be a stretch to describe *The Wedding Banquet* as an uncanny exemplar for the politics of transnational adoption and the exploitation of reproductive labor I explore in my next chapter.) With the birth of his son, Wai-tung is able to reconcile the paternal (Chinese) mandate with the liberal rhetoric of cosmopolitan queer family and kinship in a multicultural age.

The Wedding Banquet thus functions as a prescient harbinger for the evolution of queer liberalism in our global moment, one in which a queer planet would be "worlded" by the epistemology of the closet. In Wai-tung's narrative of (homo)sexual liberation as racial progress, the gay Asian entrepreneur can be thus posited as queer liberalism's model minority. Given such conditions, it is little surprise that Wai-tung must be legally enfranchised as a (nominal) U.S. citizen-subject: "My truth is that I am a gay American." His legal status, in fact, compels the plot of the film: in exchange for the promise of marriage and legal recognition, Wei-Wei submits to her continued subordination under an increasing international gendered division of (reproductive) labor.

In contrast to *The Wedding Banquet*, *Happy Together* does not engage in this type of narratological development. In Wong's film, the epistemology of the closet as the imaginary waiting room of history is fundamentally scrambled: there is no positing of gay identity; there is no claiming of legal rights and recognition through liberal political enfranchisement; there is no assertion of social belonging through queer family and kinship; there is no participation in the free market—indeed, there is no shopping at all. In the opening shots of *Happy Together*, we are thrown directly into the film, confronted by Lai and Ho's naked and entangled bodies in a moment of heated sexual exchange. This extra-diegetic moment, outside the time and space of the film's main plot, eschews conventional narratological development of anguished (homo)sexuality. Moreover, it is not a pastoral scene of budding romantic love but an erotically charged scene of graphic anal intercourse, the most explicit sexual encounter between Lai and Ho in the entire film.

Consummated within two and a half minutes of the opening credits of *Happy Together*, the scene is filmed in a grainy black and white. The

Graphic Intercourse: Lai and Ho in a moment of sexual bliss. From *Happy Together*, directed by Wong Kar-wai.

camera frame sways from side-to-side, like a rectangular porthole of a rocking ship. The affective intensity of this sodomitical encounter serves to mark an Edenic moment of sexual union from which its protagonists fall and are ejected into the main plot of *Happy Together*: an interminable cycle of abandonment, breaking up, and "starting over."[48] Unlike *The Wedding Banquet*, there is no recognizable scene of coming out in Wong's film, though in the face of this delirious and graphic opening sequence, we might say that the film itself "comes out" to the audience itself as anything but sexually neutral. In contrast to *The Wedding Banquet* and *Lawrence v. Texas*, *Happy Together* is less concerned with same-sex intimacy and domesticity than with same-sex *sodomy* and the *impossibility* of domesticity.

The inability of critics, I suggest, to detect any significance in the queer diaspora of *Happy Together* stems from the film's persistent eschewal of the dominant aesthetics and politics of queer liberalism. From the very opening moments of *Happy Together*, Wong throws us into an alternative life-world, placing us aesthetically at odds with conventional cinematic expectations of time and space and politically at odds with dominant modes of knowing and being. To the extent that globalization has produced a recognizable gay identity on the world stage, it has organized this liberal consciousness as a supplement to late capitalism and in accordance with strict divisions between capital and labor, underwriting conjugal domesticity, privacy, and intimacy. What makes the queer diaspora in *Happy Together* exceptional and, in this sense, unrecognizable, is that Lai and Ho are aligned not on the side of queer liberalism, i.e. on the side of global capital and citizenship. They do not participate in the commercial scene of global gay life as self-possessed modern liberal subjects of rights and representation. Rather, like Wei-Wei, they are aligned on the side of undocumented gendered migrant labor.

Lai and Ho represent a diasporic underclass of service providers, "servants of globalization," who track flows of global capital through low-wage and unskilled work.[49] As such, they demand a rethinking of queer studies in a more global frame, as well as a more sustained analysis of the connections between the politics of transnational feminism and the emerging field of transnational sexuality. In its attention to the problems of transnational (homo)sexuality, *Happy Together* marks the ways in which the financialization of the globe under neoliberal mandates unfolds a new (post)colonial order in the wake of decolonization, a gendering between the global South and the global North that cripples the possibility of an operative civil society in the former, while shifting priorities in the latter "from service to the citizen to capital maximization." In Spivak's estimation, it "then becomes increasingly correct to say that the only source of male dignity is employment, just as the only source of genuine female dignity is unpaid domestic labor."[50]

Lai and Ho represent a migrant proletariat class in the periphery who code as "unpaid domestic labor," a population whose movements in the global system do not trace an East-West or a South-North pathway; this is a priviledged route of global elites from the Third World to the First World, the traffic from a developing to a (post)industrialized nation-state. In the case of *The Wedding Banquet*'s Wai-tung, economic privilege comes together with sexual self-determination to shape a narrative of (neo)liberal subjectivity and agency, a teleological development from a repressed sexual past to a future of queer freedom and progress. In *Happy Together*, Lai and Ho's movement in the global system cannot be characterized through such a discourse of development. Indeed, their travel from Hong Kong to Buenos Aires traces an alternative South-South movement, a migration from one developing region to another, and a passage from one postcolonial or, better yet, one decolonizing space to another.

Lai and Ho depart for Argentina not just as an attempt to "start over" their flagging relationship. They also leave Hong Kong because Lai has stolen money from his father's business associate. This sum of capital cannot be repaid, rendering absurd numerous critics' descriptions of the couple's journey as "expatriates," "vacationers," or "tourists."[51] As undocumented migrant labor in Argentina, a country that has undergone tremendous turmoil under neoliberal structural adjustment programs, Lai's series of menial jobs—as a doorman at Tango Bar Sur, as a dishwasher and a cook in a Chinese restaurant, as a butcher in a local abattoir—is a succession of declining returns. In turn, Ho's on-again-off-again employment as an exotic hustler, selling himself to First-World tourists, might be described as the other side of the same economic coin. Lai and Ho cannot appear—cannot be visible agents—in these circuits of global capitalism, gay or otherwise. Their presence draws insistent attention to the ways by which contemporary practices of racial exploitation and (post)coloniality continue to suffuse late capitalist social relations under the shadows of neoliberal governmentality and globalization.

The universalizing of homosexuality in *Happy Together* as "sexually neutral" and as "existential tedium" by various reviewers might be characterized as the historicism of our global age. These judgments not only belie a story of development as (sexual) freedom but also situate the epistemology of the closet as the imaginary waiting room of history, marking the ways in which (homo)sexuality continues to serve as a metric of civilization and racial developmentalism. This is a logic that Lai and Ho interrupt. Like Bình, they two are rendered ghostly through this process, demanding in turn their own epistemological and ontological coordinates. From this perspective, the problem of queer diasporas and sexuality in *Happy Together* is not peripheral, but indeed central, to the question of (neo)liberalism and (homo)sexual development in Wong's film.

Tango and the Autonomy of Affect

I have discussed some of the material circumstances of the movements of Lai and Ho in the global system. What is the psychic scaffolding of—the psychic structure of family and kinship underpinning—their impossible relationship? How does Wong encourage us to rethink psychoanalysis and the Oedipal outside the mandates of queer liberalism, outside the dialectic of tradition and modernity, and outside the closet as imaginary waiting room of history?

The impossibility of their beleaguered relationship finds its internalized form in the couple's exquisite psychic deadlock. Stranded in Argentina, Lai and Ho come to embody the most severe example of the Wongian principle that physical movement and psychic movement are antipathetic.[52] The two cannot be happy together, and they cannot be happy apart. Separating shortly after their aborted journey to Iguazu Falls, Ho is beaten by a disgruntled trick, his hands broken and his face battered and bruised. Once again, he returns to Lai, who installs him into his dingy La Boca apartment in order to tend to his wounds. Care, however, in this instance means psychic stasis and the closing down of

Kitchen Tango.
From *Happy Together*.

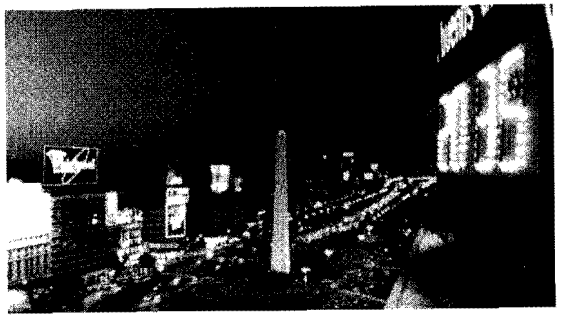
the world. "Something I never told Ho Po-wing," Lai admits to us in a later flashback and voiceover, "is that I didn't want him to recover too fast. Those days he was sick were our happiest together." Such is the psychic deadlock underwriting their world of smoldering cigarettes and hidden passports: One is happy only when the other is sick; as one gets better the other must fall ill. Although these scenes are filmed from every conceivable angle, the dreary apartment remains cramped and unchanged from beginning to end.

This problem of psychic immobility is nowhere more evident than in the couple's aborted tango. About a third of the way through *Happy Together*, as Ho slowly recovers from his injuries, he attempts to teach Lai to tango, a series of frustrating lessons and steps beginning one day in the cramped space of their studio apartment and ending one evening in the communal kitchen outside their stairwell. Here, like the opening scene of *Happy Together*, tango marks the indeterminate passing of time and space in between capitalist systematization of labor and wages. Bathed in the excessive glow of the fluorescent kitchen lights and accompanied by the haunting music of Astor Piazzola, the couple steps forward and then back, back and then forward. In the end, Lai and Ho move nowhere and, at their most physically intimate, Chris Doyle's elegant camerawork slows their saturated image to a virtual standstill. Locked in an eternal embrace, their time in the space of the communal kitchen grinds to a halt.

This tango sequence reprises a series of formal, avant-garde aesthetic devices that mark what I would like to describe as the *psychic* time and space of the in-between in *Happy Together*. In a series of time-elapsed shots, Lai and Ho are visually frozen, juxtaposed against the rapidly shifting time and space of a Buenos Aires landscape, thumping to its own tempo and beat. In each of these sequences, two different struc-

Cigarette Break.
From *Happy Together*.

Taxi Reunion.
From *Happy Together*.



The Beat and Grind of Buenos Aires. From *Happy Together*.

tures of time and space emerge simultaneously, with Lai and Ho coming to occupy their own alternative human life-world "in between."

As a dance form, tango is given over to this system of doubling, as well. On one hand, the highly structured nature of tango, defying Lai's cognitive capacities to master it, reflects the couple's incompatibility. On the other hand, the excessive affect produced by Lai's and Ho's dance of desire continually exceeds the structural and conceptual limits of tango's protocols. Marking its own history and structure of feeling, it demands, in Elizabeth Freeman's words, "a historiographic method that would admit the flesh, that would avow that history is written on and felt with the body, and that would let eroticism into the notion of historical thought itself."[53] The persistence of the couple's queer desire not only produces tantalizing scenes of sexual longing but also simultaneously indexes, I would suggest, the extra-diegetic moment of sexual frisson that opens Wong's film. Although their tango insistently points to this impossible return—a yearning to recapture that ineffable moment before the couple's tragic fall into life as well as the main narrative of the film—affect might nevertheless be described here as a kind of poststructuralist supplement to the structure of the dance.

A relation of motion and stasis, the affective intensity of their tango marks an alternate human life-world for Lai and Ho, a what-could-have-been, struggling for material expression and psychic form.[54] Unlike emotion, Massumi observes, which is "qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions . . . [an] intensity owned and recognized," affect is ultimately "unqualified."[55] Its excessive logics defy emotion's terms of symbolic inscription. Hence, the "autonomy of affect" comes to serve in *Happy Together* as a ghostly marker of the in-between, highlighting an alternative epistemological and ontological framing of Lai's and Ho's now. Indeed, I would suggest that the (post)structure of queer feeling marking the couple's tango opens upon another terrain of social and psychic relations altogether. Ultimately, it points to other ways of thinking about the incest taboo and its structures of displacement. It helps us to think alternative conceptions of family and kinship not just within but beyond the structures of the Oedipal—a poststructuralist account of family and kinship.

Starting Over

How might we imagine a post-Oedipal structure that would make the psychic lives of Lai and Ho possible and livable, a habitable psychic terrain on which their social relations could survive? How might "Anti-Oedipus" function as a kind of ethics?

These questions return us to the issue of "starting over," which dominates the couple's relationship from the beginning to the end of Wong's film. Moments after the opening sequence of the film, we follow Lai and Ho on an aborted trip to Iguazu Falls, a return to origins that remains predictably unfulfilled. Lost and stranded on the dusty roads of Argentina, Lai and Ho quarrel, and then quarrel again. The scene ends with Lai's voiceover about the couple's failed journey and separation: "I never did find out where we were that day. I do remember that he said that days with me were boring, that we should end it. If we were we to meet again one day, we might start over. Actually, for him, starting over has two different meanings."

To "start over"—"由頭來過"—is a Cantonese colloquialism that translates literally as "from the head over again." This corporeal metaphor, absent in the English translation "starting over," suggests an image at once physical as well as psychic. Physically, to start over signifies a literal return, a going back to the beginning, a return to the starting line. But it also simultaneously marks an ostensible departure, a willful attempt to move forward in a new manner that would bring one to another place or effect a different outcome or relation. The physical indeterminacy of the phrase also characterizes the psychic ambivalence of starting over. For Lai and Ho, starting over necessarily signifies both the beginning and, therefore, the end of a relationship. For the two lovers, does starting over mean going back to the beginning, going back to the starting line, or returning to a point of origin? Or does starting over mean an attempt to move forward from their place of fixity, to create new pathways and displacements that would open up breathing room for alternative possibilities in their psychic and social lives?

I would like to explore this issue of starting over in relation to the incest taboo—to its structures of kinship and to its principles of displacement. According to structuralist anthropologists, the incest taboo initiates a series of crucial displacements that organize family and social life. Claude Lévi-Strauss observes that, in its most elemental form, a kinship structure is synonymous with a particular incest taboo (or set of taboos).

The incest taboo is not a biological imperative but a cultural interdiction forcing one to displace away from a forbidden object of desire and into a social network of reciprocity and exchange. Marking the transition from "nature" to "culture," the incest taboo functions as a social law, creating and regulating family and kinship relations through specific sexual prohibitions. By outlawing particular sexual relations between members of kinship groups, the incest taboo is meant to ensure the stable reproduction of culture across generations. In short, it "worlds" the subject by forcing him or her to inhabit a particular position within a familial and kinship structure, one guaranteeing social recognition, economic coherence, and political legibility. For Levi-Strauss, marriage is the most basic form of exchange in the elementary structures of kinship and, in this system, women are considered the most precious of "gifts," bartered and exchanged between a network of fathers and brothers.[56]

The regulation of kinship in this manner continues to enable the political organization and domination of public and private life, stigmatizing "illegitimate" forms of family from "legitimate" and state-sanctioned social norms and ideals. While the incest taboo initiates an exogamic mandate for reciprocity and exchange, it is important to emphasize that displacement can assume historically contingent and variable forms. In other words, while the incest taboo might describe a universal phenomenon of social exchange, the nature of its prohibitions and the pathways of its social displacements can vary, and have certainly varied across historical periods. As Gayle Rubin observes, the incest taboo cannot be explained away as a biological imperative preventing genetically close mating. Rather it must be seen as imposing the social imperative of exogamy and displacement "upon the biological events of sex and procreation," as being motivated by the demand for peaceful coexistence with and among one's potential neighbors and enemies through scripted rituals of displacement and exchange.[57]

Running alongside this anthropological account of displacement and exchange is the psychoanalytic story of how each human being is psychically thrown into a particular structure of kinship, a psychic structure overdetermined by the laws of Oedipalization. In this account, the incest taboo demands a primary displacement from the mother, a displacement that opens up room in our psyches for new objects of desire, for other creatures and things. A traditional Freudian account of Oedipal displacement comes in the form of the little boy's loss of his mother as a prohibited object of desire. The little boy's displacement from his maternal origin is legislated by the Oedipus complex and its particular incest taboo, constituted not only through the father's interdiction of the son's desire for the mother as sexual object, but also by the heterosexual orientation of the little boy's identifications and desires as he searches for her suitable replacement.

Stitching together Oedipal and anthropological accounts of kinship, Rubin observes in her groundbreaking article, "The Traffic in Women," that the "precision of the fit between Freud and Lévi-Strauss is striking. Kinship systems require a division of the sexes. The Oedipal phase divides the sexes. Kinship systems include sets of rules governing sexuality. The Oedipal crisis is the assimilation of these rules and taboos. Compulsory heterosexuality is the product of kinship. The Oedipal phase constitutes heterosexual desire. Kinship rests on a radical difference between the rights of men and women. The Oedipal complex confers male rights upon the boy, and forces the girl to accommodate herself to her lesser rights."[58]

According to Rubin, the Oedipus complex appears to be a psychoanalytic mirror to traditional accounts of kinship in structural anthropology. The Oedipus complex is meant to organize social relations of kinship through its psychic division of the sexes, its heterosexual imperative, and its privileging of the little boy's needs and prerogatives over those of the little girl. While the elementary structures of kinship seem to be neatly reflected in the psychic image of Oedipus, there is nothing inevitable or absolute about this pairing. How might we rethink this privileged connection in a supplemental rather than analogical framing, so as to imagine how we might come to inhabit the world differently, through other forms of psychic displacement and affiliation?

Jacques Lacan's poststructuralist re-reading of Freudian psychoanalysis directs our attention to the ways in which the little boy's displacement away from his mother in the Oedipal scene is, in fact, a secondary rather than primary displacement. For Lacan, the subject's primary displacement comes not through the loss of the mother but through the fall into language. When we enter language, we lose the fullness of our being. Language alienates us from our plenitude. The displacement of the subject into language, into the symbolic world of meaning, demands the sacrifice of being, the forfeiture of presence, the loss of the "here-and-now." Forever idealized and sought after, the here-and-now is retroactively erected as the origin of our desires, the impossible what-has-been that we can never recapture or recuperate.

Importantly, Lacan's poststructuralist re-reading of Freud configures maternal forfeiture as a secondary loss retroactively projected onto this primary loss, our fall and displacement into language. When this secondary, nameable loss—the loss of the Oedipal mother for Freud's little boy—is coupled with this primary, ineffable loss—the sacrifice of being through alienation in language—desire is set into motion. We become aware of the world through the language of desire and through our drive to recapture this lost object of desire in the guise of other creatures and things. Here, Oedipus and its structures of family and kinship provide the code through which subjects interpret their sense of loss, orienting their desires and identifications accordingly. Family and kinship structures function, in other words, as a kind of social language by which we experience, express, and frame loss in terms of both sanctioned and prohibited social formations. As many feminist commentators point out, although Lacan often conflates these two losses, there is nothing inevitable about their connection. There is nothing predetermined between the loss of being and the loss of the Oedipal mother. In short, the maternal does not have to make good on the alienating effects of language.[59]

Lacan's poststructuralist account of language opens up a space for rethinking the politics of kinship, the incest taboo, and (heterosexual) desire—indeed, it demands a poststructuralist account and accounting of kinship. Lacan's theories underscore a crucial point concerning the historically contingent nature of Lévi-Strauss's incest taboo and its politics of displacement. When the secondary loss of the Oedipal mother (Freud) is conflated with the primary loss of being (Lacan), a crucial slippage between structuralism and poststructuralism occurs. Instead of insisting on a poststructuralist account of language and kinship, which would refuse to privilege the Oedipal as inevitable or desirable, we come instead to reify Oedipal forms of family and kinship as an inexorable structural mandate and a foregone conclusion. In other words, we foreclose a poststructuralist reading of language and kinship, aligning the Oedipus complex instead with structuralist accounts of language and kinship. Judith Butler observes that when the study of kinship was combined with the study of structural linguistics, the "exchange of women [was] considered as the trafficking of a sign, the linguistic currency that [facilitated] a symbolic and communicative bond among men."[60] To recast these particular positions of kinship as symbolic is "precisely to posit them as preconditions of linguistic communicability and to suggest that these 'positions' bear an intractability that does not apply to contingent social norms." In this manner, structuralist accounts of kinship burden us with the legacy of Oedipus, a legacy establishing kinship as "always already heterosexual" and "certain forms of kinship as the only intelligible and livable ones."[61] Oedipus becomes the only way of being in the world.

The Story of the World

But Oedipus is not the only story of being in the world. Wong's film most certainly does not follow this anthropological and psychic script. The implicit privileging of the Oedipal through structuralist accounts of language and kinship obviates any critical understanding of the various ways by which loss might be symbolized through any number of possible desires, the various ways in which loss is already psychically lived today outside Oedipal spheres of family and kinship. *Happy Together* is one such poststructuralist account of family and kinship. Lai and Ho insist upon the historically contingent and variable forms that the incest taboo can take—indeed, has already taken—beyond the psychic boundaries of the Oedipal and the material boundaries of neoliberal governmentality and globalization.

Lai and Ho confound traditional Oedipal notions of kinship in their very rearticulation of its terms. So impossible is their relationship in its psychic fixity that, in the final analysis, we might say that Lai and Ho come to constitute their own incest taboo. The two do not displace away from a normative Oedipal scene of maternal loss and forfeiture as much as they must displace away from each other. We might say, in other words, that the incest taboo does not take shape through a privileged Oedipal scenario as much as it emerges from the two men themselves. From this perspective, Wong presents other pathways of displacement and desire by which one can psychically enter the world, other forms of "starting over" instituted through an alternative set of social and psychic exchanges.

The couple's loss of plenitude and displacement of desire gains its symbolic traction in relation to the ineffable sexual bliss that marks the extra-diegetic opening sequence of Wong's film. Eccentric to the main narrative of *Happy Together*, this Edenic moment, shot in black and white, concludes by dropping the couple unceremoniously into the main plot and predicament of the film, their interminable cycle of breaking up and starting over. This moment of excess and plenitude acquires its

symbolic significance only retroactively through a queer (post)structure of feeling that marks the flesh and shapes their tango as a psychic trace of this impossible desire. Lai tells us in another voiceover: "Ho Po-wing always says 'Let's start over.' And it gets to me every time. We had been together for a while and had broken up often. But for some reason, whenever he says 'Let's start over,' I always find myself back with him. We left Hong Kong in order to start over. We hit the road and ended up here in Argentina."

A utopia of presence from which they are summarily thrown onto the highways and alleyways of Argentina, the opening sequence represents a fall from being they cannot ever recapture. While they re-experience this initial sacrifice through a series of interminable repetition compulsions—their tango, their sexual cleavings, their break-ups, and their startings-over—the two must finally enter the world by displacing away from each other and by symbolizing their loss finally in a different manner to that of the Oedipal. Lai begins this journey into the world through a displacement from Ho that not only marks a psychic clearing and new beginning for him, but also the end of Wong's film.

The triangulation of the couple's relationship by the young Chang (Chang Chen), a man who "sees" through his acute skills of hearing, marks another critical space of epistemological and ontological bearing. Imploring Lai to speak his unspeakable loss—his impossible desire for Ho—onto the magnetic tape of his voice recorder, Chang travels to Tierra del Fuego, carrying the burden of Lai's affective disenchantment. There, at the ends of the earth, Chang dispatches Lai's sorrow—his enigmatic sobs—into the world, thus providing another pathway, another set of psychic displacements and coordinates for his friend to start over.[62]

The psychic deadlock of Lai and Ho draws insistent attention to alternative configurations of the incest taboo outside the normative structures mandates of the Oedipal. Wong's film thus might be seen as a different type of coming out narrative: it is a coming out into the world, a "worlding," through other forms of psychic displacement. In this regard, *Happy Together* might also be considered as a coming apart of normative Oedipalized forms of family and kinship, as an interruption of the privileged social narrative of neoliberal globalization, exemplified by the gay Asian migrant-clone of queer liberalism, Wai-tung. Through its queer diasporas, *Happy Together* charts other ways of thinking about psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, a decolonized psychoanalysis attentive to alternative structures of family and kinship. Wong's film charts different psychic pathways into the light of subjectivity, into the "unexpected revelations of scenes of spring" designated by its Cantonese title, *Cheun Gwong Tsa Sit* (春光乍洩).

Lai's displacement and final separation from Ho marking the conclusion of *Happy Together* facilitates this "unexpected revelation," this emergence into the world, demonstrated by his obligation to surrender the one he first loved in order to make room in his psyche for other creatures and things. "The loss of our first love-object is always tragic," Kaja Silverman writes, "but it is the precondition for care. Only if we pay this exorbitant price early in our lives can things and other people 'matter' to us. Indeed, the case could be stated even more starkly: only because we are thrown into a kinship structure can there *be* a world."[63] Psychoanalysis has often acknowledged that normalization is invariably disrupted by that which cannot be fully disciplined by its regulatory norms. However, it has rarely addressed how new forms of family and kinship can and do invariably arise on the basis of the incest taboo.[64] The queer diaspora of Lai and Ho provides us with one such compelling disquisition.

The very end of *Happy Together* recounts Lai's attempt to return to Hong Kong and reconcile with his estranged father. Predictably enough, *Happy Together* does not end in Hong Kong with Lai's anticipated paternal reunion. The return to origins does not belong, finally, to this particular figure or to this particular place. Instead, *Happy Together* concludes in Taipei, with Lai in transit. On the night of Deng Xiaoping's death, and only five months before Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, Lai goes to the Taipei night market to search for Chang's family. This motley crew provides an alternative set of psychic coordinates for Lai to start over and move elsewhere.[65] That is, by affiliating with another man's filial unit, Lai and Wong Kar-wai suggest that the turn back to an original scene of loss and impossible desire is made possible only by this move forward, through an alternative structure of family and kinship, and through another time and space outside the prohibitions and mandates of blood descent. As Silverman reminds us, we are "not in the world merely by the virtue of being born in it." To the contrary, "we are only really in the world when it is in us—when we have made room within our psyches for it to dwell and expand. The preposition 'in' is thus in this case less spatial than affective."[66]

Into the World: "Unexpected Revelations of Scenes of Spring." From *Happy Together*.

The final image of *Happy Together* is shot from Lai's perspective on Taipei's new elevated railway system. In the neon glow of the bustling metropolis, and as the soundtrack "Happy Together" plays for the first and final time, the train hurtles forward, and the world moves into Lai as Lai moves into the world.

THREE

The Language of Kinship

TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION AND TWO MOTHERS IN *FIRST PERSON PLURAL*

Urban professionals want it all, including dogs and children, whether or not they have the time to care for them. Thus usual modes of handling household tasks often prove inadequate. We can call this type of household a "professional household without a 'wife'," regardless of whether its adult couple consists of a man and a woman, two men, or two women. A growing share of its domestic tasks are relocated to the market: they are bought directly as goods and services or indirectly through hired labor.

—SASKIA SASSEN, "Global Cities and Survival Circuits"

Two Mothers

Deann Borshay Liem's documentary on transnational adoption, *First Person Plural* (2000), recounts the filmmaker's 1966 adoption from a Korean orphanage by Alveen and Donald Borshay, a white American couple in Fremont, California, as well as her discovery of her birth mother in Kunsan, Korea, some twenty years later.[1] With the hopes of alleviating the clinical depression from which she has suffered since college, Borshay Liem decides that she must see her two families together, in one room, in the same physical space. And so she orchestrates an excruciating reunion between her American parents and her Korean family, a journey of recuperation and return to origins compelled as much by fantasy as by fact. Midway through *First Person Plural*,

tions as a private economic solution that cannot make good on large-scale structural problems including the collapse of health care, the criminalization of immigrants, and the wider dissolution of the social safety net. See Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*; and "Still After."

104. Lisa Duggan writes: "In a bid for equality, some gay groups are producing rhetoric that insults and marginalizes unmarried people, while promoting marriage in much the same terms as the welfare reformers use to stigmatize single-parent households, divorce, and 'out of wedlock' births. If pursued in this way, the drive for gay marriage equality can undermine rather than support the broader movement for social justice and democratic diversity." See Duggan, "Holy Matrimony!"

105. Duggan and Richard Kim write: "Marital reproduction households are no longer in the majority, and most Americans spend half their adult lives outside marriage. The average age at which people marry has steadily risen as young people live together longer; the number of cohabitating couples rose 72 percent between 1990 and 2000. More people live alone, and many live in multigenerational, nonmarital households; 41 percent of these unmarried households include children. Increasing numbers of elderly, particularly women, live in companionate nonconjugal unions . . . Household diversity is a fact of American life rooted not just in the cultural revolutions of feminism and gay liberation but in long-term changes in aging, housing, childcare and labor." See Duggan and Kim, "Beyond Gay Marriage."

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

TWO *The Structure of Kinship*

1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 15.

2. Monique Truong, *The Book of Salt*. The novel grew from a short story, "Seeds," originally published in *Watermark: An Anthology of Vietnamese Writings*, and garnered several prizes, including 2003 Bard Fiction Prize, the Stonewall Book Award-Barbara Gittings Literature Award, the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, and the Association for Asian American Studies Book Award; Wong Kar-wai, director, *Happy Together*.

3. Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, 186. Toklas writes: "When it was evident that connections in the quarter were no longer able to find a servant for us, it was necessary to go to the employment office. That was indeed a humiliating experience, from which I withdrew not certain whether it was more so for me or for the applicants. It was then that we commenced our insecure, unstable, unreliable but thoroughly enjoyable experiences with the Indo-Chinese" (186). Toklas tells us that Stein and she employed "a succession" (187) of Vietnamese cooks, but Toklas writes mainly about two men, Trac and Nguyen, the former without his surname and the latter without his given name.

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 207. Elda Tsou notes that *The Book of Salt* begins with two photographs of Bình, which appear to rectify a historical omission, to conjure forth the historically absent body, and to give voice to Bình as a missing subject. Yet the photographs are fictitious, one of many symptoms in Truong's novel that "stages over and over the equivocation of authorship and the fiction of testimony as access to authenticity" (147). See Elda Tsou, "Figures of Identity: Rereading Asian American Literature."

5. Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," esp. 177.

6. Truong, *Salt*, 86; 89.

7. Ibid., 98.

8. Ibid., 99.

9. Brent Edwards has written on the life of Nguyen Ai Quoc in France, "who may well stand as the most important and prodigious writer in radical circles in Paris during the first part of the 1920s" (33). Edwards connects Nguyen to a diasporic group of anticolonial and anticapitalist black activists, in particular, Léopold Senghor, indexing another historical incarnation of Asia and Africa in the metropole. See Edwards, "The Shadow of Shadows."

10. By historicism, I mean the attempt, found especially among German historians around the mid-nineteenth century, to view all social and cultural phenomena, all categories, truths, and values, as relative and historically determined, and in consequence to be understood only by examining their historical context, in complete detachment from present-day attitudes. For a trenchant critique of historicism, see Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

11. Ibid., 257.

12. Tani Barlow, *The Question of Chinese Woman in Feminism*, 3.

13. Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume 2*, 430.

14. See Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*.

15. Giorgio Agamben explains medieval conceptions of melancholia as a process of materializing the ghostly remains of an unrealized object or ideal. He highlights melancholia's insistent compulsion to transform an object of loss into an amorous embrace, thereby magically preserving it in the realm of the phantasmagoric. For Agamben, melancholia opens up an alternative time and space of the phantasm in which lost objects appear lost precisely so that they might become real. In this regard, Agamben's "ghostly matters" supplement what Avery Gordon describes as the haunting of the "sociological imagination" and its abiding fidelity to the empirical. These ghostly matters open onto the terrain of "complex personhood" (4), intricate ways of life and living that fall below the radar of conventional political representation and the protocols of market exchange. See Giorgio Agamben, "The Lost Object," in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, 20. See also Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*.

16. Truong, *Salt*, 100.

17. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 111.

18. See Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism." See also Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*.

19. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7.

20. Ibid., 18.

21. Ibid.

22. See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

23. Vilashini Cooppan, "Hauntologies of Form: Race, Genre, and the Literary World System," 81.

24. Truong, *Salt*, 154.

25. Ibid., 135; my emphasis.

26. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects*, especially the first two chapters.

27. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

28. See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

29. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 70. Massumi further clarifies: "For the in-between, as such, is not a middling being but rather the being *of* the middle—the being of a relation. A positioned being, central, middling, or marginal, is a *term* of a relation. It may seem odd to insist that a relation has an ontological status separate from the terms of the relation. But, as the work of Gilles Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes, it is in fact an indispensable step toward conceptualizing change as anything more or other than a negation, deviation, rupture, or subversion."

30. Truong, *Salt*, 111.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 189.

33. Ibid., 37.

34. See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." See also Jacques Lacan, "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis," 23.

35. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 81; Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," 86.

36. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, 333.

37. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

38. Truong, *Salt*, 190.

39. See Braudel, *On History*.

40. Carla Freccero, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," 184.

41. The Wolf, "*Happy Together*," *Inside Out Film*, www.insideout.co.uk (accessed April 18, 2000); David Dalgleish, "*Happy Together* Review," *Killer Movies*, www.killermovies.com (accessed October 8, 2009); Derek Elley, "*Happy Together*," *Daily Variety*, May 20, 1997.

42. Jay Carr, "Down and Out in Buenos Aires," *Boston Globe*, October 31, 1997.

43. Elley, "*Happy Together*."

44. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 71.

45. *The Wedding Banquet*. Directed by Ang Lee.

46. Mark Chiang, "Coming Out in the Global System: Postmodern Patriarchies and Transnational Sexualities in *The Wedding Banquet*." See also my reading of Lee's film in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, 204–28.

47. *The Wedding Banquet* is recognizable to a Western audience as a "gay" film. Queer diaspora in *The Wedding Banquet* depends on the strict alignment of the Taiwanese Gao Wai-tung (Winston Chao) with the management of transnational capital and the Mainlander Wei-Wei (May Chin) as the source of third-world labor. The narrative resolution to *The Wedding Banquet* relies upon Wei-Wei's acquiescence to keep and not to abort their unborn (male) child. In Lee's film, Wai-tung's purchase of an individuated Western gay lifestyle with his white lover Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein), along with the placating of his heir-demanding Chinese parents (Lung Sihung and Gua Ah-la), depends upon the subordination of women and labor, such that women become the very sign of labor. *The Wedding Banquet* thus illustrates the regrettable cleaving of queerness from feminist political concerns.

48. Filmically and thematically this scene represents for Ho and Lai the original ineffable experience Kaja Silverman theorizes as the beginning point of all human desire and longing: "The experience of being within the 'here and now' is completely ineffable—it defies every kind of symbolization. Once presence evaporates, however, it assumes a status which it did not have before: it comes to signify a lost fullness. This is because we are able to constitute something as an object of desire only when we are able to make it a representative of something anterior, something no longer available to us . . . To desire is thus initially to incarnate, and later to reincarnate, the 'what-has-been.'" (Silverman, *World Spectators*, 39)

49. I borrow this term from Parreñas. See Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*.

50. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Diasporas Old and New," 90.

51. See Alexander's analysis of the emergence and development of gay tourism around the globe in *Pedagogies of Crossing*.

52. In a *Salon* review, Charles Taylor notes, "It's one of the recurring jokes in Wong's movies that no matter where the characters travel, they end up in the same crummy bars and apartments and fast-food joints." See Charles Taylor, "Review of *Happy Together*," *Salon.com*, www.salon.com (accessed October 8, 2009).

53. Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction: Queer Temporalities," 164.

54. See Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Tango,

Savigliano notes, exposes the dark side of development. Tango traces its roots back to the milonga, and black men and women probably initiated the first tango steps in the Río de le Plata in the mid-nineteenth century. She observes that the worldwide increasing popularity of the tango has been associated with the scandal of the public display of passion performed by a heterosexual couple. As the tango made its way from the countryside to the slums and brothels of Bueños Aires, and to the cabarets and ballrooms of Paris, London, New York, and Tokyo in the early decades of the twentieth century, the sins of tango's erotic suggestiveness became entangled with its debased status, associated with its racial and class origins.

Globally exoticized, the tango underwrites what Savigliano describes as a "political economy of Passion . . . [one] intertwined with the economies usually described on materialist and ideological grounds" (1). Tango's political economy of passion, Savigliano contends, is a traffic in "emotions and affects [that] paralleled the processes by which core countries of the capitalist world system have extracted material goods and labor from . . . the Third World (periphery)" (1–2).

But this imperial domestication and management of passion—of emotional capital—accumulated and consumed as exotic culture, cannot fully regulate its affective deviations. Savigliano writes, "Untamable interpretations . . . of bodies performing excessive movement, despite all efforts invested in domesticating them, are good signs for a decolonizing project" (13).

55. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 28.

56. See Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

57. Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," 173.

58. Ibid., 198.

59. Numerous psychoanalytic feminist critics note that Lacan often conflates and confuses these two losses, through the privileging of the paternal metaphor and through the implicit inscription of the name of the father with meaning and the maternal body with being, i.e. that the phallus is equivalent to a penis. See the special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992) on the "Lacanian Phallus."

60. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 41.

61. Ibid., 29–30; 70.

62. See Chris Doyle, "To the End of the World." In his diary of the shooting of *Happy Together*, Chris Doyle writes, "He [Wong Kai-wai] feels that what Zhang Zhen gives Tony (and what Tony gives Leslie) is not 'love' but 'courage'—'a will to live.' It's our brightest film in all senses of the word and looks like having the happiest ending of any [Wong Kar-wai] film" (17).

63. Silverman, *World Spectators*, 38–39.

64. See Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 66. She continues: "From the presumption that one cannot—or ought not to—choose one's closest family members as one's lovers and marital partners, it does not follow that the bonds of kinship that *are* possible assume any particular form."

65. There are three men and a woman working at the Chang food stand. While Wong Kar-wai suggests that two of these are Chang's parents, we are left with an image of a non-Oedipal communal family unit. Moreover, Lai's "adoption" into Chang's family unit demonstrates that Asian queer subjectivity does not necessarily occur, as some Western critics insist, outside the sphere of the traditional nuclear family but can coexist within it as a different kind of "individualism."

66. Silverman, *World Spectators*, 29.

THREE *The Language of Kinship*

1. Deann Borshay Liem, director, *First Person Plural*.

2. See Kirsten Lovelock, "Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice." Lovelock divides post-war transnational adoption into two historical periods: the first wave was a humanitarian response to orphans in war-torn countries; the second wave, which began in the 1970s, was a response to infertility rates in the West.

3. While there is not a lot of scholarship on the topic, in recent years there have been a number of documentaries and memoirs on the transnational adoption from Asia. For a list of documentaries, see Sunny Jo, "Korean Adoption Films." For memoirs, see Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*; Susan Soon-Keum Cox, *Voices from Another Place*; Elizabeth Kim, *Ten Thousand Sorrows*; Katy Robinson, Sook Wilkinson, and Nancy Fox, *After the Morning Calm: Reflections on Korean Adoptees*; and Jane Jeong Trenka, *The Language of Blood*. For recent scholarship, see Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*; Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*; and Toby Alice Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*.

4. Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," 16.

5. See Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption,* which was originally published as a special issue of the journal *Social Text*. Volkman's collection is largely about the topic of transnational parenting, from the point of view of adoptive parents. It is curated from the disciplinary angle of anthropology, using ethnographies and personal anecdotes. This chapter is, in part, a response to a necessary critical reframing of current approaches to the topic, broadening the political, economic, and cultural issues raised by the practice of transnational adoption as well as opening up new critical perspectives from the point of view of the adoptees and the (even more silent) birth mothers.

6. See Elizabeth Bartholet, "Commentary: Cultural Stereotypes Can and Do Die: It's Time to Move on With Transracial Adoption." Tobias Hübinette, a Korean adoptee raised in Sweden, has controversially compared the practice of transnational adoption to the Black Atlantic slave trade. See his "Orphan Trains to Babylifts: Colonial Trafficking, Empire Building, and Social Engineering."