

### **Emotional Racialized Encounter**

In the summer of 2022, I had my first live encounter with a selection of the photo series *Experimental Relationship* (2007–ongoing) on the white walls of the Fotomuseum Winterthur. Featured as part of the group exhibition *Chosen Family: Less Alone Together* (June 11 – October 16, 2022), five staged self-portraits of Pixy Liao and her artistic and life partner Takahiro Morooka were spread out across two adjoining walls. The photos, of varying dimensions, showed the New York-based artist duo in different intimate settings, mostly taken in their Brooklyn apartment. However, one photo made me stop and stare. *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* (2018) shows the two artists in a *seiza* position in brightly colored kimonos in a room that indexes all things stereotypically «Japanese»—the tatami mats, the sliding shoji doors, and the vaguely beautiful nature in the background (fig. 1). My gut reaction upon seeing



1 Pixy Liao [and Takahiro Morooka], *Find a Woman You Can Rely On*, 2018, from the series *Experimental Relationship*, 2007–ongoing, digital c-print, 150 × 115 cm © Pixy Liao

this photo was to cringe. *Seriously?* I thought. *Do we need yet another portrait of two Asians looking like ornaments in an art museum frequented by mostly white people?*

In that initial moment of emotional racialized encounter, it was beyond me to notice just how much Liao and Morooka play with reversals and ambiguities to challenge such modes of racist representations. Instead, all I could think about was how I, a Korean woman, was standing in front of a hyper-racialized portrait of a Chinese woman and Japanese man, both looking very Japanese inside the «far-from-neutral» white cube of a Swiss photo museum.<sup>1</sup> Did I blend in with the photo? Did we all look the same? Do people know that Pixy Liao is Chinese, and that I'm not Japanese? Was anyone looking at me right now? During my short encounter with the photograph on the wall—which was hanging at eye-level, nearly life-size, and confronting me—I felt paralyzed by loaded feelings that I couldn't exactly pinpoint or articulate. Nor could I grasp at whom such feelings were directed. Was I angry at the artists? The museum? The colonial world order? Or was I being a self-hating Asian—a «symptom of the most detrimental form of racism»<sup>2</sup>—by not wanting to be identified with the two other Asians in the room? What I do know is just how long these indescribable, deeply uncomfortable feelings stayed with me.

Why do some feelings remain with us longer than others? According to Sianne Ngai, while «grand» and «noble» feelings like rage and fear «cannot be sustained indefinitely», minor and less prestigious feelings like irritation, disgust and anxiety—dubbed *ugly feelings*—«have a remarkable capacity for duration».<sup>3</sup> Calling such feelings explicitly «noncathartic, offering no satisfactions of virtue, [...] nor any therapeutic or purifying release», she locates the racialized subject—along with the gendered and sexualized subject—as one of the sites at which such emotions are uncomfortably sustained.<sup>4</sup> Building on Ngai's theorization of ugly feelings, Cathy Park Hong conceptualizes «minor feelings» as that of white society's perpetual gaslighting of minoritized subjects, especially in the context of the Asian American experience:

«minor feelings: the racialized range of emotions that are negative, dysphoric, and therefore untelegenic, built from the sediments of everyday racial experience and the irritant of having one's perception of reality constantly questioned or dismissed. Minor feelings arise, for instance, upon hearing a slight, knowing it's racial, and being told, *Oh, that's all in your head.*»<sup>5</sup>

Not only are minor feelings characterized by its dismissiveness, Hong further expresses, but the display of such feelings prompts reprimand from society not used to seeing racialized subjects having agency over such feelings:

«Minor feelings are also the emotions we are accused of having when we decide to *be* difficult—in other words, when we decide to be honest. When minor feelings are finally externalized, they are interpreted as hostile, ungrateful, jealous, depressing, and belligerent, affects ascribed to racialized behavior that whites consider *out of line*. Our feelings are overreactions because our lived experiences of structural inequity are not commensurate with their deluded reality.»<sup>6</sup>

The display of such ugly and minor feelings causes the racialized body to be perceived as an «overemotional racialized subject»,<sup>7</sup> marked by excess and exaggeration. Describing such a fraught affect as «racialized animatedness», Ngai problematizes the paradoxical situation in which the racialized subject must straddle between being objectified and having feelings, which are then considered out of line and inappropriate.<sup>8</sup> She further emphasizes that even though the original meaning of

animation—being full of life, denoting excitement—can be manifested as positive affects for certain bodies, «it is precisely this racialization that turns the neutral and even potentially positive affect of animatedness «ugly»».<sup>9</sup> Thus, for example, an act as harmless and joyful as laughter could be interpreted as *threatening* when undertaken by ten Black women traveling as a book club, prompting police intervention at the following train station for #laughingwhileblack.<sup>10</sup>

The unprocessed ugly, minor feelings I was feeling while standing in front of *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* in 2022 had initially to do with a sense of complicated self-identification with the exhibited subjects and, by extension, feeling myself exhibited—or, as the Black American artist Glenn Ligon so succinctly put it: «Went looking for the art and we were the art.»<sup>11</sup> I knew that I was having a moment of emotional racialized encounter, but what I ended up doing was to gaslight myself by dismissing these thoughts and trying to dissipate these feelings as quickly as possible for my own good (which was unsuccessful given their remarkable capacity for duration). I had felt hyperaware of my surroundings, not only because I was the only person of color in the room, but since the museum as both cultural institution and gatekeeper—and as the site of my live encounter—is a disciplinary space that demarcates «a social order of the upper class and the lower class».<sup>12</sup> And I knew where my place was.

The spatial and hierarchical relations between low and high are also tackled in Sara Ahmed's discussion of the performativity of disgust: «disgust reactions are not only about objects that seem to threaten the boundary lines of subjects, they are also about objects that seem «lower» than or below the subject, or even beneath the subject.»<sup>13</sup> Pointing to the lower regions of the body associated with excretion and sexual activities, Ahmed further notes: «It is not that what is low is necessarily disgusting, nor is sexuality necessarily disgusting. Lowness becomes associated with lower regions of the body as it becomes associated with other bodies and other spaces.»<sup>14</sup> Describing the «stickiness» of disgust with its accumulative properties, Ahmed argues, «feelings of disgust stick more to some bodies than others, such that they become disgusting, as if their presence is what makes «us sick»».<sup>15</sup> Here, she makes an important distinction that bodies are not inherently disgusting, but «become disgusting» through repeated contact with certain objects and signs that in turn stick to certain bodies more than others. This is also in line with Ngai's observation that neutral to positive affects only turn «ugly» when such affects are activated through racialized encounters.

Reflecting on how surfaces and signs become «sticky», Ahmed gives a personal example of the sticky effect of the insult word «Paki» that had been addressed to her. The alphabetical composition of the word may not inherently be offensive, but through its repeated, hateful utterance—by mouths intending to hurt, reaching racialized bodies, and thereby creating contact—the word «Paki» might then stick to other words that are not spoken: immigrant, outsider, dirty, and so on».<sup>16</sup> The effect of the speech act of naming something as «disgusting»—or any other signifier associated with words imbued with racism—is to make something *become* disgusting, «to transfer the stickiness of the word «disgust» to an object».<sup>17</sup> This is also consistent with Kyla Wazana Tompkins' understanding of the mouth «as a site *to which* and *within which* various political values unevenly adhere».<sup>18</sup>

In this vein, being confronted with ethnically indistinguishable and highly stylized Asian bodies in a kneeling position also evoked for me words that were not

spoken: Oriental, submissive, cute, docile, passive—sticky words associated with the «myth of the model minority». <sup>19</sup> As «stickiness» creates a «binding» effect and a «blockage», Ahmed writes, «it stops the word [from] moving or acquiring new value». <sup>20</sup> I believe that the photograph stuck with me in part because it felt like yet another iteration—and performance—of precisely how such modes of representing yellow bodies cease to move and acquire new value. But that shouldn't be the end of the story.

### **An Emotional Interlude**

Out of the three main works of literature I reference in the first section, Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings* stands out for its genre as a collection of personal essays. To me, a crucial difference between essayistic writing and academic writing is that in the case of the latter, the academic writer must contextualize one's thoughts by bringing up existing scholarly discussions and debates on the object of inquiry. In the case of the former, the writer does not necessarily need anything beyond a «perpetual self-authorization». <sup>21</sup> Even though Hong's essays are built on and motivated by numerous scholarly texts, such as Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, essayistic writing—with its intentional emphasis on the first person singular and the singularity of individual experience—somehow tends to be treated with less seriousness than conventional academic writing. <sup>22</sup>

But what is an academic writer supposed to do when there is a theoretical gap and a general lack of established lines of discussions on a given topic—in my case, around the topic of the racialized emotions of Asian women in the West? *Minor Feelings* was the only text I found at the time of my initial research in 2024 that specifically and directly addresses such fraught racialized feelings. <sup>23</sup> In the face of this dearth of scholarly material, I opted to read Hong's embodied experiences as source of expertise, thereby placing them on the same level of importance as any other «academic» texts. I believe that it is only through such interventions that we, academic writers, can reinscribe academic citational practices—by putting to test the very mechanisms of institutional gatekeeping that police and restrict embodied forms of knowledge.

Faced with the same kind of «theoretical blackhole», <sup>24</sup> Anne Anlin Cheng treads an untrodden theoretical path in her monograph *Ornamentalism*, in which she questions why there hasn't been any ontological framework that accounts for the peculiar synthetic personhood of Asiatic femininity: «We say *black women, brown women, white women*, but not *yellow women*. Is it because this last category is no longer relevant?» <sup>25</sup> Deliberately using the «too ugly and crude» word «yellow» to bring forth «the queasiness of this inescapably racialized and gendered figure» not accounted for by the more common, more politically correct denominators like «*Asian woman in the West* or *Asian American woman*», <sup>26</sup> Cheng asks why yellow people are the «political exception» <sup>27</sup> in identity politics:

«What makes the yellow woman the exception in the larger category of WOC is precisely the precariousness of her injury, a fact at once taken for granted and questionable. [...] Yet while many people might say that they are familiar with or have met the «angry black woman» or the «angry brown woman», they rarely speak of the angry yellow woman. This is not because she does not exist, but because jagged rage has not been in keeping with the style of her aesthetic congealment. [...] Is the yellow woman injured—or is she injured enough?» <sup>28</sup>

Framing the existential dilemma of the yellow woman in terms of the perpetual societal gaslighting of the fact and status of her «injury», Cheng effectively adds the color «yellow» to the existing black and brown «brutish categories of color, as denominating categories of injury».<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, Hong writes in *Minor Feelings*: «There's a ton of literature on the self-hating Jew and the self-hating African American, but not enough has been said about the self-hating Asian.»<sup>30</sup> Thus, both *Ornamentalism* and *Minor Feelings*—very recent publications written in 2019 and 2020 respectively—thematize the dearth of literature on the topic of the fraught racialized *yellow* feelings specific to the Asians-in-the-West experience. It necessarily *isn't* because Asians don't have feelings.

One symptom of having to write academically on a topic that does not yet exist in the academic world is that we, yellow scholars, have to very awkwardly shove ourselves into existing narratives that do not correspond to our very specific racial realities. This feels like a reinforcement of existing power structures marked by an overinclusion of certain hegemonic discourses—even if it is within minoritized topics—and a complete lack of presence of others within academia.<sup>31</sup> Yellow experiences seemingly always need to be read through existing literature on Black experiences. I perceive this discursive trend to be partially symptomatic of cultural stereotypes, which, through their reiteration, shape realities. For instance, when Ngai is examining the racialized affect of «animatedness» in the context of specifically the Asian American subject—which takes up a relatively small portion of her book—she comments on how this animatedness is paradoxically shown by the «pathos of emotional suppression rather than by emotional excess».<sup>32</sup> In other words, she notes the exceptional status of yellow personhood even in the application of her own theory:

«Genghis Chan: Private Eye» thus offers a genealogy of an American racial stereotype—that of the Asian as silent, inexpressive, and, like Bartleby, emotionally inscrutable—which stands in noticeable contrast to what we might call the exaggeratedly emotional, hyper-expressive, and even «overscrutable» image of most racially or ethnically marked subjects in American culture.»<sup>33</sup>

Only briefly thematizing the Asian exception as opposed to other «racially or ethnically marked subjects in American culture», Ngai pivots rather quickly to the racialized affect of animatedness in the context of Black representations, which more readily fits her theory:

«Yet it is the cultural representation of the African-American that most visibly harnesses the affective qualities of liveliness, effusiveness, spontaneity, and zeal to a disturbing racial epistemology, and makes these variants of «animatedness» function as bodily (hence self-evident) signs of the raced subject's naturalness or authenticity.»<sup>34</sup>

As much as I admire and benefit greatly from Ngai's scholarship, encountering such theoretical impulse makes me fundamentally question why there can't be an explosion of such stereotypical impasse to free up space for the angry yellow subjects, who too are animated, hyperexpressive and overscrutable. Theory shouldn't merely add to the existing order.

This isn't about claiming a purist line of logic, saying Asians can only learn from other Asians. On the contrary, the abundance of pioneering literature based on solidarity by other POC, queer and disabled writers has ignited many important discussions that are urgent and relevant to the subject of yellow womanhood and her feelings. However, until now, it has mostly been a one-way exchange where

yellow scholars have had to borrow from other POC scholars (often meaning Black American) to contextualize their experiences. What I'm suggesting here is a call for such an exchange to take place in the other direction as well, where theorizations around specifically yellow personhood and emotions are applied to other minority discourses, expanding its application beyond an ethnic marker. Cheng does exactly this in her poignant coda to *Ornamentalism*, in which she asks: «To what extent can ornamentalism speak to Africanist female enfleshment as well?»<sup>35</sup> By demonstrating how her critical framework around the yellow woman can be applied to read «the unimaginable corporeal brutality of slavery» on Black flesh, she extends her methodological invitation to fellow scholars to rethink and update the underlying assumptions informing a certain theoretical directionality.<sup>36</sup>

### **Wiping the Tears and Moving On**

As much as politicizing minor feelings is important, I must admit that I never went beyond dwelling in these ugly emotions in my initial artistic encounter with Liao and Morooka's *Find a Woman You Can Rely On*. I was unfair to and dismissive of their double portrait by flattening its theoretical potential to a mere instance of contemporary Orientalism. Cheng warns against too easily dismissing aesthetic tactics that enrage us at the expense of missing an opportunity to chart new theoretical terrains: «Moral outrage in the face of consumption or fetishization, however warranted, cannot address or relieve the truly striking, idiosyncratic, and intense exchange between thingness and personness.»<sup>37</sup> Thus, it is as necessary to acknowledge such feelings as it is to pay attention to the ways in which such emotional reactions shed light on how these Asian diasporic art practitioners negotiate and represent the emotionally loaded processes of racialization.

Represented in the large photographic print of *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* are two people with short black hair in kneeling positions. The person on the left, Liao, is kneeling upright, wearing a bright peach colored kimono. The person on the right, Morooka, is leaning on Liao's left shoulder and wearing a boldly patterned green kimono. Between their two knees, a curly black cable stretches out to the foreground, exiting the frame. Morooka is holding the other end of the cable, which has the remote control for the camera that is capturing their image outside the frame. The two are sitting on top of beige tatami mats that stretch out in long horizontal layers into the background, up to the point where the indoor space turns into outdoor space, liminally separated by the wide-open sliding shoji doors. Outside is a small wooden balcony with a view of a cluster of trees in the distance. Liao and Morooka are looking directly at the camera, not aggressively but not shyly either. As lookers, our eyes meet theirs each time, creating contact, prompting reaction.

Occupying a space that's neither entirely indoors nor outdoors, Liao and Morooka play with liminality, ambiguity and reversal on multiple levels in this self-portrait. One layer of ambiguity has to do with the title, «Find a Woman You Can Rely On». At first glance, it seems clear that Morooka, the man, is leaning on Liao, the woman, reversing the trite sexist stereotype of which the title is a pun. However, their sardonic manner thwarts this binary mode of thinking. For one, one could ask, «who is the woman in the photograph?» As Luise Guest observes, the couple constantly «erases and rewrites the gender script».<sup>38</sup> In this photo, Morooka also seems to be wearing an obi for women, marked by its wider width and an obijime—a cord for tightening the obi—on top. In this sense, it could be said that there are two women in

the photograph, which leads to the question of ‘who is relying on whom?’ Though it looks like Morooka is one-sidedly leaning on Liao, they are in fact similarly sharing the load of their bodies, quietly sustaining various directional forces at play.

The act of leaning against something requires a balancing act on the end of the receiver or the receiving object for it to remain a still pose. Even if Liao and Morooka look rather effortless in their kneeling position, anyone who has had to sustain this position for an extended period will know the cruelty of it. With its punitive associations, kneeling is a self-crushing bodily gesture, often leading to painful cramps. In order to avoid this potentially painful outcome, it would be important for Morooka to fine-tune the distribution of their collective weights. Anyone who has leaned on someone’s shoulder like Morooka will also know the discomfort of holding such a pose. Causing tension in the neck and flank, leaning—or unevenly distributing one’s body weight—comes with its own share of complications. The act of leaning is thus in no way that of one-sided reliance, in which one party benefits at the expense of the other. Instead, it is a mode of collective burden-sharing that requires an intimate, nonverbal choreography between the two bodies. Furthermore, in the photo, it is Morooka who presses the self-timer remote control.<sup>39</sup> Sharing their artistic and authorial load, the two artists rely on each other to sustain a pose, defying the unidirectionality of care suggested by the title.

### Ornamental Personhood

Let us throw in another sartorial twist to further complicate the liminal forces at play. In the photo, Liao is seen wearing her kimono with the right side in front, which is something that is only done in case of the deceased.<sup>40</sup> In Morooka’s case, his undershirt seems to be layered in the conventional order but the layering of his main kimono remains ambiguous due to its busy pattern, suggesting that he could also be wearing the kimono the opposite way.<sup>41</sup> Given that the wrapping order of a kimono is common cultural knowledge for a Japanese person and one of the most emphasized mistakes to avoid for tourists,<sup>42</sup> what this staged conflation brings to the fore are kimono’s «sticky» associations in Ahmed’s sense. It is a display tactic that plays with various registers of cultural codification—*how much of these cultural codes can you identify? Do we all look the same? Do you know that one of us isn’t Japanese and that kimonos need to be worn with the left side up?* Whether one can answer one or more or all those questions correctly is beside the point.

As I’ve mentioned in the beginning of this article, my original encounter with *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* at the Fotomuseum Winterthur had been marked by minor, ugly and yellow feelings. I had felt that I was witnessing yet another instance of an Orientalist display in which «Asia is always ancient, excessive, feminine, open for use, and decadent ... [with no room] for national, ethnic, or historical specificities.»<sup>43</sup> If I had initially cringed at seeing both Liao and Morooka in kimonos—which I presumed would lead many of the ‘average’ museumgoers in Winterthur to conflate the artists’ national identities—now I think it’s part of the point. This potential for conflation brings to the table the very fragility of categorizations based on nationality, as such modes of identification are formed on the basis of what Benedict Anderson has so relevantly called «imagined communities».<sup>44</sup> Then, my own initial gut reaction—which was to hastily categorize the three Asians in the room into three national categories (*I’m Korean, she’s Chinese, he’s Japanese*), barring all other nuances that make up the complex identity of diasporic subjects—serves as a chilling

reminder that no one is exempt from the thoroughly enrooted, dehumanizing impulse for taxonomy that underlies our society riddled with racism.

Furthermore, Liao and Morooka's sartorial conflation has an even greater theoretical significance when read through Cheng's theoretical framework of *ornamentalism*, which imagines a radically new mode of racial embodiment for yellow persons—dubbed «ornamental personhood».<sup>45</sup> If the kimono is the critical material element onto which all layers of conflation stick together, much more so than the human flesh wearing them, a fundamental ontological shift occurs. What happens when the kimono stands in for the human and the «human [becomes] the ornamental gesture»?<sup>46</sup> Liao and Morooka's objecthood—as both figurative and literally manifested in their kimonos—becomes a different mode of agency when taken seriously. Rather than being merely enraged at the potential to conflate racialized yellow subjects with what they're wearing, let us take up on Cheng's call to «think through, rather than shy away from, that intractable intimacy between being a person and being a thing».<sup>47</sup>

Thinking about Liao and Morooka's diasporic status as two Asian artists living in the US, the staging of their photograph *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* as object-humans can be read in light of their transnational mobility and their adeptness in going between cultures, material states, and geographic locations. As diasporic subjects, Liao and Morooka's racialized bodies support various baggage that their union implies on a national, ethnic, and gender level. Then, following Cheng's theory of ornamental personhood, the blurring of their humanness makes such burden potentially lighter in weight. In the process of shifting from being human to being an ornate thing with durable materiality, a certain «imperviousness»<sup>48</sup> is created. In the case of ornamental glamour, Cheng suggests that its imperviousness—a trait so stereotypically associated with expressionless Asian faces—can be «strangely liberating» in its potential to provide «a temporary relief from the burdens of personhood and visibility».<sup>49</sup> Transforming a stereotype into an opening for liberation, Cheng offers us—yellow cultural practitioners—a new theoretical footing on which we can embrace our objecthood. Instead of my initial reading of Liao and Morooka's self-representational, ornamental gesture as complicit in adding to the existing mountain of Orientalist imageries, I now read it as an invitation to engage in their goey dialogue—being sticky, getting stuck, sticking to others.

### **Coda: Being Anti-Racist Is Emotional**

For me—an Asian diasporic subject, visa-holder, and linguistic and racial minority in my place of work and residence—emotional racialized encounters often induce a fight-or-flight response. But as Cathy Park Hong has pointed out, opting to «fight» can often lead to the verdict of being «out of line».<sup>50</sup> And such a verdict is nothing short of existential for a diasporic subject, whose rights to residence, work, and dignity are dependent on being in keeping with the local population. Thus, I often opt for the «flight» response, which means trying to ignore and suppress the unfailingly intense gut-wrenching sensations I feel every time. No matter how «micro» the aggression supposedly is—no aggression is micro—encounters with racism are always emotionally fraught. Rather than dismissing these embodied experiences as excess details irrelevant to formal analysis, I believe that there is a methodological potency to paying attention to our emotions in engaging with art practices. Encounters with art always occur as part of a greater environment—institutional, technological, social, and political. Emotional reactions, especially ugly ones, can



help identify and illuminate the underlying matrices of power feeding structural racism, acting as a theoretical radar of sorts.

I would like to end this piece by returning to this quote by Anne Anlin Cheng: «Moral outrage in the face of consumption or fetishization, however warranted, cannot address or relieve the truly striking, idiosyncratic, and intense exchange between thingness and personness.»<sup>51</sup> What if we were to read this sentence as a kind of anti-racist art historical methodology? First, be morally outraged in the face of racialized commodification of minoritized human beings. Then wipe the tears, take a breath, and look at the very processes of racialization square in the eye prompted by the emotional responses. Then observe those striking, idiosyncratic, and intense processes as mediated and translated by racialized art practitioners.

Being anti-racist *is* emotional.

## Notes

- 1 Brian O'Doherty: *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Santa Monica 1986, p. 27.
- 2 Wenyng Xu: *Eating Identities. Reading Food in Asian American Literature*, Honolulu 2008, p. 26.
- 3 Sianne Ngai: *Ugly Feelings*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, p. 7.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 5 Cathy Park Hong: *Minor Feelings. An Asian American Reckoning*, New York 2020, p. 55, original emphasis.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 57, original emphasis.
- 7 Ngai 2005 (as note 3), p. 91.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 10 Alluding to Ralph Ellison's 1985 essay «An Extravagance of Laughter», Cathy Park Hong recounts this «apocryphal» sounding incident in 2015 that prompted the disastrous hashtag. See Hong 2020 (as note 5), p. 52–53.
- 11 Glenn Ligon: *Notes on a Performance by Kellie Jones*, in: *Triplecanopy*, 2015, <https://tc3.canopycanopy.com/contents/notes-on-a-performance-by-kellie-jones/#title-page>, accessed July 31, 2025, point 7.
- 12 Ka Tat Nixon Chen: *The Disciplinary Power of Museums*, in: *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 4 (July 2013), pp. 407–410, here p. 408.
- 13 Sara Ahmed: *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, New York 2014 [originally 2004], p. 88–89.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 18 Kyla Wazana Tompkins: *Racial Indigestion. Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2012, p. 5, original emphasis.
- 19 Cf. Rosalind Chou/Joe R. Feagin: *The Myth of the Model Minority. Asian Americans Facing Racism*, London/New York 2008.
- 20 Ahmed [2004] 2014 (as note 13), p. 92.
- 21 Verlyn Klinkenborg: *Several Short Sentences About Writing*, in: *Ecotone* 1, no. 2 (March 2012), pp. 126–133, here p. 127.
- 22 For example, observing the changing trends in autobiographical writing in arts and literature, Alex Kitnick claims: «Reading all this, one might worry that art's aspirations are narrowing in scope, that they have become too personal, too individual. [...] Certainly, this claim does not appear completely untrue. [...] If the I now stands for intimacy and interpersonal connection, it is also somewhat shut in, even as more and more people feel empowered to use it.» (61–62). I'm confused by Kitnick's problematization of the «too personal, too individual» or «shut in» turn of the autobiographical expression, just as I am confused to read: «To put it bluntly, one might say that the politics of representation have given way to a preoccupation with feeling.» (50) I don't understand why the politics of representation and expression of feelings need to be mutually exclusive and put under this negative resignative light. These kinds of statements fail to see the political importance of emotions and conflate the urgent need for more personal expressions of those who lack representation in any narrative space with irrelevant narcissism. See Alex Kitnick: *I, Etcetera*, in: *October* 166 (2018), pp. 45–62.
- 23 Since the initial drafting of this article, I learned that Anne Anlin Cheng herself published a collection of personal essays in September 2024, probably to address the dearth of literature on the topic herself. See Anne Anlin Cheng: *Ordinary Disasters. How I Stopped Being a Model Minority*, New York 2024.
- 24 Anne Anlin Cheng: *Ornamentalism*, New York 2019, p. ix.
- 25 *Ibid.*, original emphasis.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. x, original emphasis.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. xi.

- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Hong 2020 (as note 5), p. 9.
- 31 What I mean here has to do with an unfortunate hierarchization that automatically takes place in any given theoretical space. In the same way that the gay white male experience has long represented the entirety of the LGBTQI+ experiences, the Black experience has also become somewhat comparable in its association with all things POC where it is the «African American Women» who dominate the «genealogy of the term women of color.» See Jasbir Puar: «I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess.» *Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory*, in: *philoSOPHIA* 2, Nr. 1 (2012), p. 52.
- 32 Ngai 2005 (as note 3), p. 95.
- 33 Ibid., p. 93.
- 34 Ibid., p. 95.
- 35 Cheng 2019 (as note 24), p. 152.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 This was Cheng's response to the scathing reviews that the 2015 exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York received for its overtly Orientalist approach. Ibid., p. 91.
- 38 Luise Guest: «Experimental Material: Desire and Intimacy in the Work of Pixy Liao,» in: Yishu. *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 19, no. 4 (August 2020), [https://www.academia.edu/43908343/Experimental\\_Material\\_Desire\\_and\\_Intimacy\\_in\\_the\\_work\\_of\\_Pixy\\_Liao](https://www.academia.edu/43908343/Experimental_Material_Desire_and_Intimacy_in_the_work_of_Pixy_Liao), accessed July 31, 2025, unpaginated.
- 39 For a different interpretation of Liao and Morooka's collaborative artistic practice, in which Liao is seen as the sole authorial force, see Gaojie Pan: «Art Practices of the Chinese Women Diaspora. On Cultural Identity and Gender Modernity», in: *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 9, no. 1 (July 2022), p. 45–68.
- 40 Special thanks to Ryohei Ozaki for providing me with this cultural knowledge.
- 41 In an earlier manifestation of a similar setup titled *Japanese Room II* (2015), Liao is seen wearing the kimono conventionally with the left side in front. Interestingly, also in this photo, it's hard to tell which direction Morooka is wearing his kimono. However, whether intentional or not, the ambiguity caused by their sartorial manner in *Find a Woman You Can Rely On* (2018) seems consistent with their general collaborative practice of blurring all kinds of boundaries.
- 42 «Kimono Rule #1 [...] Only dead people have their kimono worn right over left. So unless you are at your own funeral, remember this basic but important rule for wearing a kimono! A useful and amazing [sic] memory aid for this rule is the phrase «leftover rice.»» See «Basic Rules for Wearing Kimono», <https://wattention.com/know-your-kimono-4-the-rules/>, accessed July 31, 2025
- 43 Cheng 2019 (as note 24), p. 88. This is Cheng's partial reference to Roland Barthes' dismissive attitude towards Asia, when he wrote that «to me, the Orient is a matter of indifference.» See Roland Barthes: *Empire of Signs*, New York 1983, p. 3.
- 44 Cf. Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983.
- 45 Cheng 2019 (as note 24), p. 91.
- 46 Ibid., p. 96.
- 47 Ibid., p. 17.
- 48 Ibid., p. 76.
- 49 Ibid., p. 77.
- 50 Hong 2020 (as note 5), p. 57.
- 51 Cheng 2019 (as note 24), p. 91.