

FOODCULTURE

Tasting Identities and Geographies in Art



edited by Barbara Fischer



Can I Have MSG, an Egg Roll to Suck on and Asian American Media on the Side?

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"I'm searching for an economy of the body, the system of interplay between the parts of a structure. By revolving my search around four elemental yet complex aspects of our bodies' relations to food and its consumption, i.e. crave, cook, eat, digest, I want to locate interpretations of desire. By dissecting desire as a socio-political manipulation, I'm reconstructing desire as a continuum for survival. The life in desire lies, not inside the solidity of certain boundaries and rigid definitions, but around the fluidity of metamorphic margins, intervals, residues."¹

"I am conscious of shifts in my writing. There was always a tug-of-war in me between 'there' and 'here,' the pull of roots and the dream of leaving. In that struggle of insiders and outsiders, I used to feel simultaneously on both sides. Now I've come down firmly on the side of those who by preference, nature or circumstance simply do not belong. This unbelonging – I think of it as disorientation, loss of the East – is my artistic country now. Wherever my books find themselves...[abbreviation mine], that's my only home."²

My body knows when I eat a meal in Chinatown, at a Chinese restaurant in New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, London. My eyes sort out Chinese restaurants everywhere I go, and refuse to move away. Are those monosyllabic English words particularly visible, or am I looking for them? I'm not going in this time. I look at the menu. Sit down. Glance at the waiters; peep through the kitchen door. Deciding to speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. If I order the food in Chinese it'll taste better. But the fact, is even when I do it in Chinese, I still hate it. The food, that is. The migraine and drowsiness that follows – the never-ending cycles of being punished by eating like a Chinese – in diaspora.

There is something more to be said about my “developing” allergies to Chinese food, which I grew up on, and the impossibility of resisting it. I keep thinking that this mysterious allergy I recently “discovered” inside me has got to be not about Chinese food. Probably the MSG, not the food. But even MSG I thought I grew up on. Didn't I grow up on soy sauce, on Knorr's Chicken Flavor (usually in a smaller font on the packaging) Bouillon, on fermented soy bean paste – all containing heavy doses of monosodium glutamate? Eating my mother's cooking all my life, why haven't I been allergic before to any of the above? How could seven years of living in America change my physical being in a way that completely denies my twenty-some years of existence in Hong Kong, my history of being a little Chinese gourmet, coached in my mother's kitchen? Has the “American Experience” (or, the “Natural Food Experience” for that matter) sensitized me so much that my body reacts furiously against those “unAmerican” ways of eating, or, has it actually castrated my immune system such that I can't even eat “my own” food any more? In either case, my body has lost its memory.

Or has it? Why do I have this dilemma to start with? Can I really live without Chinese food? Whatever I eat, I am haunted by its shadow. My desire for it is my continuum for survival. My body always remembers.

Memory frames my experience of diaspora. It enables me to feel simultaneously grounded and uprooted; both oriented and disoriented. This however imaginary origin of a kind of “authentic” Chinese food gives me the room to face further separation, supplies the forlorn part of self the undercurrent of self-sufficiency, yet it also always supplies the first cutoff-ness, hence the forlornness. Diaspora grants me, in the most tangible way, a permanent lack. Fear and inferiority aroused by the recognition of the lack actively repeats and

reproduces the lack, oftentimes through the most accessible manifestation of our desire, for example, the one towards food.

If food, as an object of desire, has the power to give us what we want and also to take it away, I wonder if we also have the power to change the things we want by changing the things we cook and eat. Through the rituals of imagining, preparing, consuming and imagining food, we repetitively force our desires, produced by our cultural memory, into signification. Now, if I try to eat what I and not what my body wants, will I then eventually shake up the construct of my body, thus my desires, my – so-called – lack?

How has the experience of preparing, consuming and/or rejecting food informed and constructed our sense of being? How is our relationship to our food culture affected by diaspora and how are those shifting relationships articulated in media representations? Is the excess of cooking and eating a stereotype of Asian North Americans, or is it an “essential” part of our identity? How is that tug-of-war between resisting stereotypes and reclaiming stereotypes as an integral part of our identity manifest in artists' film and video? In examining my own diasporic experience in relation to the Asian American food cultures, I attempt to use this essay to interrogate some of these questions through a study of several independent films and videos recently made by Asian North Americans.

Every time I watch *The Trained Chinese Tongue* (Laurie Wen, United States, 1994, 20 min), I feel an intense hunger rising within me, even if I've eaten right before. Whatever I've had, Chinese or not, suddenly falls short compared to the close-ups of food that streamline the optical experience, and the sensual, communal atmosphere this visual pleasure gives rise to. My responses have something to do with the surreality of the film's premise: the filmmaker asks female strangers in Chinatown grocery stores if she can follow them home. A young Chinese woman from Hong Kong speaking a displaced language, her appearance of authenticity evokes sympathy and empathy from the strangers she approaches. They bond with the filmmaker by inviting her to dinner. It is as if making friends with those who come from where one came from somehow satisfies the yearning for the “lost home.”

The film is constructed not so much on the imagined solidarity of the disenfranchised, however, as on exposing their fragility. In fact, *The Trained Chinese Tongue* opens with a potential subject refusing to collaborate; a woman hurrying away, staring back at the pursuing camera as if it were a huge rat

in the grocery store. Wen's strategy then shifts: "I am a film student from Harvard. Can I film you?" This untranslated line reveals the power relations between the woman in front of the camera and the one behind it. It sets up a paradigm in which this student from an Ivy League school becomes a symbol of the American Dream, which the potential subject may want to access. The student also happens to be an apparently harmless Chinese girl whose needs at this particular moment can only be fulfilled by the woman on camera.

In this sequence with Jenny and her eleven-year-old daughter Tina, Wen's voice-over narration compares her own immigrant experience with theirs. A mutual dependency soon develops between Wen the filmmaker and Jenny the subject. But the filmmaker's own subject position is one of both insider and outsider. Jenny doesn't speak English. Jenny assumes Wen's mother doesn't speak English. Wen, however, clarifies in voice-over that her mother was an English teacher. Jenny tells Wen that she wants Tina, like Wen, to go to an Ivy League school. The women's desire to (over)identify with each other in spite of class differences, access to representation and whatnot, speaks the emotional connections arising from the diasporic experience. This scene, however, ends not with the imaginary bonding but with a performance of will: Tina singing "A Whole New World" for Wen. While this reminds us again of the unequal power relations between the filmmaker and her subject, it also carves out a space within the film in which the subjects enjoy a greater degree of self-representation. Although the film privileges the filmmaker's English narration over the Cantonese and Mandarin spoken by its subjects,³ Tina's song of courage and determination wins her an unforgettable presence.

What is the filmmaker's need? The filmmaker needs to film. But in order to film, this need is intentionally confused with the need to eat. Auntie Lai, another woman Wen meets in the grocery store, brings Wen home like "a stray cat that needs to be fed." This analogy is deepened when we notice that most of the food in the film is seafood, heavy on fish and prawns. What does the audience want? We want to watch. But in the process of watching, we are confused by our desire to eat. We devour with our gaze as if that somehow kills the hunger. This slippery confusion of desires characterizes, in my experience, the process of any identification.

We might expect that Wen the filmmaker would identify with Lei Shing, the young woman artist. But owing to a language barrier – Cantonese vs Mandarin – the camera is more intrigued by Lei Shing's boyfriend, Ocean,



the "emergency translator" between the two women. The filmmaker is of course playing the role of the translator too, constantly paraphrasing the Chinese dialogue and its cultural meanings for the American English audience. Wen's gender-bending comparison of Ocean's use of language with that of Daisy from *The Great Gatsby* establishes both a difference and an identification that fringes on an almost homoerotic desire from a subject position whose sense of self is always already othered, colonized, assimilated. This way, she maps both herself and her object of desire onto the master's image, turns it around, claims it as an essential part of her subjectivity, and – oops! – she also reminds us of the "blasphemy" of the act.

The Trained Chinese Tongue reflects on this perhaps never-ending quest of desire: the yearning of the self to merge fully with the other, but in its failure to do so, is confronted with the other within the self. Since Wen did not come to the United States until she was twelve, the Chinese American Mr. Bau, one of her interviewees, assumes she possesses a special eating technique called "The

Laurie Wen, *The Trained Chinese Tongue*, 1994. Video still from 16 mm film. Photo: courtesy the artist.

Trained Chinese Tongue," while lacking the language skills to pronounce "Fort Lauderdale" correctly. Mr. Bau's prejudices, based on class, language and eating habits ("We Americans vs. You Chinese"), remind the filmmaker and the audience once again of the shaky and potentially dangerous imaginary bond among immigrants. It also highlights how assimilation and identification actively construct power relations by which a whole spectrum of Asians in America, including Jenny, Wen or Mr. Bau, find themselves inevitably bounded and defined. As Richard Fung has eloquently put it: "Whereas racism privileges whiteness and targets a somewhat shifting body of 'others,' anyone, no matter their status or color, can engage its discourses. There is a way that power is fluid and shifting at the same time that it is concentrated at the top."⁴

In Hong Kong, I remember there being good food and bad food. Good Cantonese food or bad Cantonese food. Good Szechuanese or bad Szechuanese. Coming to the States, however, I gradually learned that Chinese food is Asian food and Asian food is ethnic food, spicy food, fast food, cheap food. Suddenly, all Chinese cuisines become one and "Asianized." So rather than losing "home," I lost my ability to compare different kinds of Chinese food, different restaurants, different menus, as they've all become "unified" through diaspora.⁵ However much we fantasize the constant, the diasporic experience has affected the process of preparing, perceiving and consuming food in a way that no food can stay the same once it moves across cultures. So diasporic Chinese, including the relatively recent immigrant wannabes like myself, have gradually come to a sad realization that whatever "authentic" dishes we try to order, they still have a "chop suey" quality to them. By desiring and eating cheap Chinese take-out in America, I am constantly reminded of my diaspora status. While Chinese food does not remain constant, my body also changes according to contexts. My newly developed MSG allergies remind me that the possibility of reclaiming a stable origin will always be a fantasy.

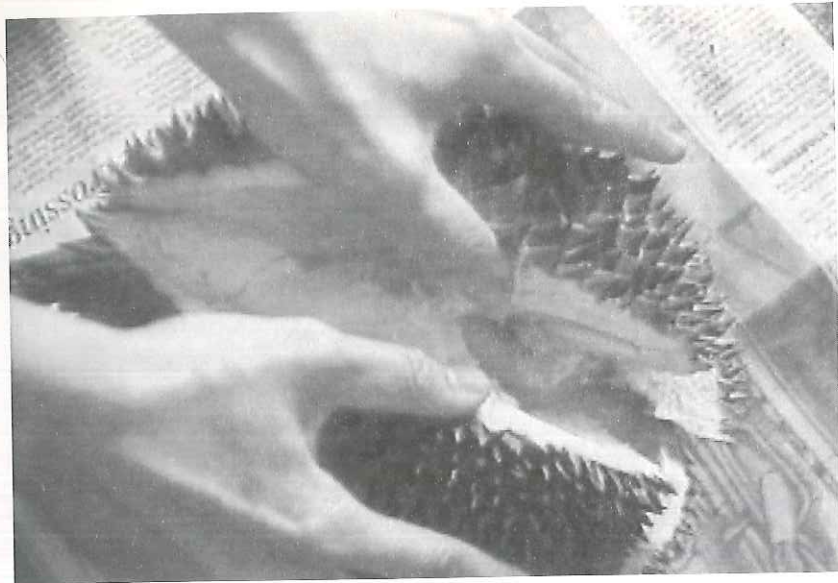
In other words, diaspora is somewhat like a sex change: a movement from the male position to the female in the system of patriarchal heterosexuality that Lacan was so interested in, subjecting her to a process of castration, forcing her into a position of naturalized lack. Diaspora creates the lack by making it visible, edible. Through a process of colouration that many diasporized subjects go through, Chinese food becomes too visible; becomes a homogenous signifier for difference. However much I resent American Chinese food, consume or resist it, I would still be perceived as having qualities that resemble it – my skin the same color as a fortune cookie's.⁶ I don't

have Chinese food; I become Chinese food. And I lost access to Chinese food when I became it.

But just as I am glad that I don't have a permanent dick, there are tremendous strengths within diasporized artists who have used the "lack" to their own ends. After all, what is this "lack" if not the inequality of military and economic power among nations enabled by the Story of Mr. Dick? *Fast Life on a Lazy Susan* (Tien, Canada, 1993, 15 min) explores how Chinese American food as a discursive formation, always already held at bay by the Story of Mr. Dick, is in itself full of contradictions and instabilities. In this short experimental video, a group of young Canadian women of Asian descent discusses how "white people's perception of Chinese food" is different from the "genuine" Chinese food their own mothers cook. Yet they also jest that they actually love these "fake" inventions – Chop Suey, Egg Roll, et al. – because, although these takeout foods were developed by the Chinese in North America to cater to "what they thought white people wanted to eat," it's become the only Chinese food widely available: "I know that on the one hand it's white people's representation of us in a kind of food form, but on the other hand it's been made by Chinese people. We get the last laughs. When we take it into our own hands, it means something different."

It is in such a context that the women sharing a durian, a woman gutting a fish, washing a squid and, last but not least, consuming a bowl of fortune cookies, become political acts. Tien confronts the reality of Chinese food as a lost territory, daring to reclaim it through contradictions and ironies. The low-tech, shakycam aesthetic gives this tape a home video look which, among other things, frustrates the exoticization of these otherwise easily exoticized acts of preparing and consuming food.

The piece cuts between a utopian vision of a community of Asian American/Canadian women from different language backgrounds sharing food, jokes and thoughts, and the image of a lone young Chinese woman pushing a cart of steamed buns down cold Vancouver streets. There are no people, only cars, and she appears lost, not quite knowing where, why or for whom she's going. Finally, she offers the buns to the camera and the audience. In the former, the women's legs erotically caress each other. They consume Chinese foods in a typically unfeminine, and therefore unoriental, manner: six pairs of chopsticks tear a bun apart, a woman devours a bowl of noodles, spilling them occasionally and wiping her mouth with her hand, looking straight at the camera as it closes in on her. The fact that Tien chooses a community of young



Tien, *Fast Life on a Lazy Susan*, 1993. Still from 15 minute video. Courtesy: Video Out.

women but represents them in codes that defy traditional Chinese gendering is significant. While the domestic kitchen is historically a space to confine and contain women, and cooking (for her husband and children) is defined as a woman's "natural responsibility," the kitchen is usually a freer space where women and girls can hang out and share secrets beyond men's control. Traditionally, a good Chinese wife is marked by how well she cooks within the kitchen, and how decently she behaves outside it. The relative freedom of the kitchen is dependent upon the meticulous gendering outside. Whereas *The Trained Chinese Tongue* expresses empathy toward the intimate ways women bond through the food ritual and gives the women's laughter and silences outside the kitchen an unusual amount of space, *Fast Life on a Lazy Susan* shows women's bonding and self-representation as a given in any space. In Tien's video, the women's refusal to observe "table manners" powerfully extends women's freedom way beyond the kitchen, and, in fact, beyond the "home." It is through redefining women's freedom that the video seeks to redefine home.

The woman who wipes the grease off her face, mouth stuffed with noodles, is the same woman pushing the cart. With this juxtaposition, Tien interrogates the North American stereotype of cheap Chinese food, which perpetuates the

subjugation of many Chinese in America as a class systematically alienated from their labour of producing food. By differentiating the foods that Chinese people eat and the ones they sell to survive, this video also points to the Chinese labourer's alienation from her product. As a producer of cheap food, she does not exist as a subject since she owes her existence to the customer's appropriation. By directly addressing the audience, offering us – not selling – the same kinds of steamed buns that the subjects themselves eat, the video builds up an understated tension by contrasting the intention of hospitality and possibility of community with the harshness of North American realities.

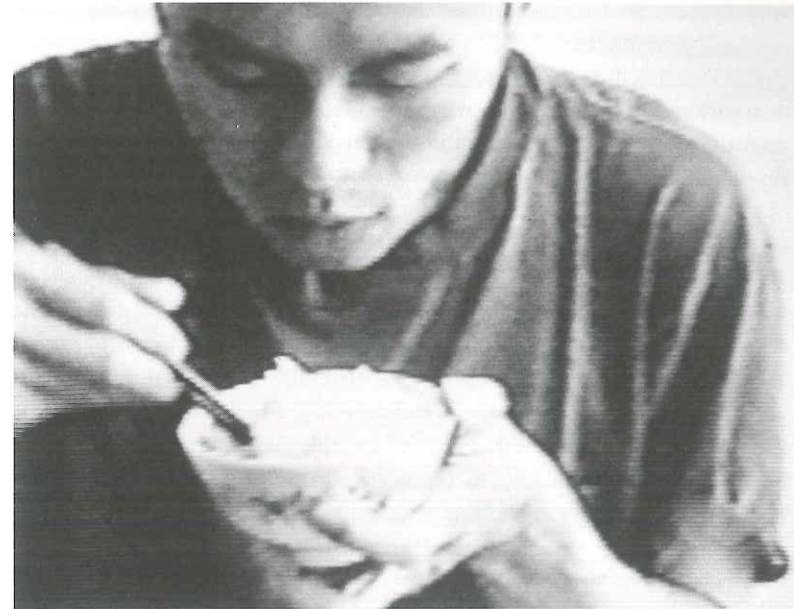
What Barthes said about wine vis à vis the French people can very well be used to speak about food vis à vis the Chinese: "wine is a part of society because it provides a basis not only for a morality but also for an environment; it is an ornament in the slightest ceremonials of French daily life. It exalts all climates, of whatever kind: in cold weather, it is associated with all the myths of becoming warm, and at the height of summer, with all the images of shade, with all things cool and sparkling. There is no situation involving some physical constraint (temperature, hunger, boredom, compulsion, disorientation) which does not give rise to dreams of wine."⁷ If Fanon is right that to be exiled from language is to be dispossessed of one's subjectivity, then what we witness in both Wen's and Tien's works is how exiles repossess their displaced subjectivity through food; how they build their sense of self through food amidst, despite and because of the physical, emotional and intellectual constraints they have experienced in a hostile environment, an environment that aggressively rejects and assimilates cultural others as the absolute opposite of the "White Boy's" troubled self-image, as incomprehensible as the Empire of the Signs and the like.

But just as Mr. Bau manages to use the discourse of food to flaunt his "Americanness," the repetitively and obsessively performed rites of preparing, cooking and consuming food also play an essential part in upholding the image of the "native" by the native, in this case, Chinese identity as a "race." Food thus serves as an index of the imaginary "heritage" passed on, the racial symbolism, the alimentary sign of Chineseness, most brilliantly performed by the long, fast-paced sequence of chopping, steaming and stuffing that opens *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, Taiwan/United States, 1994, 130 min) As a member of this race, it sure felt good. Deep down I knew that neither my mom nor my friends' moms nor my friends' friends' moms cook that way. But at that moment I felt

very Chinese. So I began to think maybe somewhere, sometime my grandmother's grandmother, if she happened to be the Emperor's mistress, maybe she cooked like that. Of course, Emperors' mistresses never cooked.

Yet again, watching the film in a theatre in New York's Soho, to feel quint-essentially Chinese is also to feel essentially othered, superior but castrated, especially since this identity is, again, based on these very very strange ways of cooking and eating. I could smell the wide eyes, the falling jaws around me. The film is so wonderfully calculated – the protagonist is a famous chef – that this fetishistic representation of food is justified within its characterization. Those close-ups of the kungfu of chopping and stir-frying constitute a postmodern version of the West's Chinoiserie. I felt like I was stripteasing, selling something that I didn't have. I felt incredibly fixed and therefore false. I felt as if I were an imitation, pretending that I too could live up to the glamorized image of these foods. Then I realized the only way I could feel more comfortable looking at these images was to imagine I wasn't Chinese. That way, I could take full pleasure in enjoying the intricacies of the acts, those strange, very very strange ways of cooking and eating. As if this was completely foreign, and I was not.

The title says it all: the film is about how "Eat Drink" and "Man Woman" are interrelated. The central pathos lies in the resistance/impossibility of the daughters to take care of their father, while continuing to uphold the image of the traditional Chinese family – i.e., living, sitting, eating together. As a renowned chef, the father's character serves as a spectacular epitome of that tradition ("There's no one in the whole of Taiwan that cooks like you anymore"), versus the rapid modernization of the metropolitan Taipei embodied in the daughters' drifting away. The film is punctuated by wide shots of the busy thoroughfares of Taipei. It keeps reminding us that this is not a film about one family, but about a society. The three sisters are all marked by distinctly "Western" influences – Christianity, international business, Kentucky Fried Chicken – which reinforce the "authenticity" of the father. That he cooks better than any Chinese on earth, makes him in fact more Chinese than anybody else. Thus the only option left open to the daughters is not authenticity but submission to it. Their goodness is not measured by their ability to cook, but rather to stay home, sit around the dinner table and eat. Paradoxically, the more a daughter is like the father, the more she is considered a problem. For example, the second daughter cooks best; she even enjoys making elaborate dishes like her father's. But the fact that she criticizes her



Nguyen Tan Hoang,
*7 Steps to a Sticky
Heaven*, 1995, 24
minutes, color, sound.

father's cooking – oh yes, she also talks back – makes her a nuisance. In other words, she competes.

The Father is the sole upholder of the family – the breadwinner, and also the commander-in-chief in the household. He keeps the family together by performing the duty of cooking both outside and within the home. The absence of the mother facilitates a gendered dichotomy with, on the one hand, the father-cum-giver-cum-timekeeper-cum-custodian of (Chinese) tradition and, on the other, the daughters-cum-takers-cum-sleepers-cum-ungrateful asserters of (modernized) individuality.

The character of the Father is marked by mobility. He is constantly on the run, cabbing, jogging, speeding from room to room, from house to house, from his kitchen to the restaurant, to the sauna, to the hospital, to the park, and even to deliver lunch to little Shan Shan's school every day. The film begins at a point, however, when this power of mobility seems to be in question: he has more or less retired, has lost his taste buds and his health is in question. Who is going to take care of him? He now has to meet the challenges posed by his daughters' increasing mobility. But while moving out of the home suggests the possibility of a more independent space for the women, both the eldest and the youngest daughters' flights are into other men's arms. They move from the gender-defined space of their father's household into the equally gender-defined space of their husbands'.

The women in the film are all marked by the signifiers of conventional Chinese femininity: crying, singing (even hymns), hysteria, admiration of a husband's strength and, of course, pregnancy. The film's potential moment of transgression comes when the second daughter attempts to trespass the boundaries of the kitchen by proving to her lover (with whom she has no plans to marry) that she can also cook – almost as well as her father. However, the potential of subversion is never fully realized, not so much because of the "almost," but more for the fact that no matter how well she cooks, she will never have the option of moving into the restaurant as a chef. Further, her ability to cook only serves as a "cure" for the father's taste buds. Uncle Wen on his hospital bed defends the father by saying that he kicked his second daughter out of the kitchen so that she could move on to "bigger things." What the film refuses to deal with, though, is the fact that Chinese professional chefs (as opposed to domestic cooks) are seldom female. Inserting a woman into that role would upset the patriarchal system defended, and ultimately embraced, by the film.

If there is anybody in *Eat Drink Man Woman* who manages to transgress real boundaries, it is, again, the father. He is given the most melodramatic moment of the film when he proposes marriage to Jin Rong, instead of the expected Mrs. Liang. It is perhaps not surprising that Jin Rong has little voice in the film; most of the time she lowers her head, as if her divorce has completely paralyzed her sense of self. Ironically, the part is played by Sylvia Chang, one of the smartest and strongest Taiwanese actresses and the director of numerous films, including the recent *Xiao Yu*, co-produced by Ang Lee. Her impregnation at the end of the film signifies the father's regained youth from marrying a young woman. The nuclear family is restored, the weaker gender conquered and retained in the house, happily.

In the final scene, the father asks for more of the daughter's soup, (while criticizing it, of course) and the daughter stands up to get it for him. The two reunite by calling each other "Daughter" and "Father." Freeze. This frame has stayed with me for a long time. The daughter standing, passing the soup to the father in both hands, showing the utmost respect. They re-identify with each other's familial roles. The return of the prodigal daughter. She performs the ultimate traditional Chinese feminine vocation: stay unmarried, take care of your father. Again, the triumph of Mr. Dick? Is it surprising then, that this film speaks so effectively across cultures, right at the moment when it seems the most quintessentially Chinese?

Seven Steps to a Sticky Heaven (Nguyen Tan Hoang, United States, 1995, 24 min) is an imaginative attempt to signify eating as a practice of both oppression and liberation, of self-violation and self-fulfillment. It also encapsulates the desire of young Asians to queer up the hetero-patriarchal ideologies embedded in their food culture. The videotape examines the term sticky rice, which refers to Asian gay boys who desire Asian gay boys. By performing himself on the tape, devouring sticky rice and rubbing it on his own body, Nguyen parodies a world in which we Asians become the food we (are expected to) eat; the image of a racialized food reinforces the stereotypes of the Asian body, smooth and soothing. On the other hand, to sexualize the Asian male body is also to defy the Eurocentricism of the dominant sexual paradigms, to reclaim the (lost) penis as a presence, to counter the myth of the undersexed Oriental male, the Chan who is always missing, lost in the gaps between the racial dichotomy of black and white.

If the video sexualizes the maker's own body, it also seduces the viewer to identify with the maker's desire for undesirable bodies, to identify with and

desire an Asian male body which doesn't desire white men. Ironically, in the video's interviews, the terms used to describe the desirable Asian male body are also those of the dominant stereotypes: the smoothness of the skin, the hairlessness, tight little ass, little brown nipples, and of course, "the dick is kind of cute." This is how the tongue-in-cheek structural motif of the sticky rice backfires on itself; how we all suddenly become and remain sticky rice; how we all eat it, hate it, love it and ... eat it – so historically fixed in a position that we actually proclaim it as desire, as home. While it is easy to see this as "internalized oppression," its foregrounding strategically provokes a re-examination of available space to Asian American gay subjects coming into being. While it has appropriated the white gaze as part of its own desire, the overt narcissism of the video lures the viewer into a position where, in order to desire the (yellow) body, one also has to identify with it, thus problematizing the whiteness of the gaze.

The fact that our subjectivity as Asian North Americans, or Asians living in the generalized Western world, is inevitably constructed of internalized/assimilated Orientalist knowledge, epitomizes the contradictions confronted by a lot of Asian diaspora artists working today. If making a video or film, especially with an autobiographical voice, is about articulating, and therefore inventing, one's subjectivity, how do we negotiate a sense of self which is always already othered? Or, to be more specific, how do I formulate a strategy that critiques the imbalance of power around the making and reading of Asian North American work in a white-identified society which, at the same time, allows me to come to terms with my othered state of being? How do I represent the fact that at times I find being in the margins, like masturbating with Sticky Rice, pleasurable, even desirable, when marginality has become an integral part of my being? This dilemma is in many ways similar to my food dilemma: how do I continue wanting to eat Chinese food (in America) without hating it or, for that matter, myself? Is this the beginning, the reason, or the limit of doing auto-ethnographic work?

Since food, Asian food, Chinese food in particular, has acted as a major source of western anthropological knowledge, our sense of self as Asians and Asian North Americans living in an imperialist global economy is inevitably informed and violated by assimilated anthropological knowledge historically focused on us as the objects of ethnography. Within and alongside this established ethnographic food discourse, a new generation of Asian North American media artists such as Wen, Tien and Nguyen have sought various strategies of

cultural resistance to challenge their status as native informants, re-articulate the complexities and subtleties of their cultures while at the same challenging the misogyny and heterosexism also embedded in their cultures. In their very different ways they foreground, question and contest the marginality of their representations in both Asian and North American cultural contexts. While directors such as Ang Lee receive backing from the Taiwanese Government to promote their nationalistic sentiments and sexism overseas, and subsequently became the tokens of Hollywood's diversity, we, as independent makers, realize there's a lot of work to be done, new battles to be fought. As an "authentic" Chinese, "when our time comes," I'll treat you to a good Chinese American restaurant I know.

Notes

Thanks to Richard Fung for editing an earlier version of this article.

1. Millie Chen, *cook (note) book*, exh. cat., Galerie Burning, Montreal, 1993, 3.
2. Salman Rushdie, "My Unfunny Valentine," *The Guardian*, February 4, 1999, 18.
3. In a private conversation with Wen she told me she has seriously considered subtitled the film in English instead of using English voice-over, but could not afford doing it.
4. Richard Fung, "Seeing Yellow/Asian Identities in Film and Video," *The State of Asian America/Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan, South End Press, 1994, 164.
5. The irony is: the harder the Communist Chinese Government seeks "unification" with the other Chinese societies, namely Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, the more Chinese people from these societies are forced to "unite" in the West by becoming voluntary exiles.
6. A more detailed study of the colour of the fortune cookie is found in "Eating the O: Gender and Sexuality in Recent Asian-American Art," a paper by Fatimah Tobing Rony delivered at the College Arts Association Annual Conference, 1994.
7. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris, 1957, trans. Annette Lavers, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.