SURFACE RELATIONS

Queer Forms of Asian American Inscrutability

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of the Asian American political project, which has not been about normalizing who its proper subjects were, or pinpointing origin as something other than performative copy, but rather about naming a queer internal contradiction that produced and was produced through what Lisa Lowe decades ago identified as the racial heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity of Asian America.[52] There is a privilege to being asked where we are from because, indeed, as Muñoz permits me to think, we were made for another world altogether, one that is made glimpsable in the sober reality of the present. Even the violence of this world is not totalizing; it still makes sensible, if barely, another world, a place for us, somewhere that does not evacuate a past in the turn toward a future. What we have is now, and what we need is to sense and believe in the beauty of other worlds, ones that are populated by the dead we carry with us, and by the artists and activists whose genealogies inform our other temporal becoming and potential relation, and to sense out modes of survival that persist through contemporary creative practice.

2

SILENCE AND PARASITIC HOSPITABILITY IN THE WORKS OF YOKO ONO, LAUREL NAKADATE, AND EMMA SULKOWICZ

To perform inscrutably is to shift expectations of sensory relation. Stealth performance may not be registered, yet that does not discount its impact on modern life. This chapter takes up the charge of silence and its liberal judgment of passivity. For Asian racialized people, we may pose the question: How are we heard when modern life depends on our silence? The first chapter of *Surface Relations* takes up the celebrated self-erasure of Asian women in the American theater and the ways in which Asian American and diasporic woman artists have refigured the vanishing point. This chapter continues this sensory gendering of Asian absence through the sonic by reframing the charge of quiet as an inscrutable mode of racial performance that signals a

noisy hospitability. My turn to discourses of hospitality may be surprising. As white supremacist conventions of racial visibility eradicate the presence of Asian life except as a buttress to white conquest, the tacit expectation for Asian life to support white wealth makes service a painful and draining topic. To appear through forms that do not reproduce such hatred calls for subtle strategies that work toward minoritarian endurance and grace. It may be tempting to outright refuse Orientalist strictures and perform their perceived opposite. Inscrutable aesthetics allow us to ask: How does one create modes of responding to gendered racism that are reparative and body forth other modalities altogether?

Yoko Ono and Hospitable Performance

Miss Ono sat looking inscrutably Japanese (she is actually Japanese) while members of the audience took turns to cut off her clothes with a pair of scissors.—*Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, September 29, 1966

Yoko Ono's oft-cited *Cut Piece* could be described as a performance of hospitality par excellence. Similar to Ono's other event scripts—as famously published in her book *Grapefruit* (1964)—the premise of *Cut Piece* is simple: "Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of him. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small piece of the performer's clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer's option."[1] In one view, Ono's six performances of her famous event script position her as the host of the performance and her audience members as the guests she invites to the stage who leave with something "to take with them." Since premiering in Kyoto in the summer of 1964, *Cut Piece* has garnered renewed relevance and circulation in feminist art historical research and (re)performance of Ono's event script, including the artist's own performance in September 2003 in Paris. From Julia Bryan-Wilson's 2003 essay on *Cut Piece* as a "ritual of remembrance" to Jack Halberstam's chapter on radical passivity in *The Queer Art of Failure*, *Cut Piece* is convincingly presented as the epitome of protofeminist performance art.[2] In the first section of this chapter, I pick up these discourses of feminist performance art and jostle them against a discourse of hospitality in order to theorize Ono's lifeworks as Asian feminist performances of hospitality. Surveying critical reception of *Cut Piece*, much of which enfolds Ono into racist and misogynistic ideologies, I suggest that Ono's own rhetoric of unconditional giving, as embodied in *Cut Piece*, circumvents persistent Western discourses that conjoin hospitality with female sacrifice and Asian docility. I will then turn to Jacques Derrida's meditation on hospitality to consider how Ono and Derrida challenge and extend one another and, in doing so, contrast figurations of Asian femininity beside an abstract universalized subject.

Reading the event script for *Cut Piece*, one may be struck by the performer's open invitation to the audience, who "may come on stage," "cut," and "take" from the performer. One may also note the script's focus on the performer as grammatical subject. Since it is imagined that the event script would only ever be initiated by the performer, as an abstract experiment for the imagination, as with arguably any of Ono's event scripts, the emphasis is on the performer's experience of the piece and how such an exercise might expand and enact the performer's world. This emphasis on the performer, however, is largely lost upon performance—or rather, in inviting audience participation, the performer's challenge is to receive not only the participant's physical cut but also the epistemes that would frame such an encounter.

I should mention that, as with other event scripts, the subject of the performance is universalized to include performers other than Ono herself. The unmarked social status of the performer and audience members of the script might be expected to welcome a similarly unmarked interpretation of the performance within a genealogy of participatory art from the sixties.[3] Ono's six performances of the piece, however, evidence the perlocutionary effects of her particular body performing the piece (see figure 2.1). That is, as critical reception of her performances demonstrates, Ono's *Cut Piece* circulates alongside tropes of Asian femininity as submissive and passive, as something to be seen but not heard. Note, for example, the ways Alexandra Munroe describes the "doing" of Ono's body as "traditional Japanese feminine" and "masklike": "In London, as in Kyoto, Tokyo, and New York, where she had previously presented this work, Ono sat motionless on stage in traditional Japanese feminine position—knees folded beneath her—and invited members of the audience to cut a piece of her clothing away until, nearly forty minutes later, she was left all but naked, her face masklike throughout."[4]

Even when Ono's Japaneseness is not explicitly named, the exotic and inscrutable aura of the East is conjured. In the opening essay accompanying Ono's retrospective at the Japan Society, Munroe writes, "*Cut Piece* expresses an anguished interiority while offering a social commentary on the quiet violence that binds individuals and society, the self and gender, alienation and connectedness."[5] Kristine Stiles asserts, "*Cut Piece* acquires an even more tragic and metaphysical tone and implication as it becomes

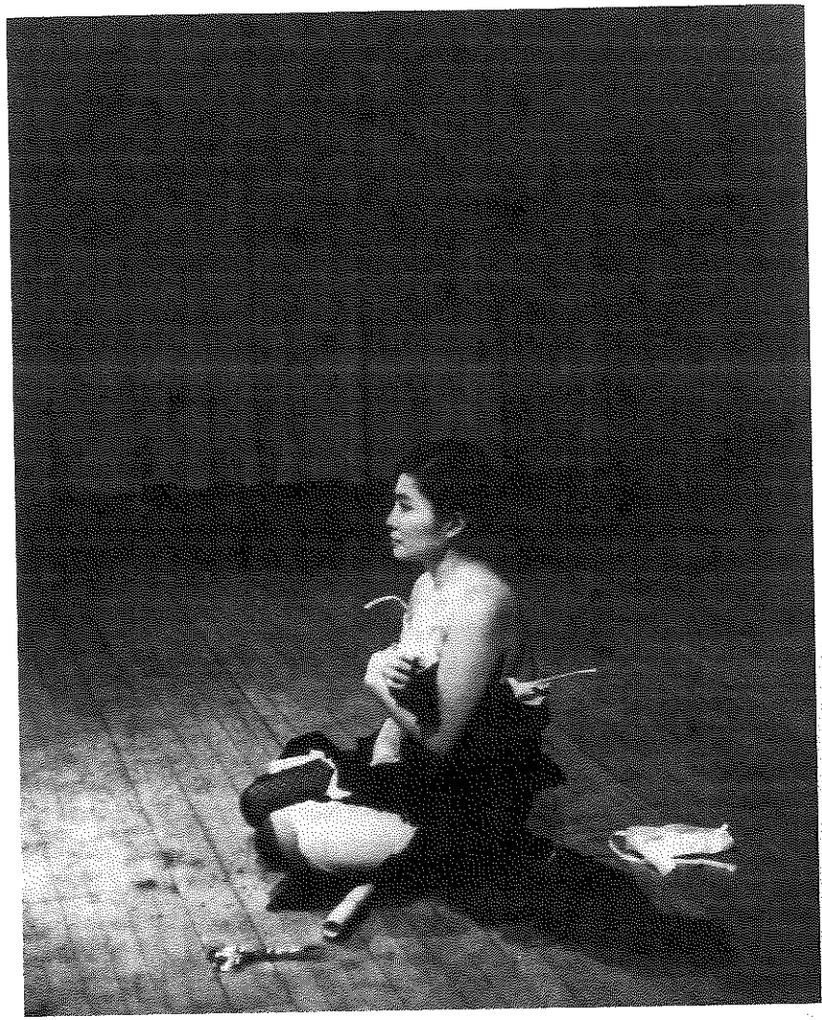

FIGURE 2.1. Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece.* Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, March 21, 1965. Photograph by Minoru Niizuma.

a representation of the translation of mental concepts into corporeal and spiritual deliberations on the problem of ethical human interaction."[6] Ono's *Cut Piece,* which here includes not only her physical performance but also the participation in and ongoing reception of the work, invites us to ask: Why is it that "an anguished interiority" and a "tragic and metaphysical tone and implication" can so repeatedly be figured in the performing body of Yoko Ono? As Bryan-Wilson asks, "Does *Cut Piece,* with its dual faces of passivity and exhibitionism, exemplify a collective fantasy about the contradictory status of the silent but signifying Japanese female artist?"[7]

In Ono's work, something beckons for recognition. Something invites our attention, a something that harks back to Claire Bishop's formulation of a "relational antagonism" that "would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony."[8] In this vein, Ono's work exposes an awkward relationship between aesthetics of Asian femininity and a discourse of harmonious hospitality. Ono's rhetoric of unconditional giving finds an interlocutor in poststructural theory. For instance, we can turn to *Of Hospitality,* a book composed of side-by-side texts by Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle. (The format of the book, subtitled *Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond,* suggests a structure for hospitality, one that juxtaposes Dufourmantelle's "Invitation" on the left-hand pages and Derrida's two lectures "Foreigner Question" and "Step of Hospitality / No Hospitality" on the right. Provokingly, both texts begin on the same longitudinal place on their first page, but, for the remainder of the 155 pages, Dufourmantelle's text is italicized and paired with substantial blank space beside Derrida's pages of full text. For now, I simply wish to gesture to this visual experience that structures the reading of *Of Hospitality* and assure the reader that we will return to this negative space, this noise, later in the chapter.) Returning us to the conceptual query of hospitality, Derrida conjures the image of a door and invites: "Let us say yes *to who or what turns up,* before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification,* whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female."[9] Let us say yes. Derrida proposes an indiscriminate welcoming of another through the threshold, in a manner that is not so different from Ono's performance of saying yes. Regardless of who approaches her, Ono remains seated and more or less "motionless" on the stage as the participant cuts away her clothing. Ono's overall stillness makes all the more noticeable, for example, her arm's movement to her chest when an audience member cuts across her bra straps. Even then, in the famous performance document filmed by the Maysles brothers, Ono does not speak or end the performance. Rather, the camera captures her resolve in enduring the performance.

Although Ono could be said to invite participants "before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*" of who or what they are, the audience anticipates Ono's presence. Derrida's formulation of

the law of hospitality grants open parameters for the "who or what [that] turns up." The particulars of who the "us" in the position of saying yes is, however, are not addressed. Derrida's request for unconditional giving is seductive when the subject is universalized and abstract. However, as audience reception instructs, we marked subjects do not socially experience ourselves as such. Saying yes presupposes the possibility of saying otherwise, presumes the person inside the door has a choice. Historically, this acknowledgment is discriminately dispensed.

Derrida nods to the problematic social logics of hospitality toward the end of his second lecture, calling the model of hospitality "paternal and phallogocentric," a "conjugal model" in which the father "represents [the laws of hospitality] and submits to them to submit the others to them in this violence of the power of hospitality."[10] The philosopher's concluding images in *Of Hospitality* are of two moments when, as demonstrations of hospitality, two patriarchs in the Old Testament surrender their virgin daughters to foreign guests. Without further analysis, Derrida aligns host with patriarch and leaves room for readers to problematize the anti-woman and colonial staging of hospitality.

This relationship between hospitality and ownership calls for an intersectional analysis that critiques the position of women, children, and people of color as property. As Maurice Hamington writes in *Feminism and Hospitality*, "Women and children are historically included in the category of property and therefore become part [of] what can be offered to the guest."[11] An intersectional feminist approach might further trouble the racialized and transnational dimensions of property that are offered to guests in the name of hospitality. Maureen Sander-Staudt notes the use of military sex slaves, so-called comfort women, in the Japanese Imperial Army, for example, to argue for the ways in which certain (predominantly Korean) bodies are feminized, sexualized, and objectified as both sacrificial gifts and collateral damage for an ethnically pure (Japanese) nation.[12] The euphemism of comfort here signals the historical asymmetry of which bodies receive comfort and which bodies are objectified in the name of providing comfort.

This chapter is a study of the possibilities of and in saying yes, especially for women and trans people in the contemporary United States. The imperialist equation of certain bodies, land, and culture feminized these zones of the other as exploitable resources. The bodies of Asian women are overdetermined by xenophobic and colonial methods of conquest, where the feminized body is aligned with land and natural resources, as part of the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny. The metaphorical and material practice of penetration (of

body, land, and culture) becomes not a discourse about permission to enter (presuming a code of hospitality that precedes the encounter) but rather of manifest entitlement, patriarchal benevolence, and missions to civilize. Meanwhile, women historically have been exempt from receiving hospitality, including access to naturalization or citizenship as with gendered exclusions from the United States such as the Page Law of 1875 (which effectively barred the immigration of Chinese and Japanese women, arguing all were prostitutes and therefore threatening to the moral purity of the nation).[13]

Who has possession of the door, the synecdoche of the domicile? And who is seen alongside that door as another possession, as a necessary prop in the scene of hospitality? In her consideration of the gendered division of public and private space in the Old Testament scenes, Sander-Staudt argues that a feminist approach to hospitality necessitates considerations of safety and home. She writes, "Whereas men are shown to be in need of hospitality because of the dangers of the world outside of the home, women are shown to have refuge nowhere, without condemnation."[14] Indeed, the entities created to mitigate "dangers of the world outside of the home" are often the same entities that ensure danger for women. For example, we may observe how US military campaigns around the Pacific Ocean for more than the past century figure Asian women as, simultaneously, in need of protection and, with the boom of tourist economies (sexual and otherwise) at those bases, available for purchase. Asian women, whose underacknowledged labor is the "constitutive absence" in nationalist and transnational discourses, have been conscripted to give and grant (sexual, emotional, cultural) access.[15] To be clear, my intention here is not to shame or antagonize people who work in the sex or hospitality industries. Rather, I point to the disciplinary formation of "Asian woman" as an effect of not only a conceptual discursive tradition but also the militarized and capitalist manifestations of paternal hospitality.

Discourses that promote hospitality (as with Derrida's unconditional giving) without acknowledging the historic power differentials that accompany their circulation risk once more putting the burden of "saying yes" on women of color most of all. I am critical of this hegemonic mandate for women and people of color to give (and labor) unconditionally. I desire a disidentificatory discourse of hospitality, one that does not vacate or concede the pleasures of giving or saying yes. I am moved by the scholarship of Celine Parreñas Shimizu and Nguyen Tan Hoang, who innovate gender and sexuality studies and Asian Americanist critique with their respective formulations of the "productive perversity" of Asian female hypersexuality and the bottomy methodology of gay male Asian culture.[16] If Asian women

are produced as hospitable thresholds, then which relationships are possible (and desirable) between Asian femininity and hospitality? What can we do with this Western ethical imperative to say yes? Can performances of hospitality in fact constitute a practice of feminist becoming and world-making?

Though Ono does not explicitly use the language of ethics or hospitality, she has described *Cut Piece* as a gift experiment. Ono explains Buddha's travel narrative as "a form of total giving as opposed to reasonable giving like 'logically you deserve this' or 'I think this is good, therefore I am giving this to you.'"[17] Ono tells the story of the Buddha's practice of giving to contextualize her decision to perform *Cut Piece* wearing the best outfit available in her wardrobe, suggesting that to do otherwise would be against the spirit of saying yes.

In her solo performance, Ono powerfully plays with this expectation of Asian hospitality in her publicized insistence on peace and saying yes. As Hamington writes, "In hospitality, Derrida finds a fundamental tension of morality—an impossibility or *aporia*—that humanity must struggle with. Hospitality calls us to give of ourselves. In its pure form, or unconditional hospitality, absolute giving is demanded but one can no longer be the host or the giver, if all is given away."[18] Though Ono's project of total giving is in the spirit of Derrida's law of hospitality to an extent, it runs up against the problem of temporality and duration. The risk of total giving as self-sacrifice becomes prominent when the perceived host is not an unmarked and universalized body but one that traffics in historic tropes of hypersexuality and romanticized self-harm. Notably, Ono has offered a Buddhist hermeneutic that would allow for something other than an interpretation of female self-sacrifice, as historically fetishized in high Western art. With the decision to wear her best suit at the first performance of *Cut Piece*, Ono has described the Buddha as an inspiration, as one who operates in an economy of gift, of total giving. In this sense, Ono gestures to alternative genealogies that contextualize hospitable practices of Asian femininity in order to disrupt a capitalist and imperialist economy and temporality.

I invite a pause here to recognize the availability of such a reading.

Despite such possibility, a tradition of interpreting Asian female performance in a Judeo-Christian logic of hospitality emerges in reception of Ono's work. If, as Derrida suggests, the host is also always a hostage, then Ono, as the host of the performance, is also hostage to Orientalist discourse of gendered Asian racialization.[19] In other words, a performer has what some might term agency in creating the performance, but she is subject and subjected to audience reception. As Karen Shimakawa writes, "Asian American performers never walk onto an empty stage" as "that space is always already densely populated with phantasms of orientalness through and against which an Asian American performer must struggle to be seen."[20] This "struggle to be seen" is exemplified by Ono's appearance in popular art historical discourses. Ono's work is often discussed, if at all, in conversations in which her social identity serves as a foil for a white, Western, masculine subject.[21] Think of the ways in which the sign of Ono is perhaps most famous in collaboration with John Lennon or in relation to the largely white and European Fluxus crowd. As Midori Yoshimoto writes, "After 1967, Ono became so closely associated with John Lennon that her earlier avant-garde activities were forgotten or seen merely as eccentric by the public."[22] More damningly, Bryan-Wilson writes, "After [Ono's] marriage to John Lennon, she became the embodiment of the 'yellow peril' itself, a controlling Asian dragon lady, depicted in the most racist terms imaginable."[23] Despite (or perhaps because of) Ono's ethos of total giving, she cannot control how her work is received or taken up by others. A universal (in theory) and feminized and racialized (in practice) discourse of saying yes creates a mandate for minoritized womxn to offer generosity to xenophobic systems that would normalize their labor of giving as complicity or aspirational assimilation. A hegemonic discourse of hospitality, then, continues to tether the benefactor of paternal hospitality (through figures of white masculinity) to Asian femininity, defining itself by these imperialist dynamics. Can Asian femininity exist beside white masculinity without bodying forth a posture of sacrificial host? Can a hospitable posture, embodied by an Asian woman, be interpreted otherwise?

Though hospitality is a fraught topic for discussions of Asianness and femininity, I pursue it with the hope that performances of Asian femininity may model and create new epistemologies for hospitality and the "complex personhood" theorized by Avery Gordon and furthered in Kandice Chuh's work on Asian Americanist critique.[24] This chapter is my experiment in how to possibly grapple with Asian femininity and its overburdened sexual connotations, with interest not so much in narrating or defending why or what Asian femininity is, and more—sounding a familiar bell in performance studies—in what performances of Asian femininity can do for those of us craving more capacious practices of feminist sociality.

If hospitality as unconditional giving soon reinforces a tidy dichotomy between East and West, female and male, and reinscribes exhausting power differentials, then which forms of welcome, invitation, and saying yes can Asian women perform? To clarify, I write with the condition that giving and saying yes can be pleasurable social modes—pleasures that are not uninformed by a colonial hierarchy of identity production but that are also not wholly

coterminous with their means. My intellectual pursuits of these pleasures are inspired by the work of queer scholars, including Elizabeth Freeman, Juana María Rodríguez, and adrienne maree brown, who create conceptual space and gesture to the lived experience of pleasure in and between bodies as important historiographic work.[25] Ono's work elegantly asserts that a discourse of hospitality historically constructs, and is constructed by, discourses of Asian femininity. It also poses questions: What does this mean for the purposive performance of hospitality by Asian women? How do these performances in turn challenge the legibility of hospitality, and also what is legible as Asian femininity?

Laurel Nakadate and Parasitic Femininity

> There's always a gaping hole in the center of Nakadate's world, something that echoes the disaster of prescribed sexual roles.—JERRY SALTZ, "Whatever Laurel Wants"

In one of Laurel Nakadate's first video works, *Happy Birthday* (2000), the contemporary Brooklyn-based artist asks three men to celebrate her birthday in three one-on-one settings. These were invitations to participate in suspended disbelief; the day was not her birthday and the guests were not her friends. They met when each man separately approached Nakadate in public. Anecdotally, the three scenes follow a series of similar exchanges: he asked her out in a public space, and she asked if he would make a video with her. As Nakadate describes, "I showed up at their houses in a party dress with a birthday cake and I asked them to pretend that it was my birthday and to celebrate my birthday with me. I'd have this birthday cake and I'd set it down on their kitchen table and ask them to sing to me. So they sang 'Happy Birthday' a cappella and we had cake together."[26]

The resulting videos are often shown in a three-channel installation (see figure 2.2). In the left monitor, for example, Nakadate and a man are seated around a table in an eat-in kitchen. Behind them, opened French doors reveal a mattress on the floor. The man facing the camera has long black hair, a moustache, and glasses, and he is dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans. Beside him, on the viewer's right, Nakadate's chair is angled toward the man, her feet bare on what appears to be a red Oriental rug. She wears a black skirt with a pink sleeveless floral button-down, and her wavy hair runs down her back. She lights the cake candles and then places her hands in her lap. The man begins to warble out the familiar anniversary tune. In the middle monitor, a seated man in a collared shirt grins and looks on while Nakadate leans over the square wooden table, poised to blow out the cake's birthday candles

FIGURE 2.2. Laurel Nakadate, *Happy Birthday*. © Laurel Nakadate, courtesy of Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

(see figure 2.3). The fridge and counters behind them suggest a crowded kitchen. The man's bare feet are seen, crossed at the ankle, and beside them sit two small bowls possibly for a pet in the bottom left corner of the shot. Two white plates on the table anticipate slices of cake, while a long knife is placed as though a linear extension of the man's right arm. Behind them, a closed door's latch hangs unsecured. In the right monitor, Nakadate sits on a red couch with her feet tucked under her skirt, and she turns away from the camera to slice the cake at the center of the frame. Her sneaker-wearing costar smiles and holds out a plate while seated in a yellow armchair. In each of the scenes, Nakadate's hair is long and her feet are bare. Seen together, the monitors play out domestic scenes of uncanny birthday party convention.

The mood of the scene is unclear; neither attendee seems particularly joyful or sure of their role. Yet, when she occasionally and briefly looks straight into the camera, Nakadate seems to wink at the viewer as if to reassure us that she knows what she is doing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Nakadate has faced criticism for exploiting her video costars, whose private spaces and, to an extent, desires are made vulnerable to her camera. The men want something

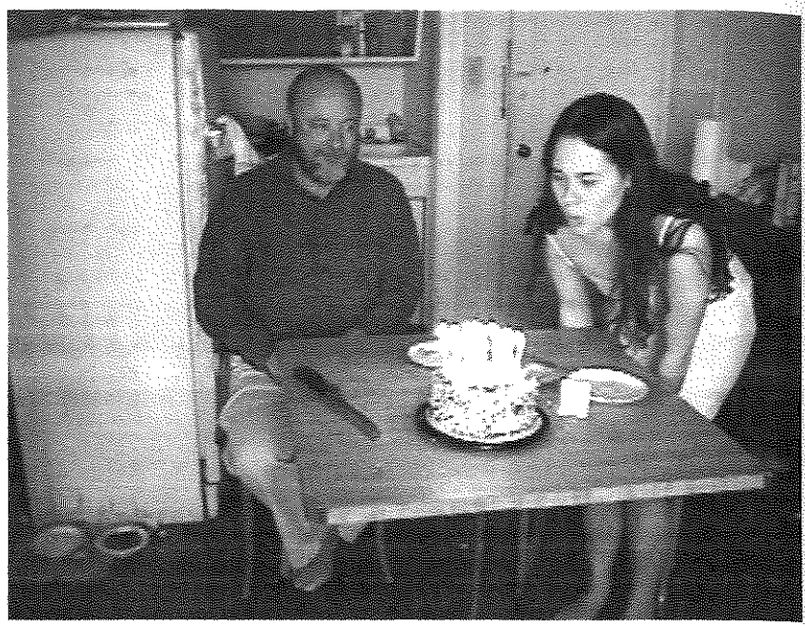

FIGURE 2.3. Laurel Nakadate, *Happy Birthday*. © Laurel Nakadate, courtesy of Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

from her that is inseparable, it would seem, from their racialized and gendered conceptions of her, and some critics suggest Nakadate takes advantage of their desires. The artist insists that the men consent to making videos with her and that some have even become her friends and repeat collaborators. She has also commented: "After hundreds of years of art history, a young half-Asian girl meets older white men, and *she's* the predator? Suddenly no one can take it?"[27]

In Nakadate's work, with the discourse of exploitation, I sense a related and perhaps parallel experiment with hospitality to Ono's. To exploit can mean to take advantage of another's hospitality, to respond to another's gift inappropriately. This would seem to reverse the racial and gender designations of host and guest as previously imagined, where Asian women are seemingly ineligible as guests but rather thresholds for the condition of hospitality. In *Happy Birthday*, the proverbial sound at the door does not make obvious who is on the inside or outside. Approached by white male strangers in parking lots and other public spaces in New Haven, Nakadate is hailed as a guest, in one formulation. She then responds from the position of impertinence, inviting the additional guest of her camera. She shows

up at the men's homes, but, just as well, she could be seen to host: bringing cake, elevating the dress code, preparing activities, lighting the candles, cutting the cake.

Yet Nakadate's design of the performance suggests that she is not exactly a host. The space is pointedly not hers. Nakadate is clear to film the encounters in the men's private homes. She has said: "For me one of the primary motivations at the beginning of this work was going out into the world and meeting strangers. And whether I was meant to be part of their world or not, I just wanted to spend more time there."[28] Nakadate is a visitor, an oxymoronic invited imposer spending time in a world that may not be "meant to be" hers. Though Nakadate could be and has been interpreted as an irreverent, rude, or exploitative guest, I suggest that the language of guest and host is wrong altogether when it comes to her work.

Nakadate nominates herself as host in another's home but also as the guest of honor to be celebrated. At the same time, there is no indication of disappointment or altered expectations for the men. If Nakadate is a solicitor or an opportunist, so, too, are the men. Nakadate's video art suggests that aesthetics of Asian femininity can disrupt the dialectic of guest/host. As with Ono in *Cut Piece*, Nakadate is simultaneously host of her performance and hostage to Orientalist discourse. Nakadate's role as director of *Happy Birthday*'s video documentation, however, extends the reach of her artistic direction and blurs the dualistic focus. I now shift from the framework of hospitality to that of parasitism, with an interest in how Nakadate's performance of parasitism in turn differently shapes Asian feminist sociality.

The figure of the parasite differently sounds the knock at the door. In the preface of Michel Serres's book *The Parasite*, translator Lawrence R. Schehr clarifies that "in French, the word [*parasite*] has three meanings: a biological parasite, a social parasite, and static."[29] This static does not identify the knock of a guest or host at the threshold but announces a parasite, gnawing at the dialectic of host/guest (*hôte/hôte*). Serres's example par excellence may be instructive: his main stars are not people but rats, beginning with a city rat who invites a country rat over for leftovers at the tax farmer's table, only to be scared away by a noise at the door.[30] Eschewing a model of host and guest, Serres identifies each of the players as a parasite in its own right: the tax farmer, the city rat, the country rat, and the noise: "Strictly speaking," he writes, "they all interrupt."[31] The egalitarian rule of the parasite: it is a potential position for all. The reader may already intuit my turning to Serres's parasite in examining Nakadate's work, since roles in a domestic scene, traditionally in a rhetoric of hospitality, are Nakadate's playthings.

Serres writes that the parasite "is social technique and knows how to play at the mastery of men and at their domestication."[32] Both Nakadate and her costars rather willingly submit to the staged "domestication" of the men for the duration of the videos. Serres adds that the parasite "is the relation and not fixed in the essence, that he is not fixed in a station but is in the functioning of the relations in his being part of the warp and woof, that he is relational and thus that he is multiple and collective."[33] We note the gendering of the parasite here as well as the parasite's entitlement when Serres writes that "man is the universal parasite, that everything and everyone around him is a hospitable space."[34] What intervention would a feminist rendering of the parasite make? In thinking with Nakadate's video work, I draw upon Anna Watkins Fisher's work on feminist parasitism as a "tactical feminist remapping of the structural dynamics of gendered territoriality as the parasite comes to overwhelm the terrain of its host."[35] Recuperating Serres's parasite into a feminist rhetoric, Fisher emphasizes the shift away from a default "liberal autonomous individual" and toward "notions of the minor, the derivative, the relational."[36]

I welcome this turn and draw inspiration from Fisher's feminist intervention on parasitism as "an experimental art practice as well as a performance model for contemporary feminist politics."[37] In her work, Fisher identifies a gendered history of "the feminized parasite and her masculinized host" and studies conceptual work by artists including Sophie Calle, Chris Kraus, Roisin Byrne, and Ann Liv Young.[38] Fisher asks: "How have long-held anxieties within feminist theory over the notion of the parasite—a historically feminized metaphor for an intruder that is overly dependent, ungracious, and unwelcome—emerged as a tactical model for reinvesting contemporary feminism?"[39]

I wish to build upon this question to ask: What about the ethnic, migrant, and transnational parasite, who is already familiar with discourses of being received as "overly dependent, ungracious, and unwelcome"? How have long-held anxieties around hospitality in gender and Asian Americanist discourses given rise to a tactical model for making parasitic conventions of hospitality? This consideration allows me to wonder about the imposition of hospitality on Asian women, for whom the descriptor "ungracious" fits uneasily. As we see with descriptions of Yoko Ono's work, Asian women are often expected to be docile, submissive, and eager to serve even as they simultaneously must reassert their right to personhood, citizenship, and safety. As Leslie Bow reminds us, Asian female sexuality functions as an implicit stage for social, cultural, and political allegiance, such that Asian women are never immune to charges of betrayal from one affiliation or another.[40] In this view, "ungracious" is the paradoxical other side to subjectivization via hospitality.

We may note Asian biracial parasitism as a weaponization of this feminine threat as well. Nakadate's work is proximal to the racializing matrix of the art market and, more broadly, circuits of US sociality. Though Nakadate does not necessarily identify her work as Asian American, it is worth noting the gendered language in critical reception of her work, as well as her biraciality, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. At times the language is more nuanced, describing her as an "enigmatic, Mona Lisa beauty," "a fit and attractive woman in her mid-30s," "sporting cute clothing that's just slightly tacky, and natural hair and makeup."[41] Other language is overtly sexualized, describing Nakadate as "a baby doll [who turns] into an avenging angel and a wolf in baby doll's clothing," one who exudes a "slutty, back-alley exoticism" that "blends naïve schoolgirl with the dominatrix."[42] The racialized dimension of these sexualized tropes is further clarified in reviews like this for an artist who was born, raised, and maintains residence in the United States: "Nakadate is a half-Japanese, half-American photographer living in New York."[43] Without using the language of race and gender, the artist has stated: "It's always a problem—you've got to figure out a place to put your body."[44]

Perhaps critical comment on Nakadate's biraciality invites us to further theorize the parasite's coupling of intimacy and difference.[45] Fisher positions parasitism "as a corrosive queering move that challenges recent work in queer theory and performance studies that has privileged, under the opaque appellation 'negativity,' moves of cynical distancing, pure refusal, exit, and escape to argue instead for maneuvers of overintimacy, exaggerated mimicry, and excessive appropriation for feminist theory."[46] Thinking with queer-of-color critique and scholarship in queer diaspora that embrace and extend negativity, I suggest that it is precisely the queer parasitism of Asian femininity that challenges the logic of "instead" between "cynical distancing" and "overintimacy."[47] That is, through viewing Nakadate's work as well as Ono's, I feel the brightening sense that the queer work therein is the holding together of distance and intimacy, one that names the particular crux of Asian and feminine becoming, one that cannot entirely refuse the language of hospitality in the register of the real, but that is also not wholly delimited by such a discourse.

Yet I agree with Fisher in the sense that "negativity" is also not exactly appropriate to describe the Asian feminist practices that I argue Ono and Nakadate both perform: their silent art of giving complicates the language of negativity, not the least because their gifts are materially productive, whether

in the fabric scraps of *Cut Piece*, the cake of *Happy Birthday*, Nakadate's relationships with her costars, or the performance documentation of both artworks. Neither could their performances be described as affectively negative in a straightforward sense. Studied together, alongside rhetorics of gendered hospitality, the works of Ono and Nakadate open questions about Asian negativity as a contradiction in terms.

Whether within or beside conversations of the negative, I prefer the idiom of inscrutability to reserve conceptual space for the curious relationality between Nakadate and the costarring men, one that allows for possible intimacy and exploitation, for critique and friendship. My theory of inscrutability does not foreclose intimacy but gestures to the racialized and gendered systems of knowledge used to cognize sociality as such. Nakadate parasitically stages "the minor, the derivative, the relational" by saying yes to men's invitations and in turn inviting them to participate, all the while maintaining distance in the space that the camera and imagined viewer occupy. As Serres writes, "The best relation would be no relation. By definition it does not exist, if it exists, it is not observable."[48]

Just as Nakadate's parasitic play blurs her role in the encounter, the disruption of the host and guest dialectic destabilizes what we viewers think we know about these men. Their relation to one another is not clear, but it is made observable. I wish to note, too, that Serres's "no relation" is in fact not an absence or lack in Nakadate's staging but something in excess of observation under normative optics. In this sense, parasitic relation is not antirelational or necessarily along a project of self-shattering negativity. Rather, Asian performance of feminist parasitism insists on relationality by performing it, allowing for the distance necessary for such relationality to take shape. The impossibility of its observation highlights the interruptive work of viewing. Looking at their performances of hospitality side by side, I suggest that, with Ono and Nakadate, the viewer's involvement holds the viewer accountable for the staged encounter as well and welcomes the possibility for spectatorial resistance.

The parasite needs the host/guest in some sense, but it should not be forgotten that the host/guest needs the parasite for evidence of its own existence. More, the host/guest is also always already a parasite, in the position to interrupt. If you have a parasite, you are a part of history, you are witnessed, as these men are witnessed in the video archive because of Nakadate's work. They need her to appear, just as she needs them to make her work. The parasite changes the rules, knocks on something—not to ask for permission, for permission is not in the vocabulary of the parasite. Rather,

the sound rings in a new epistemology, one where the relation generates something new. We viewers might question: On which side of the door do we stand? Suddenly, we realize we have been in it, too. Nakadate's gaze into her own camera interrupts not only the domestic scene of birthday ritual but also the viewer's practice of unremarkable voyeurism.

What Is Almost Inaudible

> I want to think that this noise I constantly hear at the door is produced by a being whom I would like to know.—MICHEL SERRES, *The Parasite*

Inscrutability takes different forms, or it may be more accurate to say that the judgment of something as inscrutable alerts us to the dawning articulation of a new form. Without collapsing the one into the other, I continue by juxtaposing inscrutability with Serres's formulation of parasitic static to show how hospitable sociality depends on not only sensory interruptions but also interruptions of our interpretations of sensory interruptions.

For example, in a literal understanding of static noise, it may be worth pointing out that both *Cut Piece* and *Happy Birthday* feature speechless artists. Both Ono and Nakadate sit quietly in their surroundings, communicating nonverbally. Videos of *Cut Piece* as well as *Happy Birthday* instead rely on the participants to create the soundtrack and to interpret the noise. Their deliberate silence, I suggest, positions them as observers. Serres writes that the "observer always makes less noise than the observed. He is thus unobservable by the observed."[49] Yet by emphasizing their own roles as artists and silent observers, Ono and Nakadate interrupt this dichotomous relationship with the presence of the viewer as a fellow observer and draw attention to their performance of social relation through silence.

Static and sounds of fumbling permeate the length of the Maysles brothers' film of *Cut Piece*. The camera primarily returns to Ono's face, zooming in and out to show the state of her dress, including a black cardigan and mesh stockings. The camera pans sometimes to the unlit house, from which coughs, laughter, and applause occasionally erupt. The wooden stage amplifies the heeled steps of approaching audience members, the metal weight of the scissors put down. As participants move toward Ono and cut, most often they are also speechless, perhaps uncomfortable, perhaps focused on making careful cuts. As viewers, we can speculate as to the participants' silence, though Ono's own silence sets a tone. This unspoken invitation to share in silence is not reliably heard or heeded by others. "Very delicate, it might take

some time," the white-bloused man chortles to the audience before kneeling at Ono's side. He cheats out to the audience he makes a cut directly down the center line of her undershirt. Studying the shirt's exposed wing, he then snips the left shoulder strap, at which point Ono looks down to see the damage done. When Anne Dufourmantelle suggests that "we must learn to perceive what is almost inaudible," readers may question how it is that those who do not seek to perceive or listen may do so.[50] By necessitating the involvement of audience members as performers of *Cut Piece*, Ono stages a social situation that highlights their participation and responsibility.

In fact, two voices by the camera's microphone giggle, and one remarks: "Look at the expression on her face!" The other replies, "He's getting carried away." The participant onstage boasts, "I'll make a piece for *Playboy* with it." Meanwhile, Ono's eyes and neck move around, silently searching the man's face, seemingly with no returned look. He stands behind her, pulling and cutting the shirt away, and struts as he cuts the shoulders of her bra straps. From the audience shouts a voice: "For God's sake, stop being such a creep!"

Ono's disciplined silence in contrast amplifies the sounds in her audience and draws attention to the uncontrolled nature of audience members' reactions to her and to one another. No such live group audience is present in Nakadate's video world. Though Nakadate is also silent throughout her performance, the men have a score to work with and we viewers have an expectation of a song to hear. Notably, Nakadate invites and conducts the noise without making any sound herself. The audio of *Happy Birthday* highlights the convention that structures their encounter. The eponymous celebratory greeting gives us a speech act, or an Austinian total speech situation, one that could not be complete without the world's most famous tune. Though Nakadate and her costars perform the requisite conventions, with props and songs and perhaps even sincerities, there is an overriding feeling of wrongness. The strict familiarity of a birthday song makes more palpable the interruptive sense of misfire or abuse. We note the flatness of the left-monitor man's closing phrase of the song, while the man in the middle monitor leaves out the second line of the song altogether. It may be tempting to suggest that the birthday scenario is failed, and yet the fact of its doing returns to the question of *why* the two people are together and, ultimately, what it does for viewers' sense of social possibility. On these fronts, Nakadate's persistent silence through the three scenes produces a complementary sense of inscrutability. The artist avoids eye contact even when the men joke with her, as the man in the right monitor does, voicing a self-conscious refrain ("I'll have to throw my scale out!") at the sight of cake. Nakadate's muteness, juxtaposed

with the men's amateur croons, plays into a facade of girlish inscrutability at the same time as it compels the men to fill the silence. They are made to provide the narrative and the entertainment. Her performance of inscrutability presents the noise, and the men are made to respond.

This note on muteness and parasitic performances of Asian femininity is not my effort to reinforce stereotypes of Asian and feminine reticence but to highlight Ono's and Nakadate's artistic use of this trope.[51] Their silence invites and commands the participants to offer the labor of talking and interpreting their actions. Their silence—reverberating against one another when read together, creating a duet over time and space—withholds readymade meaning of their work, allowing an existence in transformational noise. Their silence, too, welcomes an interest in what is there, constellating the inscrutable, the parasitic, and Sianne Ngai's writing on the aesthetic judgment of the interesting. As Ngai describes, "Regardless of the particular objects and situations to which it is ascribed, the judgment always seems underpinned by a calm, if not necessarily weak, affective intensity whose minimalism is somehow understood to secure its link to ratiocinative cognition and to lubricate the formation of social ties."[52] Like the aesthetic of the interesting, I suggest, the inscrutable has "the capacity to produce new knowledge."[53] Unlike the aesthetic of the interesting, however, the inscrutable gestures to the Orientalist abjection of the Asian, the feminine, and the silent by quietly contorting its moves to uncertain social effects. Rather than refuse a stereotype of mute Asian femininity, Ono and Nakadate perform its technical restraint, in what Shimakawa might call an abject mime, and effectively shift focus to the noisy happenings that such inscrutable performance permits.

Perhaps here I may circle back to or pull through Dufourmantelle, who has been silently waiting to appear in this chapter, as the one who invited Derrida to remark on hospitality and who comments on Derrida's "poetic hospitality" as that which in significant ways eludes "the day, the visible, and memory."[54] Dufourmantelle's language of the night, and her text's visual reliance on blank space, is sympathetic to my interest in inscrutability, feminized silence, and Serres's noise. Dufourmantelle describes her attempt "to come close to a silence around which discourse is ordered, and that a poem sometimes discovers, but always pulls itself back from unveiling in the very movement of speech or writing."[55] We may note Dufourmantelle's rhetoric of silence and unveiling as interestingly constitutive of philosophy's racializing and gendered aesthetics. One of this chapter's explorations has been to identify the silent construction of Asian woman in Western discourses of hospitality; and, through that effort, to engage the work of Ono and Nakadate as two

contemporary Asian/American female artists who pointedly reconstruct and trouble the terms of their legibility as such through participant-based performance. If at moments I have struggled to do so with more clarity, consistent with my own capacity for failure, I also wonder if it is the discursive construction of Asian femininity that in fact resists straight narration. This queer ephemerality is also what returns Asian femininity once more to its ontology as performance, as that which is lived out in material bodies and takes meaning through discursive spectatorship, "always pull[ing] itself back from unveiling in the very movement of speech or writing."

Emma Sulkowicz and the Potential to Be Offered

> There are qualitative distinctions between being silent and being *silenced.* Similarly, as I have suggested, it is a quite different process to be silent than it is to be unheard.—PATTI DUNCAN, *Tell This Silence*

How might these formulations of parasitic femininity and strategic Asian silence bear on Emma Sulkowicz's famed *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)* of the 2014–15 school year (see figure 2.4)? The durational performance by the then Columbia University undergraduate student artist may ring familiar to readers given its recent and wide coverage. Sulkowicz created an arts thesis project that made visible and material the toll of carrying the emotional, psychic, and material weight of sexual violence and inadequate institutional response. With the commitment to continue the performance until either they or their attacker, fellow student Paul Nungesser, officially left Columbia University, Sulkowicz and their performance brought urgent issues of campus safety, sexual assault and rape, and institutional responses to "private" grievance to major headlines. The performance concluded upon Sulkowicz's and Nungesser's graduation, as the institution did not expel Nungesser, nor did he leave of his own volition. Comparisons of *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)* have been made to Ana Mendieta's *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973) and Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Liebowitz's *Three Weeks in May* (1977), and we may be reminded of Ono's film *Rape* (1969) as well.[56]

The "rules of engagement" were written on the walls of Sulkowicz's art studio at Columbia, and described in a performance document on the artist's website:

1 Whenever I am on Columbia University (CU) property, I must have the mattress with me. This area includes the campus, all the buildings on campus, and any Columbia-owned buildings off-campus.

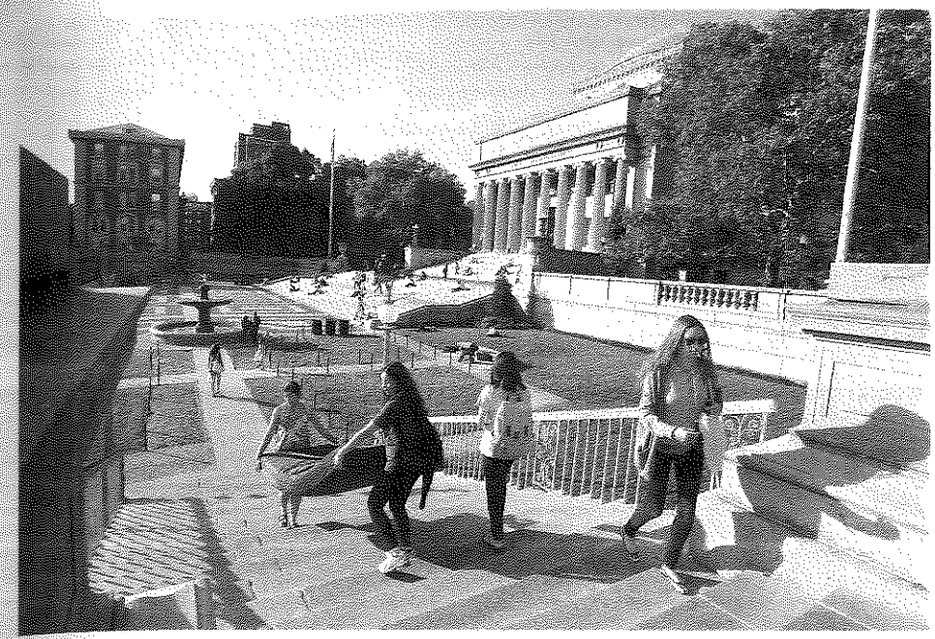

FIGURE 2.4. Emma Sulkowicz, left, with Gabriela Pelsinger, *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight).* Photograph by Jennifer S. Altman for the *New York Times.*

2 When I am inside a CU-owned building, the mattress must be inside the building as well. However, it *can* be in a different room.
3 I may not seek help carrying the mattress. However, if someone offers either to help me carry the mattress or carry it for me on their own accord, I can accept their aid.
4 When heading from a location owned by CU to a location that isn't owned by CU, I must leave the mattress in a safe place on campus.
5 When heading from a location not owned by CU to a location owned by CU, I must first collect the mattress from wherever I left it previously.
6 I must notify all my professors about the performance before classes begin. They may deny me a spot in their classes at their own discretion.[57]

The emphasis on the mattress as central performance prop/costar shows the overdetermined epistemology of the mattress as a metaphor for the weight of the experience and memory of sexual violence. When the press rushed to conflate the performance as legible protest, Sulkowicz critiqued, "In the

news, people have been calling my piece a protest, and just ignoring the fact it is not really a protest but a performance-art piece."[58] Implications as to Sulkowicz's personal character quickly echo those of Ono's and Nakadate's reception. Writes *Elle Magazine*, "Reactions to the piece, [Sulkowicz] says, range from extreme adoration—'Emma's a goddess and angel'—to extreme hatred—'Emma's a slut and a liar who's trying to grab attention.'"[59] What might it mean, then, not to consider *Mattress Performance* as a clearly legible message and call for direct justice but instead to interpret *Mattress Performance* through aesthetics of inscrutability as they work to discipline and variously invisibilize and hypervisibilize Asian American women and nonbinary people?

The "weight" referenced within the artwork's parenthetical title may be understood not only as a simple synecdoche of the weight of rape but also the weight of insisting on consensual intimacy, and the burden of practicing this feminist ethic of consent while waiting for justice—a form of legal justice that must be demanded under neoliberalism, even if its recognition (of expelling Nungesser, for instance) would not address the greater social problems of misogyny and rape culture. The burden to do the most while one's own needs are not being tended to is an extension of what I've articulated here as parasitic femininity, where Sulkowicz contorts the burden of liveness they as an alleged rape survivor are made to bear, in performing testimony and performing perfect survivorship (further explored in their subsequent artwork, the video *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol*). Rather than outright "saying yes" to those institutionalized avenues and scripts of redress, Sulkowicz creates a performance piece that invites practices of consent with others, including with strangers, and thereby reveals the burdens of its disappointments (see figure 2.5).

Rule number 3 delineates that the artist's relationship to the mattress can invite an expansive sociality to their task of carrying it, however asymmetrical that request for help may be. As Sulkowicz shares in an early video circulated by *Columbia Spectator*, "One of the rules of the piece is that I am not allowed to ask for help in carrying the mattress, but others are allowed to give help if they come up and offer it."[60] With this rule, the artist conjures an audience and configures the viewing public as always already in the position to (1) help and (2) offer help. Sulkowicz shows how to watch and be in their presence is already to be involved and to offer help is to respond to a preexisting responsibility. *Mattress Performance*, then, is an invitation to be involved, to take part, to engage, and to carry the weight of another as an extension of one's own. Sulkowicz directs the audience as those with the possibility of helping, and the artist's role is to consider accepting or saying yes—with no promise or need to do so. Rule 3 reminds us that it is the artist's prerogative

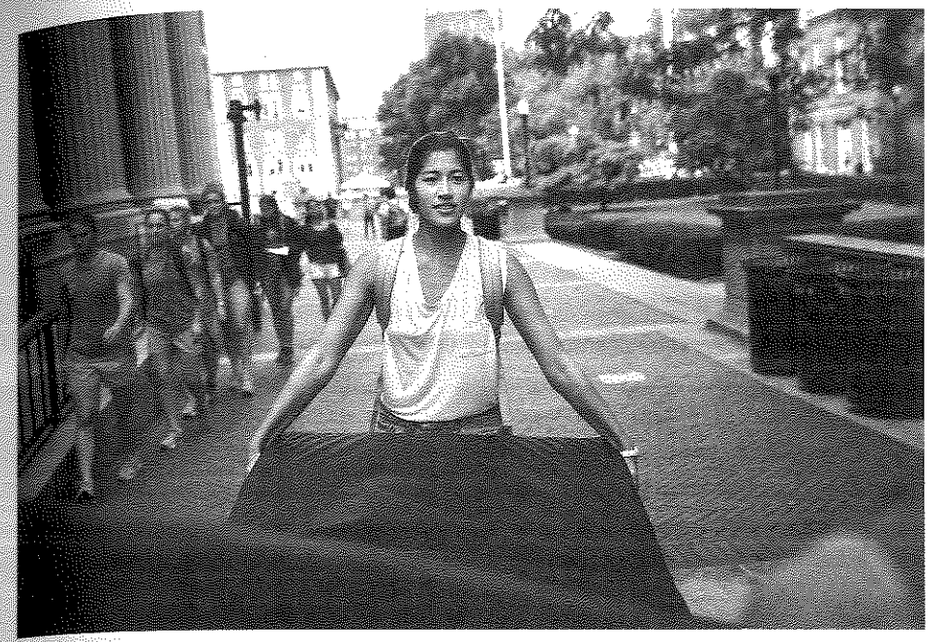

FIGURE 2.5. Emma Sulkowicz, *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*. Photograph by Andrew Burton/Getty Images.

to say yes, and so, too, it is the bystander's role to reach out and offer help. In this chapter, I have tried to complicate the seeming clarity of saying yes, the troubling deferral to positivist language, even or perhaps especially as college campuses today promote discourses of affirmative sexual consent of "yes means yes." Though I am not interested in speaking against those efforts, I do wish to identify racialized problems of consent, particularly with Sulkowicz's visibility as a young assigned female at birth (AFAB) gender nonconforming survivor of sexual assault simultaneous with their racial invisibility as an Asian American biracial artist. Here, it is relevant to state that Sulkowicz, since the publicity around *Mattress Performance* as an undergraduate student artist, uses "they/them" pronouns. As Sulkowicz writes, "Being the victim of assault helped me realize that I was gender non-conforming" and "'they' evokes my slippage between man and woman, but it also evokes the way that I see the slippage between human and object."[61] The slipperiness of gender in relation to body ontology, new materialist study, and sexual violence will continue in the next chapter in thinking with contemporary novels featuring transfeminist aesthetics.

I wish to make explicit how Derrida's meditation on universal hospitality and the exhortation to say yes resonates with contemporary discourses of affirmative sexual consent and rampant sexual assault. Though Ono's works are sometimes understood as activist art, as is *Mattress Performance*, it is worth recognizing the blurriness of those categories of activism and art as commonly rendered distinct from one another. Though a discourse of feminist art rose with second-wave feminist politics around the 1970s, feminist scholars and artists of color such as Coco Fusco have offered an alternative historiography wherein the embodied practices of women of color—whether under the genre of slavery, freak show, military conquest, or colonial object—have in fact been the pioneers of revolutionary body art that is personal, aesthetic, and political.[62] We may understand the works of Ono, Nakadate, and Sulkowicz, then, to variously evidence how feminist performance upsets a dichotomous relation often drawn between art and activism. To take *Mattress Performance* seriously as performance art is to attune ourselves to the multifarious effects it may have in the world, ones that exceed the bounds of legal recognition and presentist epistemology.

Strikingly, Sulkowicz's biraciality is rarely addressed in media coverage of their work. Though *Mattress Performance* is frequently if briefly contextualized in a performance art tradition, and sometimes a feminist performance art tradition, rarely is it discussed alongside Asian American or multiracial aesthetics. Rather than read this as colorblindness on the part of the press, I consider this lack of specificity as an example of Asian racial inscrutability on a national stage, particularly when it does not rehearse familiar tropes of Asian submissive respectability. Grappling with Sulkowicz's racialized gender in relation to their response to alleged sexual assault, however, enriches interpretations of their performance piece. To study *Mattress Performance* as a racialized performance of inscrutability is to consider Sulkowicz's performance as a then-college student, a gender nonconforming person, an artist, and a biracial Asian person whose gendered racialization was rendered unremarkable and thereby erased in public discourse. Rather than praise the lack of focus on race as post-racial white universalism, paralleling Derrida's embrace of hospitality, I propose that the unremarked-upon racialization and gendering of Sulkowicz cuts out a rich genealogy and futurity of their work. When I embed Sulkowicz within a genealogy of Asian and Asian American feminist art, I do not do so simply by deferring to a biography of the artist as of Chinese and Polish ancestry. Rather, I ask us to engage Sulkowicz's work with deference to an ample tradition of radical aesthetics that is the privileged domain of people of color, women, and gender nonconforming people.

Inscrutability indexes a raw vulnerability that pulsates beside any critical interpretation. In a panel discussion at Williams College in the spring of 2015, Sulkowicz critiqued the desires of others who nominate them to the position of martyr, comparing their mattress carry to Christ's walk with the cross on his back. What I heard implicit in their words was others' desires for them to represent strength and heroism, bravery and solidity, to serve as a poster child for redemption. Instead, Sulkowicz emphasized their feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, describing the ways in which the performance (and its subsequent audience reception) further bound them to the educational institution and to the person who attacked them. In my reading, what is mesmerizing about Sulkowicz's performance is precisely this insistent vulnerability of asking others to ask for consent, especially in the face of trespass.

At an event for Sulkowicz at Williams College organized by Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb, I discussed their work's position of generosity and feminist pedagogy in making it known that they can accept help with the mattress in the rules of engagement. In my readings of their work, I wanted to recognize the inexplicability of the performance, one that is not entirely delimited by the facts of sexual assault and institutional neglect but expands the possible social relations with vulnerability and receptivity. I was struck when Sulkowicz kindly corrected me, agreeing that the performance's terms sought out consent from participants of the work but that in practice strangers regularly grabbed onto the mattress without receiving an explicit "yes" from the artist. The actual performance and dismissal of Sulkowicz's rules of engagement, then, shed light on the sense of entitlement people had—presumably to help out, but also in ways that disappoint and trespass their boundaries.

The participant's presumption of offering help orients *Mattress Performance* in a different light, one that shows the limits of identity positions that cohere as victim or survivor. One interpretation is that people often assume that Sulkowicz needs help and believe that their shared carrying of the mattress will help the artist. I understand their performance as extending my study of Laurel Nakadate's parasitic performance. Sulkowicz is a host of sorts, where the mattress is a metonymy for a domicile or private space. In a sense, the mattress externalizes the hospitable site that an Asian woman's or femme's body is already made to bear. People who approach Sulkowicz and take on the mattress without their agreement presume to know what it is that the artist wants. The gender and racial inscrutability of Sulkowicz's body underscores the external mandates imposed on their performance work as well as the long-standing institutions that prescribe readings of their body and authority. The audience-participant's presumption to know what they want and

what they mean by the performance once more betrays the anxiety of waiting for an answer, the anxiety of approaching an uncharted, though broadly reiterated, relationality.

There is a risk to each of these performances by Ono, Nakadate, and Sulkowicz that is a refusal to give up the social, to conform to a narrative of isolating self-victimization, where the only recourse is to respond in masculinist logics of aggressive reaction. It is a refusal to resign oneself to exploitation and abuse by retracting an outreached hand. It is through embodied performance that the authority of Asian women as artists compels us to problematize a persistent alignment of Asianness, femininity, and powerlessness. I locate *Mattress Performance* in this genealogy of feminist art not to essentialize or reinforce a reading where Asian women, trans, and gender nonconforming people are inevitably vulnerable and submissive, as though they are without agency to ask for help. Rather, I want to look again at Sulkowicz's third rule and align it as a feminist and Asian strategy to expand the submissive position, to position oneself to accept and receive, to risk the optic of submissiveness, and to politicize that embrace. This work by queer and feminist scholars and artists not only has the effect of problematizing a normative racial and gender discourse. These performances also have the effect of insisting on oneself as a source of desire, as social critic, as social practitioner.

I hold in mind the countless conversations between and among Asian women and gender nonconforming people, and other womxn of color in the United States and abroad, who are exhausted from the expectation to literally and figuratively "say yes" to daily mandates of sexism and racism. The stakes of my exploration in this chapter, then, include the ability for Asian people who identify as women, or who are identified as women, to manage our production as those who run the world materially and symbolically as care and service laborers, including bodying forth alternative epistemologies of care, inviting relationality by staging participatory encounter, and sometimes interrupting expectations by pointedly performing them. Though inscrutability has been racialized and gendered as threatening, I think with Ono's, Nakadate's, and Sulkowicz's participatory performances to argue that inscrutability is also the condition for hope in unknowable sociality. This unknown content and form—the "warp and woof"—of the inscrutable is also the queer horizon that, following José Esteban Muñoz, so many of us yearn for and feel pulled by. This saying yes, then, would be saying yes toward something that, like the indistinguishable sound at the door, imaginatively opens up social futures and refuses a teleology of the inevitable.

3

IM/PENETRABILITY, TRANS FIGURATION, AND UNRELIABLE SURFACING

Asian forms are often discussed as spectacular surfaces with mysterious interiors to penetrate or cut into, including silence, concisely heterofeminizing Asian form. This book now moves from the relational noise of silence to the tropes of the inscrutable other as both impenetrable and penetrable, at once sexually and materially penetrable *and* psychically and narratively impenetrable. I explore other mappings of penetration in this chapter, in ways that move away from a compulsory heterosexual reading that disciplines a gender binary based on genital skin. Could penetration be about something other than colonial seizure and a reconsolidation of a gender binary? Pursuing this question could change the surfacing of Asiatic form. The larger stakes of

27 Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 9.
28 Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 4.
29 Campt, "Black Visuality and the Practice of Refusal," 80.
30 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 111–20, 189–94; León, "Forms of Opacity," 378.
31 León, "Forms of Opacity," 378.
32 Harper, *Abstractionist Aesthetics*.
33 Harper, *Abstractionist Aesthetics*, 2. As Harper shows, the normalization of abstract aesthetics has created a national image vocabulary where highly stylized visual figures, such as Aunt Jemima and Dragon Lady, are integrated and accepted as realistic images.
34 Smith, "Surface Play," 48.
35 Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race*, 31.
36 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 401.
37 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 401.
38 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 401.
39 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 402.
40 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 402.
41 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 402–3.
42 However, come to think of it, mapping out the anatomy of the vulva is a viable strategy in Diana Oh's performance of *Clairvoyance* in April 2019, part of their yearlong residence at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
43 Uyehara, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," 403.
44 See Huang, "Whither Asian American Lesbian Feminist Thought?"
45 Kimsooja, *Archive of Mind*.
46 The gallery space was connected to an exhibition on Chinese art, with glass double doors allowing a visual preview of the *Double Happiness* exhibition next door. Billed as an art museum for American and Asian art, the Peabody is also known for its architectural installation of Yu Tang's "The Chinese House." In this sense, the inclusion of Kimsooja's installation is partly justified by her biography as a Korean artist; though Kimsooja's Koreanness is invoked in the wall text introducing the exhibition, however, there is no phenotypic or aesthetic story offered in the exhibition space. The role of race and nationality, then, is not centered in the show as relevant. And, in a sense, one could argue that the lack of clear political or social connection in the exhibition renders it unprovocative or a gallery one could make a quick visit to. As the docent mentioned to me, many visitors step into the gallery space, take a look around, perhaps quickly roll a ball, and then soon after leave the space.
47 Peabody Essex Museum, "PEM Invites Visitors to Participate in a Meditative Sculptural Installation."
48 The interpretive scale of the point reminds me, too, of adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* and the emphasis on reiterative forms that can be scaled up and multiplied but also exist individually, such as a fern.
49 Smith, "Surface Play," 53.
50 "Is Dot Painting the Remnant of Pointillism?"
51 Snow, "Migration Greeting Card Set."
52 Kim, *The Racial Mundane*; Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*.

2. SILENCE AND PARASITIC HOSPITALITY IN THE WORKS OF YOKO ONO, LAUREL NAKADATE, AND EMMA SULKOWICZ

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1 Ono, *Grapefruit*. The epigraph to this section is from Sean Day-Lewis, "Music," *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, September 29, 1966, 80; quoted in Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," 120.
2 Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," 103; Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 123–45.
3 Here I allude to the generative discourse around relational aesthetics and participatory art, particularly Claire Bishop's formulation of "relational antagonism" following Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. See Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics."
4 Munroe, *YES Yoko Ono*, 28.
5 Munroe, *YES Yoko Ono*, 28.
6 Stiles, "Being Undyed," 148.
7 Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," 119.
8 Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 79.
9 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 77.
10 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 149.
11 Hamington, *Feminism and Hospitality*, xv.
12 Sander-Staudt, "Su Casa es Mi Casa?," 27.
13 For more on the first Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the United States, as well as early spectacular performances of Asian femininity under the genre of freak show, see Kang, *Compositional Subjects*. For more on Asian female labor in nineteenth-century US immigration, see Sonia Shah's introduction to *Dragon Ladies*, where she notes that "Asian women shouldered much of the cost of subsidizing Asian men's labor" (xv), as well as Bonacich and Cheng, *Labor Immigration under Capitalism*, 5–34.
14 Sander-Staudt, "Su Casa es Mi Casa?," 26.

15 Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 6.
16 Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race*; H. T. Nguyen, *A View from the Bottom*.
17 Concannon, "Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," 89.
18 Hamington, *Feminism and Hospitality*, xv.
19 I thank Karen Shimakawa for helping me articulate this idea on being held hostage to racializing discourses.
20 Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 17.
21 *Into Performance*, Midori Yoshimoto's comparative historical study of Japanese female artists in New York, critiques this bias and allows for multiple and heterogeneous Japanese/American femininities that recall Shimakawa's comparative analysis of female characters in Velina Hasu Houston's play *Tea*.
22 Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 4.
23 Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," 121.
24 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*; Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*.
25 See Freeman, *Time Binds*; J. M. Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*; and brown, *Pleasure Activism*.
26 Indrisek, "Laurel Nakadate."
27 Siegel, "The Provocateur."
28 Kastner, "A Provocateur Who Talks to Strangers."
29 Schehr, preface to *The Parasite*, vii.
30 Serres, *The Parasite*, 3.
31 Serres, *The Parasite*, 3.
32 Serres, *The Parasite*, 64.
33 Serres, *The Parasite*, 64.
34 Serres, *The Parasite*, 24.
35 Fisher, "We Are Parasites," 5.
36 Fisher, "We Are Parasites," 5.
37 Fisher, "Manic Impositions," 223.
38 Fisher, "Manic Impositions," 223.
39 Fisher, "We Are Parasites," 4.
40 Bow, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion*, 37–69.
41 Fleissig, "Laurel Nakadate's 'Only the Lonely' Opens at PS1"; Johnson, "A Burgeoning Film Career Built on Random Encounters"; Schwarting, "You Dirty, Worthless Slut."
42 Saltz, "Whatever Laurel Wants"; Hamilton, "Laurel Nakadate."
43 Hamilton, "Laurel Nakadate."
44 Indrisek, "Laurel Nakadate." We may note how Nakadate echoes the words of Elena Tajima Creef when she writes, "In spite of the current tendency to celebrate and even romanticize multiculturalism, there is a genuine dilemma of where one may place a hybrid body that does not fit into any one simple place on a white American map" (Creef, *Imaging Japanese America*, 177).
45 Scholarship in Asian American and critical mixed-race studies informs my thinking here of racialized performances of inscrutability, in particular Jennifer Ann Ho's *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* and Colleen Kim Daniher's "Performing the Racial Ambiguity Act." See also Kina and Dariotis, *War Baby / Love Child*, which includes Nakadate's work.
46 Fisher, "We Are Parasites," 4.
47 I think here of the vital work of Christina León, Iván Ramos, Hentyle Yapp, Katie Brewer Ball, Ren Ellis Neyra, Roy Pérez, and Summer Kim Lee at the panels on racialized negativity at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in 2015. I am inspired by León's formulation of opacity as "an aesthetic and ethico-political response to the demands for transparency" within Latina/o studies ("Forms of Opacity," 378). Certainly I am indebted to the work of many scholars, including Gayatri Gopinath's theory of impossibility and queer female diasporic subjectivity (*Impossible Desires*), and Martin Manalansan's formulation of disaffection as a temporary affective mode of survival ("Servicing the World").
48 Serres, *The Parasite*, 79.
49 Serres, *The Parasite*, 238.
50 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 20.
51 For more on racial aesthetics of silence, see Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*; and Owen, "Still Nothing," which elegantly theorize quiet and silence as expressive modes of critical resistance in Black culture. My thoughts on silence engage, too, with Mari Ruti's concluding dialogue with Jordan Mulder in *The Ethics of Opting Out*, and "the role that silence plays in the fetishistic production of the exotic other who, by virtue of its unwillingness (or incapacity) to participate in the vocal world of neoliberal agency, functions both as an object of desire and as a site of tremendous anxiety for the urban Western subject" (220).
52 S. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 112–13.
53 S. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 171.
54 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 2.
55 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 2.
56 Davis, "Columbia Student's Striking Mattress Performance."
57 Sulkowicz, "Rules of Engagement."
58 Van Syckle, "The Columbia Student Carrying a Mattress Everywhere."
59 Duan, "Going from Class to Class."
60 Duan, "Going from Class to Class."
61 Small, "Queer Identity in the MeToo Movement."
62 Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance."

3. IM/PENETRABILITY, TRANS FIGURATION, AND UNRELIABLE SURFACING

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