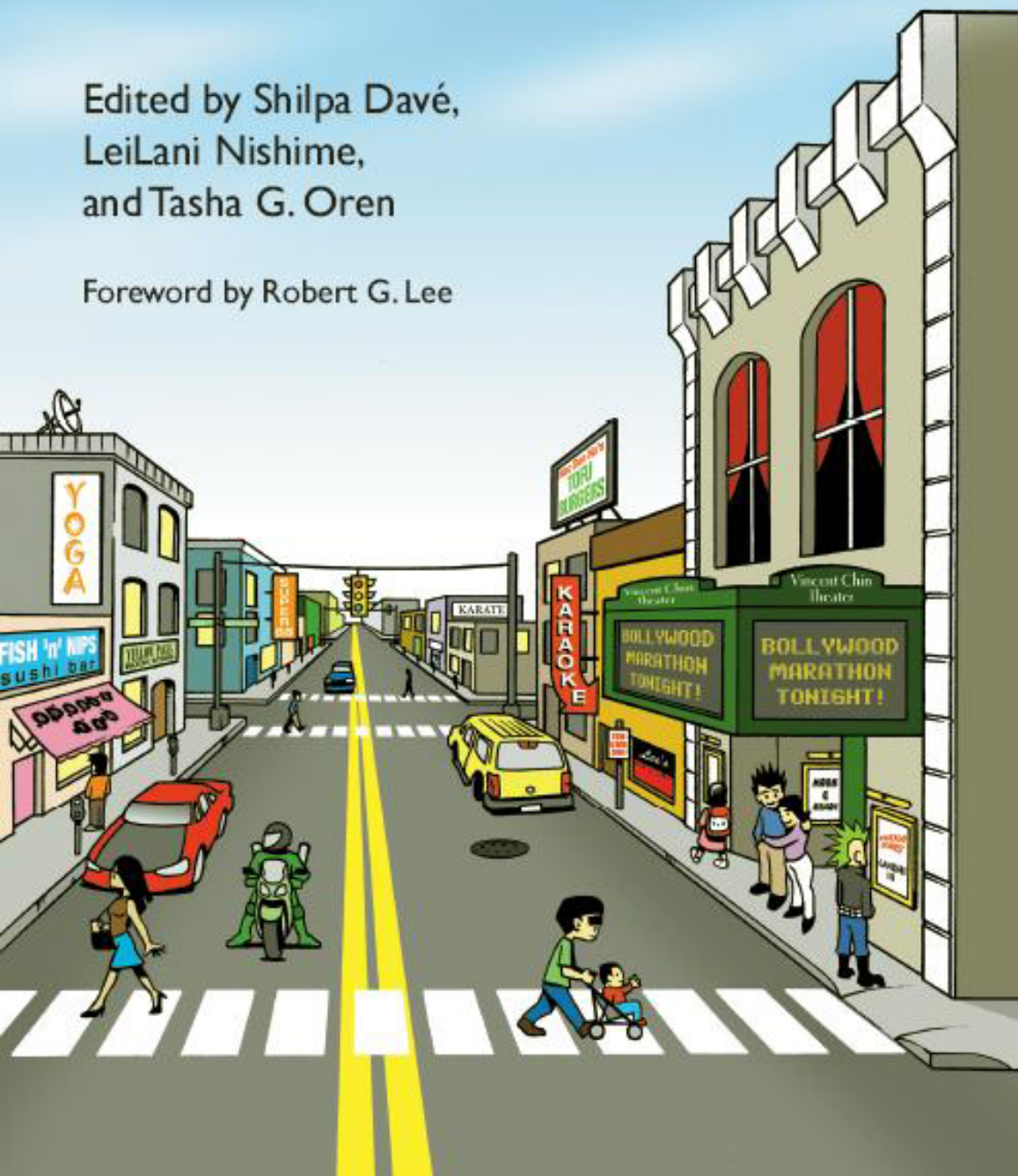
East Main Street

Asian American Popular Culture

Edited by Shilpa Davé,
LeiLani Nishime,
and Tasha G. Oren

Foreword by Robert G. Lee



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Foreword

Robert G. Lee

In response to the following passage from a 1736 poem promoting the English settlement of South Carolina, Georgia asked its readers to imagine the American colony as a potential commercial rival to China and India.

> The frugal matron and blooming Maid;
> The expiring Insects curious Work resume
> And wind materials for the British Loom:
> Our web to these shall all the Beauties owe,
> Which Asia boasts and Eastern Pride can show;
> With skilful China's richest Damasks vie,
> And emulate the Chint's alluring Dye."[1]

While Georgia's experiment with sericulture soon foundered on the wrong species of mulberry tree, the verse nevertheless serves to remind us that Asia has been present in the American popular imagination from the onset of European settlement in the Americas.

Desire and revulsion are the dialectic that defines America's cultural engagement with Asia. Europeans discovered "America" in their search for a new path to the riches of the Indies and China and used its vast stores of silver to purchase the spices and manufactures of the "East." Americans have long imagined the markets of Asia to be the answer to periodic crises in the economy. If Asia was the object of commercial desire, Asians themselves were, however, the objects of social revulsion. As the racial Other marked as indelibly foreign, the Oriental subject has been central in the ongoing debate about what and who belongs in American culture.

America's contradictory fascination with Asia was reflected in the country's first museums. By the 1830s an emergent urban middle class in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston could visit China vicariously at P. T. Barnum's American Museum, the East India Maritime Society Museum, Dunn's Chinese Museum, or Peale's Chinese Museum where they could see Chinese artifacts, splendid luxury items of ivory, porcelain, and silk that had shaped American elite taste (and wealth) in the early Republic. At P. T. Barnum's American Museum they could even see real Chinese people in a diorama of a "Noble Chinese Family." Later at Barnum's and at other venues they saw Ah Fong Moy, a "Chinese Lady" who performed Chineseness in dioramas and tableaux or Chang and Eng, the celebrated "Siamese" twins who began a thirty-year career with Barnum and later toured internationally on their own. Throughout the nineteenth century, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian performers could be seen on the burlesque and vaudeville stage as magicians, singers, and dancers.

But looking at Asian things or even people as artifacts of the exotic was one thing, Asian settlers in America was quite another. From the mid-nineteenth century well into the twentieth century, the image of Asian immigrants, first the Chinese, then the Japanese, and then the Filipino were marked in songbooks, minstrel shows, and plays as well as labor broadsides and newspapers as an unalterably foreign threat to white American workers and the American way of life.

Even as it closed the door to Asian immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century, America conquered a formal colonial empire in the Pacific and pursued an informal empire in Asia whose markets American businessmen imagined to be a panacea for periodic crises of "overproduction." The captains of industry and trade built pavilions in the Chinese style in their formal gardens or constructed Japanese tea gardens where they staged elaborate Oriental-themed parties. Middle-class women also consumed the Orient, donning silk kimonos, sticking chopsticks in their hair, and setting their dining tables with tableware etched with Japanese-themed designs.[2] Such was the popularity of the exotic Oriental motif that the nascent film industry made Sessue Hayakawa along with Rudolph Valentino among its first romantic stars.[3] At the same time, the Worlds Fairs in Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco laid out for thousands to see a great chain of being in which "Western" Civilization, that is to say European and North American culture, was at the undisputed apex while Asian and Pacific cultures were ranked among the lower orders.

After Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, in Europe, Britain, and the United States anxiety over the "Yellow Peril" became a nightmare.[4] Sax Rohmer's fictional Fu Manchu became the archetypal Oriental villain. Androgynously sexy, Western-educated, but Oriental in his cunning and cruelty, his mission was to engineer the downfall of Western civilization. Fu Manchu became the first Asian celebrity with name recognition in American culture. Only later would he be rivaled by a "good" Oriental figure, the rotund and fatherly Charlie Chan. The absolute Oriental Otherness of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan was underscored on the silver screen where they were consistently played in Yellowface long after Blackface had left the commercial stage.

The bloody but brief Japanese challenge to Anglo-American hegemony in the Pacific resulted in the transformation of the Pacific into an American lake. Although China was "lost" to the American imperium, later to be joined by North Korea and Vietnam, the imperatives of the Cold War in Asia dictated a new set of policies and attitudes toward Asian immigration. Beginning in 1943 with the abrogation of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, legal barriers specifically aimed at Asian immigrants were gradually dismantled. A massive immigration of middle-class professionals from Asia in the late 1960s and 1970s fed a new image of the Asian immigrant as a model of assimilation into middle-class American mores and a conservative model for the behavior of African Americans, Latinos, and working-class whites on the margins of an economy in crisis.

A new Yellow Peril fear has emerged in reaction to the transformation of the postwar Fordist economy based on large-scale industrial production in favor of flexible accumulation and multinational finance capital, the dismantling of the New Deal social compact, and the rise of Asian capitalism. In contemporary narratives of American decline, such as *Year of the Dragon, Falling Down,* and *Rising Sun,* Asian Americans are once again identified as the Yellow Peril, as the agents of an Orientalized capitalism responsible for America's economic ruin.

The critique of these representations of Asians in American culture and the racialization of the Asian American as indelibly foreign has been a major task of Asian American studies. This impulse has been driven both by the need to expose the stereotypes and refute racist claims made about Asian Americans and the need to understand the historical moments in which Asian Americans made their own history. While Asian Americans have been active producers of American popular culture since Ah Fong Moy sat in dioramas for the American Museum, Chang and Eng drew

crowds for P. T. Barnum, and Lee Tung Foo sang on the vaudeville stage or Sessue Hayakawa, or Anna May Wong lit up the silver screen, Asian American cultural producers (other than writers) have received little public visibility or critical attention.

The essays in this volume make a decisive turn toward foregrounding Asian Americans as agents in the production of popular culture. In an era of globalization, Asians and Asian Americans are becoming ubiquitous in American popular culture. In the past several decades the shift to flexible accumulation, the compression of time and space through changes in transportation and communications, mobility of capital and labor—all those economic phenomena that are collectively referred to as globalization—have resulted in massive immigration from Asia to North America. Globalization has also been accompanied by intensified transnational cultural practices and cultural hybridities in societies around the world. As Neil Lazarus has observed, these multicultural practices are the cultural logic of globalization.[5] In the 1990s, the Asian American presence became commonplace if not ubiquitous in American popular culture both as producers and consumers. With rapidly expanding market segmentation through cable and satellite, it is now possible to watch television programs in Hindi or Tamil, Cantonese or Mandarin even in such provincial outposts as Providence, Rhode Island. Service calls from your bank or telephone companies are most likely to come from Mumbai or Bangalore. Asian American newsreaders are common, though for many complicated reasons Asian American talking heads are not.

The essays in this collection take us across a wide range of cultural arenas, locales, and sites, to see the diverse ways in which Asian Americans produce, consume, and critique popular culture, reminding us that popular culture continues to be a contested terrain. Taken together these critical essays serve to warn us against a premature celebration of a multicultural utopia. They remind us that multiculturalism serves the state in its management of difference, obscuring the contradictions of contemporary globalization and the savage inequalities that it has generated.

NOTES

1. "Ode to Tomo Chachi," Warwick, England, 1739.

2. See Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East, White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

3. See Robert Lee, *Orientals, Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

4. See, for example, Jack London, "Yellow Peril," in *Revolution: And Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1912); Homer Lea, *The Valor of Ignorance* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1909).

5. Neil Lazarus, "Charting Globalization," *Race and Class* (1998–99) 40:91–110.

Introduction

Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren

From henna tattoo kits available at your local mall to "faux Asian" fashions, house wares, and fusion cuisine; from the new visibility of Asian film, music, video games, and anime to current stylistic blending of hip hop, martial arts motifs, and "Japanese kitsch style," Asian influences have thoroughly saturated the U.S. cultural landscape to become part of the vernacular of popular culture. Paradoxically, this current visibility of global "Asianness" renders the cultural presence of Asian Americans in mainstream American culture conceptually problematic: simultaneously hypervisible and out of sight. In the midst of a boom in both Asian American population numbers and cultural productions, Asian Americans continue to occupy a precarious position in the popular American imagination, lodged in that hazy symbolic space that blends the seemingly opposite impulses of global proximity with the exotic. How do we address the Asian American presence within our hyperglobalized mainstream culture? How can we theorize Asian American popular culture while acknowledging its traditions, accounting for innovations and creative fusions while also maintaining its distinctions?

Born from political activism, cultural isolation, and historical erasure, Asian American studies has developed along two parallel streams that largely dominate contemporary work in the field. While one approach explores Asian American representations as "others" in mainstream U.S. media culture, another tradition focuses on Asian American-produced media, literature, and cultural practices within Asian American communities. This collection marks a turning point in Asian American studies by introducing readers to innovative contemporary work that challenges

received definitions of the field by reconceptualizing the popular. Through a consideration of cross-cultural influences and global cultural trends, the essays here thrive at the interdisciplinary intersection of Asian American studies with media, literature, sociology, film, performance, and cultural studies. Together, they offer a new, inclusive approach that brings the maturing field of Asian American studies into productive dialogue with both new and well-established disciplines.

Traditional models for Asian American studies have been wary of acknowledging and readmitting the complexity of their own immigrant roots and the uncontrollable multiplicity of the populations the field purports to represent. Recent developments in global immigration flows, accelerated cross-cultural mixing, and local changes within Asian American cultural production outside and (increasingly) within mainstream popular culture have left these approaches ill-equipped to account for and theorize current popular culture. Concurrently, popular culture scholarship has lagged behind the general trend toward ethnic, economic, and geographical diversity in the study of Asian Americans. Popular culture studies often seems mired in an out-of-date vision of Asian America as solely Chinese or Japanese American, male, straight, and middle class. Further, contemporary developments in other fields such as media and cultural studies, as well as a new scholarly emphasis on globalization, have brought previously distinct fields of inquiry into a new proximity as scholars have begun considering Asian American cultural production and representation within the joint contexts of U.S. mainstream culture and global cultural trends.

Popular culture is an enduring interest in Asian American studies. Widely acknowledged as one of the first collections of Asian American literature, *The Big Aiiieeeee!* edited by Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong introduced and influenced Asian American theory for years to come and came out swinging against the image of the passive and eternally foreign Asian in America. Yet their anthology has also come under fire for neglecting non-Japanese and Chinese Asian Americans as well as its introduction's macho, heterosexist rhetoric. However, its emphasis on overturning stereotypes with examples of outspoken and resolutely American writers still echoes through contemporary criticism. Books such as Russell Leong's anthology *Moving the Image* (1991), Amy Ling and Shirley Lim's anthology *Reading the Literatures of Asian Americans* (1992), and King-Kok Cheug's *Articulate Silences* (1993) have continued to shed light on neglected work by Asian Americans. Even more

recently, writers such as Lisa Lowe, David Eng, Peter Feng, Josephine Lee, and David Palumbo-Liu have begun to expand the boundaries of what constitutes Asian American cultural production.[1] Lowe and Palumbo-Liu cross generic boundaries to read city streets and academic cannons, while Eng, Feng, and Lee move to establish how Asian Americans revise and reorient queer theory, dramatic performance, and film theory. It is in the spirit of these authors that we began to collect the diverse voices of this anthology.

The other main strain of Asian American popular cultural scholarship focuses on representations of Asian Americans in popular society. Traditionally, the primary focus was on roles and representations in film and television. Studies include such well-known works as the documentary *Slaying the Dragon* (1991) and Darrell Hamamoto's *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and Television* (1994). Just as gender studies began to move away from image-based analysis to explore representations of women in a more fluid context, Asian American cultural analysis has turned to a dynamic understanding of racial representations. In the past few years Robert Lee's *Orientals* (1999) has done much to historicize the depiction of Asians and broaden the scope of analysis to newspapers, popular songs, and other cultural discourses. In addition, Dorinne Kondo's *About Face* (1997) offers new directions in scholarship by emphasizing the interrelation between culture, race, and performance and the multifaceted nature of Asian American culture. These last two writers, like the authors collected here, focus on the uneven exchange between popular and Asian American culture.

Taken together, the essays in this volume engage not only with the broadening of the traditional definitions of "what counts" as Asian American studies but shift critical emphasis from the celebrated margins into the mainstream. They eschew the familiar representation-based models that emphasize victimization and alienation in favor of a multifaceted approach that highlights the intricacies and internal tensions in contemporary Asian Pacific American cultures. To this end, the volume facilitates an expansion of the field from film and video to the arena of global communications, the Internet, youth and immigrant subcultures, and alternative modes of culture that have yet to be fully addressed in any book-length collection.

The category "Asian American" has grown to encompass over fifteen different ethnic and national backgrounds from sixth-generation Chinese Americans to Hmong refugees to Pacific Islanders. The latest census

figures estimate that over 12 million Asians and Asian Americans live in the United States. Hence the term Asian American is a group identity in flux, a fluid and changing identity that initially served as a political rallying point but now recognizes multiple histories and contexts and seeks to interrogate ethnic categorizations. This volume presents a broad vision of Asian America that includes often neglected groups such as South Asians, multiracial Asians, and teenagers. It also examines the contrary nature of established racial and ethnic categories so as to open up the discussion of what constitutes Asian American popular culture.

Far from presenting a comprehensive picture, we view this collection as only the beginning, a first step. Instead of attempting to account for each group, interest, and form of cultural practice, or seeking to present a self-contained "record" of Asian American popular culture today, we offer this collection as an introduction to new work and a call for more. Thus, we conceptualize Asian American cultural presence in a trans-Asian and dynamic context. Specifically we argue for the centrality of popular, mainstream culture in understanding the particular complexity of Asian American identity in a contemporary, increasingly global environment that often feels inflected with "Asianness."

Divided into three key thematic parts, the opening set of articles in the collection examines the transnational flows of culture inside and outside national and international boundaries, whereas the second section focuses on how political, social, and global economies influence and direct cultural history. The last section specifically addresses the marketing and consumer patterns of popular culture as a way to engage and challenge how we produce and understand racial identities. However, the essays also speak to each other across categories and their grouping into these particular sections is more suggestive than indicative. Other categorical groupings are just as likely—gathering the essays by genre or ethnicity, for example. The fluidity of themes, concerns, and foci further emphasizes the fundamental links the essays share, and as the editors of this volume we hope readers will explore these connections and devise their own pathways of conceptualizing and categorizing Asian American popular culture.

In sum, the collection presents Asian American media and popular studies as cultural studies, a collection of divergent approaches that considers the current constructions of culture as processes of symbolic and political significance.

Globalization and Local Identities

While few scholars and critics still maintain the trope of authenticity and cultural insularity, preferring models of dynamic and constant cultural exchange, fewer still would deny that contemporary forces known jointly as "globalization" have accelerated such exchanges to a near-frenzied pace. As Aihwa Ong has argued, global communication systems, media technologies, increased leisure and labor mobility, and the finely coordinated commercialization of transnational product and media flows have together facilitated the emergence of "global trends."[2] Indeed, theorists such as Lisa Lowe and David Palumbo-Liu have outlined the ways in which Asian American identity has been transformed by the increasingly porous boundaries between America and Asia. While concerns over Western imperialism (and Americanization, in particular) of mass culture continue to draw significant scholarly attention, fewer academic works have addressed the equally powerful phenomena of "counterflows" and the pervasive popularity of Asian accents and influences within popular culture, particularly in the United States.

The increased commercialization of Asian culture, dance, and music—particularly among the young and trendy—fuels new international formations and is the subject of Sunaina Maira's "Trance-Formations: Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism in Youth Culture." Maira delves into the influence of South Asian iconography on rave culture and its implications for traditional conceptions of both Orientalism and the opposition of the global and local. The process by which a local cultural product becomes a part of the global marketplace is also the subject of the following two essays by Kieu Linh Caroline Valverde and Jigna Desai. However, as both authors demonstrate, it has very different implications for immigrants, diasporic communities, and their relationship to a "homeland." Valverde's "Making Transnational Vietnamese Music: Sounds of Home and Resistance" documents the two-way influence of Vietnamese and *Viet-Kieu* music and the political implications of the movement of music between Vietnam and America. In "Planet Bollywood: Indian Cinema Abroad," Desai chronicles the ways in which second- and third-generation South Asians consume and rework images of diasporic Indian identity through Indian cinema. As these essays demonstrate, old categories that demarcate local from international, immigrant from native, and "original" from fusion hardly suffice to describe this current global climate.

The article "Model Minorities Can Cook: Fusion Cuisine in Asian America" interrogates the category of "global fusion." As Anita Mannur looks at the consumer-friendly marketing of Asian culture through food, she finds far-reaching and disturbing implications for liberal multicultural rhetoric. In "PAPPY'S HOUSE: 'Pop' Culture and the Revaluation of a Filipino American 'Sixty-Cents' in Guam," Vicente M. Diaz brings historical global flows into a personal focus as he takes up the term "Pappy" to reveal a legacy of colonization and imperialism in Guam, the Philippines, and the American South.

Cultural Legacy and Memories

Despite the insistence in popular culture on the new and cutting edge, it remains inextricably linked to history. While mass-produced culture invites us to share in a world devoid of the weight of history, the authors in this collection make clear that history, whether national, cultural, or familial, always informs and shapes both the production and reception of popular culture. However, history does not exist as some unchanging and essential reality. Indeed, history both dictates and is dictated to by cultural formations. The project of recovering history that runs throughout the articles does not simply midwife a fully formed past. Instead, like Foucault's genealogies of history, these authors reshape Asian American history while simultaneously revising contemporary conceptions of Asian America.

In the first two essays of Part II, Victor Bascara and Christine So explicitly address historiography and the practice of remembering a shared past. Bascara's "'Within Each Crack/A Story': The Political Economy of Queering Filipino American Pasts," borrows from queer theory to envision a Filipino American history that values, without valorizing, the early bachelor communities of Filipino male laborers. Through a reading of Asian American poetry, literature, and film, Bascara asks whether reading familiar histories through a new lens can revive the critical subjectivities and agencies of those near-silent men. In her essay, "A Woman Is Nothing: Valuing the Modern Chinese Woman's Epic Journey to the West," Christine So also turns to literature to examine the recent explosion in transnational Chinese women's historical fiction. As she analyses the narratives and global popularity of such works, So argues that history functions as another character in these novels, helping the reader negotiate a global capitalist present. With Hye Seung Chung's "Between Yellowphilia and Yellowpho-

bia: Ethnic Stardom and the (Dis)Orientalized Romantic Couple in *Daughter of Shanghai* and *King of Chinatown,*" we turn from literature to 1930s Hollywood cinema and to some of the earliest examples of Asian American stars. By placing the films and star personae of Anna May Wong and the Korean American actor Philip Ahn in historical context, Chung accounts for both their surprisingly sympathetic and active portrayals and for the cross-textual readings by the film's Asian American audiences.

Local audiences' readings of their own representation in the American mainstream media culture is at the center of Morris Young's essay "Whose Paradise? Hawai'i, Desire, and the Global-Local Tensions of Popular Culture." Through the controversy over the use of "pidgin" English in the television series "The Byrds of Paradise," Young implicates popular culture in the negotiation and struggle over local identities as he traces the development and expression of a distinctly Hawaiian sensibility. Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain takes up a different struggle over local cultural identity in "Miss Cherry Blossom Meets Mainstream America." By tracing the controversies that periodically arise within and over Japanese American beauty pageants, King illustrates how changing notions of idealized beauty reflect the shifting and elusive nature of Asian American identity. Through this reexamination King also demonstrates how neglected cultural forms can revise our view of history as a simple progression from oppression to liberation.

The second section concludes with the recovery of repressed histories both personal and political. In "How to Rehabilitate a Mulatto: The Iconography of Tiger Woods," Hiram Perez investigates the erasure of history in the marketing of the "Cablinasian" Tiger Woods. By reinserting Woods into America's fraught racial history, he reanimates the symbolic and political meaning of Woods as an American icon.

Ethnicity and Identification

In the previous section, the authors examined the cultural economics of history and addressed how the constructed nature of history influences personal and public perceptions of beauty, sports, and even family genealogies. As these essays suggest, race and its cultural meanings remain at the core of globalizing media flows and their local receptions.

Race, as we all know, is a social construct, a mass fantasy in which we all participate, yet it persists as a constant material force as well as a visceral

and lived reality. This section focuses on the means by which this "reality" is enacted, enforced, and debated through the varied reception and consumption of race and ethnicity. As a field of study, spectatorship has been slow to enter the mainstream of ethnic studies. While gender studies has embraced the concept, particularly in relation to cross-dressing and drag, acceptance by race theorists has been stymied by both practical and political considerations. As Elaine Kim has argued, the emphasis on reception comes at a time when race has finally been recognized as a material force in the lives of racial minorities and an emphasis on performance threatens progressive political moments deeply rooted in identity. Indeed, the search for authenticity as well as an authoritative voice to challenge the racial construction of Asians as a wedge group or "model minority" in American society has long been a motivating force in the creation of Asian American studies (see *The Big Aiiieeeee!* eds. Chin et al.). However, just as essentialist ideas of Asian American racial identity are being dismantled (see Josephine Lee's *Performing Race and Ethnicity,* and Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*) so too are calls for singular notions of a seamless and authentic cultural expression of that identity.[3] Rather than reading cultural representation for their positive or negative (authentic or inauthentic) portrayals, the authors in this section emphasize the ways in which these representations function to reiterate, challenge, transform, and/or create cultural norms.

The essays in this last section tackle an array of concerns including cross-racial identification, the invention of an "alternative" Asian American identity, debates about Asian American authenticity, and challenges to the "model minority myth." In "Bruce Lee in the Ghetto Connection: Kung Fu Theater and African Americans Reinventing Culture at the Margins," Amy Ongiri reevaluates the popularity of Asian culture and martial arts in seventies black urban culture, offering new insights into this historically media-savvy but untapped consumer market. Along the way, she challenges traditional understandings of the cinematic "black-Asian connection" and its implications for contemporary media culture. The cybercitizenship created by and for Asian Americans is the subject of Lisa Nakamura's essay "Alllooksame? Mediating Visual Cultures of Race on the Web." In it, Nakamura reviews and theorizes the extent to which Asians can articulate their identities in the newly created transnational and performative space of the Internet.

LeiLani Nishime's "Guilty Pleasures: Keanu Reeves, Superman, and Racial Outing" builds on the earlier discussion by examining how multira-

cial Asians reshape theories of racial classification. In her readings of Keanu Reeves and the television drama "Smallville," Nishime explores how the pleasures of "outing" race in cases where it is not apparent illuminates understandings of multiraciality and the stakes of identity for their consuming spectator.

The relationship between knowing and seeing the visual aspect of race informs the production of knowledge about race and culture in the previous chapters. Jane Park also examines performance and identity, but this time through music. In her essay "Cibo Matto's *Stereotype A*: Articulating Asian American Hip Pop," Park traces the marketing and critical reception of the group Cibo Matto as an Asian novelty act in the U.S. hip hop music scene, contrasting it with the band's own visual, textual, and tonal self-representations. The essay reveals popular reception as itself a cultural struggle through Park's analysis of Cibo Matto's stylistic engagement with the stereotypes of Asian American women.

The cultural construction of a model minority through a manufactured sound is also addressed in Shilpa Davé's "Apu's Brown Voice: Cultural Inflection and South Asian Accents," where she maps out how ethnic accents produce racial and class hierarchies within the South Asian American and Asian American communities. Focusing on the character and performance of Apu from *The Simpsons* Davé introduces the practice of "brown voice" to elaborate on how vocal representations re-create additional stereotypes.

In the concluding essay, "Secret Asian Man: Angry Asians and the Politics of Cultural Visibility," Tasha G. Oren reevaluates Asian Americans' presence as both actors in and consumers of mainstream media in the shadow of the "model minority" myth. As Oren reads media portrayals of angry Asians against public expressions of rage, she revises familiar stereotypes with an appraisal of how anger is a mobilizing cultural force that fosters social and political awareness and alliances.

The essays collected in *Asian American Popular Culture* address a new phase in Asian American studies of media and popular culture by defying the long-standing practice that has kept thematic concentrations on the local, global, mainstream, and historical at a discreet, politically charged distance. It broadens the scope of inquiry by emphasizing the diversity and interaction within and across ethnic, cultural, and national categories. As all the essays in this final section argue, to recognize the fluidity of race in its cultural and popular incarnations is to recognize its political nature. By situating cultural practices in time, geography, and genre, the authors bring together the dynamic indeterminacy and the solidity of

"real politics" to this current moment in our cultural life. As this collection is also an invitation to further research, we look forward to the next one.

NOTES

1. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997); David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001); Peter Feng, *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003); Josephine Lee, *Performing Race and Ethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997); and David Palimbu-Liu, *Asian/Americans: Historical Crossings in a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999).

2. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999).

3. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian American Critiques* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

Part I

Globalization and Local Identities

Chapter 1

Trance-Formations
Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism in Youth Culture

Sunaina Maira

Images and sounds of Asia emerged to mark the "cool" edge of U.S. popular culture in the 1990s in ways that express the contradictions of economic and cultural globalization, immigration, and racialization, contradictions that speak to the particular positioning of Asian Americans at this historical moment. In the late 1990s, for example, South Asian motifs and music became particularly visible in the latest manifestation of "Asian cool" at a time when South Asian immigration to the United States was growing rapidly, with an increasing number of South Asian labor migrants working in low-income jobs. South Asian American youth were justifiably ambivalent about this "appropriation" of South Asian cultural symbols, from henna "tattoos" and decorative "bindi jewels" to the images of Hindu deities on T-shirts and lunch boxes.

Yet the commodification of South Asia in mainstream youth culture is not just about contestation over cultural authenticity and ownership; it also brings to light deeper issues of race relations in the United States, the inequities of economic globalization, and rising anti-immigrant sentiment —all heightened after the events of September 11, 2001. I have focused elsewhere on the meanings of this cultural commodification of "Asian cool" for South Asian American youth (Maira 2000), yet not much work has been done to carefully examine what it means for white American youth to consume these symbols of "otherness." Asian icons are often used by white (or other) American youth to signal their "alternative" approach to mainstream popular culture, as with neohippie subcultures that have reinvented the sixties' fascination with India.

I want to focus here on what this manifestation of late capitalist Orientalism reveals about the national and global imaginaries re-created in U.S. youth cultures at the turn of the millennium and, in particular, reflect on the implications of the adoption of South Asian iconography by dance music subcultures. Are notions of Orientalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization, much discussed in cultural studies and Asian American studies, relevant to these phenomena? If so, how can the "local" and "global" structures of feeling expressed in these youth subcultures help us rethink these paradigms and understand the contradictions of citizenship and consumption today?

Electronic Dance Music and Goa Trance

Electronic dance music is a large and continually expanding musical genre and dance subculture, having evolved from Detroit techno, Chicago house, and New York garage/disco parties as well as European electronic music experiments, notably in Germany (Collin 1997; Reynolds 1998; Shapiro 2000; Silcott 1999). In brief, the story of raves begins, most recently at least, in England where Chicago house music was transformed by clubbers in the 1980s into what was called acid-house, an Ecstasy-driven, all-night dance culture (Thornton 1996). Travel is a key motif in this subculture. It has always been at the heart of the evolution and narration of raves: it was British tourists in Ibiza, Spain—on routes that would later include India, Nepal, and Thailand—who helped import a casual and communal club ethos to England in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Transnational travel and cultural globalization continues to thread itself into the story of rave culture's entry into the United States. The first full-blown raves on the East Coast were hosted by deejay Frankie Bones in Brooklyn in 1989 after he attended house parties in Britain (Champion 1997; Reynolds 1999, p. 144). On the West Coast, a group of British expatriates drawing on rave's "techno-pagan" dimension hosted parties on northern California beaches that offered a cyberhippie consciousness through a vision of dance as ritual and the deejay as "digital shaman" (Silcott 1999, pp. 58–59; Reynolds 1999, p. 156). In southern California, British expatriates jump-started a party culture that mutated into its local manifestation of outlandishly spectacular and highly fashion-conscious events, some held in the desert; in the early nineties, these parties were reportedly unusually racially mixed (Prince and Roberts 2001; Reynolds 1999, pp. 159–160).

Trance music has been called "the Esperanto of electronic dance music" by dance music critic Simon Reynolds, who claims that in the late 1990s it was the "most popular rave sound in the world" (1998, no page). Trance is growing in appeal in the United States and offers a "populist, accessible alternative to the experimental abstraction of hip rave styles such as techno and drum and bass" (Reynolds 1998). Trance has a more melodic sound within the spectrum of electronic music subgenres, characterized by what Reynolds calls "recognizably human emotions and a warmly devotional aura." Goa trance is the faster, "fiercer" version of trance music (140 bpm and up), first popularized by raver-tourists re-creating the Ibiza paradise on the beaches of Goa, India—historically a sixties' hippie haven—and later circulating as a "viral, 'virtual' presence across the Western world" (Reynolds 1999, pp. 175–176).

I was initially intrigued by "Goa trance" because it seemed to be the enactment of a late-twentieth-century Orientalist fantasy. But the meanings of Goa trance are more complex than I had thought. My own understandings of Orientalism in practice, particularly in the context of globalization, have changed in response to my research. To interrogate the nature of the Orientalist imaginary in Goa trance, one has to situate the music in the particular local contexts in which it is embedded and produced.

The Rave Subculture in the "Happy Valley"

In western Massachusetts, where my research is situated, the rave scene is minimal compared to urban centers in San Francisco, New York, Orlando, and the Washington, D.C.–Baltimore area. Yet there seems to be a community of "party kids" in the Northampton-Amherst area who travel to raves up and down the East Coast. This is not surprising given the large college population attending institutions such as the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Smith College and also the demographic makeup of the region, for electronic dance music is a largely white, middle-class youth subculture. The "Happy Valley" of Western Massachusetts, as the area is called with an equal measure of affection and derision, has a predominantly white population with a very visible neohippie culture. Apart from the small Cambodian American community in the Northampton-Amherst area and the Vietnamese immigrant community in Springfield, there is only a transient population of Asian American youth attending the area colleges. Trance fans find out about parties in the region by word

of mouth or from fliers and websites. This subculture is inherently nomadic, and the large parties are generally held not in clubs but in visually and digitally enhanced auditory environments created in ice-skating rinks, amusement parks, barns, and fields. The notion of space, and thus of community, is mobile and fluid but at the same time focused and circumscribed by subcultural ideologies about authenticity and virtuosity.

Deejay Kalyx is one of the young owners of The Grow Room, an electronic music store in Amherst that sells vinyl as well as dancewear and that has become a meeting spot for (aspiring) deejays and party kids. Kalyx spins trance at parties in Cambridge and New York and observed that Goa trance itself has fragmented, with many local variations in sound and tempo across the various sites it has produced. Gavin, a producer of trance parties in Amherst and New York, describes Goa trance as the traditional label, now interchangeable with "psychedelic trance" (or psy-trance) for a sound that has an "arpeggiated synth-line" and is "very chaotic," with "lots of sounds and noises moving in and out of each other," which Reynolds calls "mandala-swirls of sound" (1999, p. 176). The mystical imagery is not coincidental: Goa parties have a "cyberdelic" aura, or what Kalyx calls a "supertribal" vibe, with images of Hindu gods and symbols forming the standard visual iconography of psy-trance fliers. The parties do not use strobe light or traditional shadowy club lighting but ultraviolet or "black" light that reflects off the dancers' fluorescent clothing. Women often wear nose rings or bindis, the Indian forehead ornament, and according to the promoter of the well-known Tsunami trance parties in New York, "they look like goddesses, infused with the spiritual energy of India" (cited in Reynolds 1999, p. 208). Ravers and promoters alike suggest that a particular Orientalist, or at least spiritual, overtone was key to Goa trance's emergence in the United States, connected to the return to house in dance music in recent years and the fringe status of psy-trance within rave culture. Hien, a young Vietnamese American man who grew up in Worcester and has been going to dance parties for several years, said insightfully: "I think, you know this is probably like Orientalism at its lowest common denominator. Basically, Goa trance has nothing to do with, trance itself has nothing to do with Southeast Asia or India. . . . It's funny because when house became popular, a lot of people reinvented trance just to be this all mystical, and Oriental, and Southeast Asia like, to set themselves apart from house, to make it seem more like spiritual, or more psychedelic."

Many observers as well as participants describe trance music as "a religion" and its fans as "tribally devoted to the scene." This attitude was evident among the people I spoke to. Like fans of other music genres, they felt passionately about the music. The underground nature of the trance scene appeals to those tired of the commercialism of the mainstream parties and the influx of younger clubbers who they say are primarily drawn by the drugs rather than the music. Both deejays and dancers like what they perceive as the "underground" nature and spiritual vibe of the trance parties compared to the increasingly expensive, large-scale raves that are attracting high school students.

In fact, Hien points out that the name "rave" itself is no longer used by insiders, because of the mainstreaming of the subculture and the negative attention it has drawn in the mass media: "Raves are like the ideal. But nowadays, being called a raver kind of has a lot of bad connotations. Because when you're a raver, you're trying to be underground, you're trying to do lots of drugs and stuff. That's why a lot of people now call themselves party kids, not ravers." For Hien and other "party kids," there is a clear sense of belonging to a youth subculture that has to keep renaming and re-creating itself in order to remain true to its own vision and distinct from the mainstream, even if doing so is not sanctioned by the law. Issues of authenticity and subcultural capital are preeminent in the hierarchies that undergird belonging in this subculture, as I have elaborated elsewhere (see Maira 2003).

In this subculture there are two ways to gain subcultural capital and advance in the social hierarchy: skill as a dancer or connections as a drug dealer. The issue of drug use is highly contested. All the people I spoke to were ambivalent about its role in the party culture, expressing their concern that drugs had given their subculture a bad rap, so to speak, and had overshadowed what to them was most important and unique about parties: the music and the dancing.[1] Dance is an extremely important element in this youth subculture. Apart from hip hop—from which it draws several stylistic and kinesthetic features—dancing is perhaps the most heavily prized, even fetishized, art form in raves. Hien was himself a member of a dance crew, a collective of young men from western Massachusetts who danced together at parties and who had joined the group by invitation.

There is an understanding among the youth I spoke to that the party subculture is particularly generational, that individuals spend a few years in the scene and then eventually move on, either burned out on the drugs

or unable to maintain a lifestyle compatible with being in the workforce. For the mostly middle-class party kids the cover charges for these events are expensive, not to mention the drugs, and attending parties requires a schedule that allows for the travel to and from and "recovery" afterwards. But there are certainly those who struggle to find the time and economic resources to participate consistently in the subculture. So for many, the party scene can be viewed as fulfilling the role of a traditional youth subculture (Clarke et al. 1976), of providing a liminal space where youth can participate in shared rituals that create a sense of collectivity but that they ultimately leave when they enter adulthood and the larger social and class hierarchy.

However, the question I am interested in addressing here is not the traditional subcultural lynchpin of resistance or subversion, but the work of Asian iconography in raves. This preliminary research leads me to ask questions about the relation of youth, specifically U.S. party kids, to the postindustrial nation-state in an age of globalization and at a moment when the Asian and U.S. economies are ever more intertwined, as is apparent from the role of Asian (and Asian American) sweatshop labor and imported Asian commodities (Louie 2001; Skoggard 1998).[2]

I draw on the multilayered structure of Goa trance in offering a preliminary analysis, conceiving of my samples from the interview narratives as layered into two tracks: one, the theme of technology, modernity, and Orientalism; and two, tensions between cosmopolitanism, consumption, and citizenship.[3] In fact, this multilayered structure models that of Goa trance itself.

Track I: Technology, Modernity, and Orientalism

Noah, an articulate and thoughtful young man who grew up in Northampton, has traveled to trance parties in New York and throughout New England. He believed that the very long, "low-frequency sound waves" of the heavy bass have a neurophysiological affect on dancers that is responsible for creating an altered state of being, in addition to or even apart from the influence of drugs. The idea of consciousness-altering rituals involving music and dance that simultaneously subvert and reinforce the social order is obviously an old one. What is new in these contemporary rites at raves is the notion that one can be simultaneously modern, or even postmodern, and premodern. Some have called this techno-shaman-

ism, which for the so-called E-generation is not as paradoxical as it might appear. Gavin, who producers Spectra parties and is based in Amherst, explained why he used Mayan images on his fliers:

> Trance is the fusion of the newest technology available with the oldest rhythms available. People who come to the parties are very computer-literate, they are using technology to awaken their senses. The Mayans were very advanced for their time, and they were also very spiritual. The vibe at parties is very tribal. . . . it's very modern but also the oldest thing people have been doing.

Trance parties rely on digital technology and a postmodern aesthetic based on sampling, but they also distinguish themselves by their ritualistic performance and staging; live acts feature not only deejays but also drummers and fire artists who perform with fireballs and firesticks. Successful party producers such as Gavin pay special attention to the visual decorations, which include not just the digital displays found at other parties but also installations of fabric and banners that react to the UV light. "Om" symbols and images of Hindu deities are also common; in fact, Hindu iconography is so standard for trance fliers that Gavin turned to Mayan imagery to try to distinguish his own graphics from those of other party promoters. Rather than expressing a simple postmodern nostalgia that looks back on a moment in a distant past, trance participants claim that their music and dance *are* a representation of primordial experience and embody the surfacing of collective memory through the mediations of a deejay-shaman. The technology of electronic dance music and trance parties is seen as offering a way to connect with a heightened consciousness via visions of "other" spaces or times. Perhaps, then, this is a performance of Orientalism that is both spatial and temporal (see Maira 2003 on notions of time).

Tribal techno and trance offer white American youth a way to reimagine themselves through racialized, and even globalized, notions of otherness. Noah had just returned from a party in New Hampshire when I spoke to him for the first time, and he described the outfit he had worn: a white dress with "Chinese characters" that glowed in the black light. He reflected, "So when I came into the costume, I take on this other persona. And that's what a lot of people do, they go there to see things, do things, that they can't in their everyday life. So I just wanted it to help step outside of myself." This description could be read as a classic performance of

Orientalism but in our conversation it became clear that it was not the Chineseness of the characters per se that helped Noah take on another persona but the experience of being in what he calls a "costume" and notably in one that he had altered for himself, of performing in an altered light.

Yet it is also true that trance parties draw heavily on mystical-psychedelic symbolism based on Hindu and Buddhist imagery. Fliers for the Synthetic Sadhu parties in New York feature images of Ganesh, Om symbols, and yes, meditating sadhus, with one flier depicting a controversial photograph of Mike Myers as a Hindu deity. Noah's response to these fliers was that they were appealing simply because they were colorful and psychedelic, but he did not seem to consume the Indian iconography through an exoticist lens.

The evocation of India seemed to have meaning for Noah largely as a way to geographically situate the genealogy of the music, the name "Goa" leading him to believe that Goa trance was actually a music produced by Indians. This is perhaps where the Orientalism of trance might seep into the imaginaries of American youth, for as Hien says: "I wish I knew why they chose that name Goa trance. . . . Maybe they wanted to mystify trance further, by adding this element of Goa, this foreign world, you know." Noah also acknowledged that such naming was part of consumerist packaging, saying, "It's the label that has to be put on it. Our culture is so much about the label." During the course of our conversation he realized that Goa trance was really produced by tourists and drew very few Indian followers. This was a revelation to him but he did not seem disappointed, remarking: "Now I understand why people from your country would be offended by this, you know. I mean, maybe they don't like being represented in this electronic music." When I asked Hien how he felt about ravers using Asian symbols or style, he said, "I think it's funny how a lot of people have kanji tattooed on them, and they don't even know what it means. I shouldn't talk, because I have Japanese kanji tattoos!" However, Hien did not see this appropriation of Asian iconography as problematic. He thought that some non-Asian American women actually looked very attractive in the Chinese or Vietnamese clothes that became a popular fashion trend in the late 1990s. Clearly, the responses of youth to Asian iconography vary by ethnicity, gender, and class and are contingent and contextual.

Indeed, in thinking about the complex meanings of Orientalism in my research, it occurred to me that my presence as a researcher had as much

to do with the production of Orientalism as these young people's own understandings. They learned that there were no Indian people in trance, but *I* was there. I was both dissolving the myth of the Indian authenticity of Goa trance and simultaneously embodying an Indian subject who, after all, had grown up in India and could be presumed to be authentically Indian, claiming to know about the origins of the music and its relation to India. Needless to say, I did not embark on this project with the intention of setting the cultural record straight about Goa trance, but neither did I assume the role of the traditionally detached researcher who listens, but never comments or responds. This was a complex but always illuminating process, for notions of authenticity and Orientalism, mine and theirs, collided in sometimes unexpected ways.

The thoughtfulness of the young people I spoke to forced me to think more carefully about the interpretive models and theoretical assumptions I was bringing to the research, to really listen to what it was they were saying (Lipsitz 1999), though of course there are moments when it is important to move between listening to "native ethnographers" and analyze critically what is not being said or brought into focus. This dialogic approach underscores the value of using ethnographic methods in cultural studies that go beyond the study of media as cultural texts and speaks to the larger debate about the strengths and shortcomings of youth culture studies in the United States, where a focus on youth culture abstracted from the lived experience of youth themselves has sometimes seemed to be the dominant approach (Grossberg 1996; O'Connor 1996; McRobbie 1997), and also to the value of developing truly interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary methodologies in Asian American studies. My ethnographic subjects forced me to think about how my questions were embedded in our relationship and to consider difficult ethical and political questions about representation. I was concerned not only about representations of India but also about how my subjects' investments and opinions would be described for a largely academic audience that would, it is safe to say, not be composed primarily of ravers. For those immersed in critical ethnography it is a cliché to say that research is coproduced, within limits, and that it is contingent and conjunctural. But we are still grappling with the shape of the new knowledges produced through reflexive ethnography and their implications: substantive, epistemological, and political (see Maira 2003).

In this project, for instance, the reflexivity of my research relationship complicated my own understanding of Orientalism and its relation to cosmopolitanism. Recent work on Orientalism that refines Edward Said's

(1978) framework offers useful ways of thinking about the production of Orientalism in turn-of-the-millennium U.S. youth culture. Meyda Yegenoglu revisits Said's distinction between the "unanimity" and "durability" of the "latent structure" of Orientalism, as opposed to the "apparent contradiction and heterogeneity" of its "manifest content," and astutely concludes, "To insist on the unity of Orientalist discourse is not to claim that it is a monolithic block. But, if the legacy of Orientalism is with us today, and if it has been able to survive despite the collapse of empires, it is because it has articulated itself differently in each instance" (1998, pp. 71–72). Holly Edwards, curator of the exhibition "Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasure: Orientalism in America, 1870–1930" (2000), conceptualizes Orientalism as "multivocalic," evolving, and conflicted (2000, p. ix) and, in similar vein, Lisa Lowe has examined "orientalist representations overlapping with rhetorics of gender and class" (2000, p. 325). If Orientalism is multivocalic, however, it is also self-reflexively evoked and ambiguously produced by scholars and critics in relation to research subjects.

Track II: Cosmopolitanism, Consumption, and Citizenship

I returned to talk to Noah, having decided that I needed to explicitly discuss the politics of representing constructions of "difference" in the subculture. I explained to him my understanding of Orientalism, the construction of the "East" as opposed to the "West" in Edward Said's (1978) framework. Noah's response was:

> You bring up East and West, and . . . stuff like that, and it's hard for me to think about that. And I don't know why that is. You know, I've always lived in the West, . . . but for me, the music is a worldwide thing and that's why it's so important to me because I feel that it's a force that can connect us all, regardless of our origins, our gender, our physical characteristics, . . . That's the only way that I try to talk about it, with most people, as a unifying force. . . . With our different languages, our different cultures, and all these differences, to me it really looks like . . . the roots of something we can all connect to.

For Noah, the categories of "East" and "West" were less important than a particular notion of cosmopolitanism in the face of an acute awareness of social differences, a belief in electronic music and dance as offering a uni-

versal language that could cross national and cultural boundaries. Raves are a global cultural phenomenon, and trance parties are drawing youth in countries as far-flung as Japan, Hungary, Mexico, and Australia. Lee, a young woman who has been to parties across New England, said that the theme of "we are one world, one people" is very evident in Goa trance. Fliers for raves and dance music albums often talk of "one planet" and depict a world map. Yet, interestingly, the theme of nation and of nationalism persists. A New York City rave in 2001 promoted by a production company called "Stuck on Earth and Unity" had a flier entitled "One Nation," with an image of the Statue of Liberty against a red, white, and blue backdrop. A trance album has the telling title "TranceGlobalNation" superimposed on an iconic globe represented by latitudinal and longitudinal meridians. In some instances, the category of nation is used to imagine the planet. The party subculture is for some an imagined community with horizontal, affective ties like the nation described by Benedict Anderson (1983), except it is now a "global-nation."

The contradictory discourse of trance, which seems to override national identity and simultaneously evoke the nation as the model for a global community, particularly through its discourse of universalist humanism, appears cosmopolitan. Bruce Robbins proposes that "actually existing cosmopolitanism," rather than an older, romantic notion of universalism, arises out of "an ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates" (Rabinow, cited in Robbins 1998, p. 1). In this model, cosmopolitanisms are not only plural and "come in different styles and sizes," but they often work in support of nationalisms (Robbins 1998, p. 2). Yet the concept of cosmopolitanism is ambiguous: what, exactly, is this "cosmopolitical" space that is "beyond," yet still yoked to, the nation that manages to allow room for critiquing what Robbins calls a "dangerously reinvigorated U.S. nationalism"—certainly a pressing question in the wake of September 11, 2001 (Robbins 1998, p. 13)?

Clifford's cautious and careful appraisal of cosmopolitanism is useful in thinking about its role in global dance culture. He writes of "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" as occupying just one position along a "continuum of sociospatial attachments" from neighborhoods and cities to national communities and cross-border affiliations. He notes, "You do not, of course, have to leave home to be confronted with the concrete challenges of hybrid agency" (Clifford 1998, p. 367). It is in this sense that rave culture is