APPREHENDING THE "ANGRY ETHNIC FAG"

The Queer (Non)Sense of Shame in Justin Chin's "Currency" and "Lick My Butt"

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Lick my butt
cos I'm an angry ethnic fag
& I'm in so much pain
so lick my butt
—Justin Chin, "Lick My Butt" (1997a)

Romanticizing, of course, occurs when one is moving from one class status to another, or in transition, and is forced to look back. Maybe the sights in the rearview mirror are not so much romantic, but more incomplete, unfamiliar, hesitant, yet demanding of one's full attention.
—Justin Chin, "Currency" (1999a)

What might be the implications of discerning the provocation offered by the late poet, writer, and performance artist Justin Chin in the first epigraph as an ethical imperative for queer politics?[1] Far from embracing a politics of respectability, the speaker of the poem issues and reiterates the command that the reader (you) "lick my butt" as an opening to apprehending the histories, struggles, and conviviality indexed by the queer worlds that he inhabits. The speaker thus reverberates the polemical tone of radical HIV/AIDS activist groups, enacting a mode of refusal that challenges the social codes that dictate how queer lives, desires, practices, socialities, and suffering can or cannot enter into the public frame. The command also registers the intermixing of pain and pleasure, signaling the limits

GLQ 26:1
DOI 10.1215/10642684-7929125

and possibilities for a utopian social order rooted in queer erotics. Accordingly, it gestures toward the ideal that "Queers Read This" (Anonymous 1990) proffered: "Being queer is 'grass roots' because we know that everyone [*sic*] of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone [*sic*] of us is a world of infinite possibility." These explicit invocations of sex with anger and shame seemingly register what Heather Love (2007: 7) describes as a "backwardness disavowed or overcome" in mainstream LGBTQ political agendas. Attending to this backwardness, however, may allow for a reassessment of the shifting uses and values of "queer" as a political and critical rubric in order to consider the possibility for alternative approaches to sexual politics.

The stakes for such a reassessment are urgent. Resounding Cathy J. Cohen's 1997 trenchant critique about the pitfalls and promises for a radical queer politics, Chin's observations remain all too applicable. Observing the frequency in which "queer" politics fixates on an axis of sexuality imagined as untainted by racial and class differences, Cohen (1997: 445) interrogates any platform that aspires "to integrate into dominant institutions and normative social relationships," rather than "seek[ing] to change values, definitions, and laws which make these institutions and relationships oppressive." Indeed, homonormativity and homonationalism speak to the waning of such radicalisms, as LGBTQ groups enthusiastically embrace opportunities for rights, protections, freedoms, and inclusions that further the violent interests of the state and capitalism.[2] In his essay "Currency," Chin contemplates how the ascendency of select LGBTQ subjects into dominant institutions, celebrated as transitions into a relatively higher socioeconomic or political position (e.g., the enfolding of LGBTQ subjects into the nation, military, or academe), simultaneously compels a backward glance that considers what conditions have (not) changed and have (not) been achieved at this moment of arrival.

Left behind in these transitions, the "angry ethnic fag" reckons with how any view of these pasts is always incomplete by enfiguring the ongoing modes of historical violence, shame, and pleasures surrounding queer socialities. On the heels of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a growing mainstream LGBTQ movement oriented toward Pride increasingly focused on rights and state recognition, advocating a politics of respectability that often disavowed sex as shameful and distanced itself from radical histories of AIDS activism.[3] As a counterpoint to such tendencies, Chin's writings drag out what Kadji Amin (2016: 181, 182) notes as the "stickiness" of queer's "historicity," by demonstrating how "it remains haunted by the electric 1990s convergence, under the banner of *queer*, of same-sex sexuality, political urgency, and radical transgression," in contradistinction to the

mainstreaming of queer and claims about its infinite mobility. And yet Chin warns against any interpretations that narrate the relationship between this past and our present in terms of progress or through a melancholic attachment to a bygone era in which queer afforded radical politics and theorizing. Indeed, queer studies scholars who challenge the sentiment of pride by insisting on a focus on shame and recentering sexual practices often reproduce what Chin cautions as a nostalgic mode that romanticizes the past and inhibits analyses into the entanglements among gender, sexuality, race, and class.[4]

Meanwhile, terms of civility reinforce this progress narrative as charges of "incivility" delegitimize and diminish other voices of dissent. Tellingly, Kyla Wazana Tompkins speculates that "civility . . . is about the embrace of class mobility and therefore about the abandonment of the crucial and necessary work of articulating class and race together as intersecting" (Tompkins and Nyong'o 2018: 92). In this equation, not only does the angry ethnic fag's continual positioning at the bottom signal a mark of shame, but also the politics that emerge from this figure's experience of bottomhood becomes an unwanted reminder, a mark of incivility that disrupts fantasies of inclusion and transition. As interdisciplinary studies programs face increasing budget cuts and institutional precarity and as the current government administration threatens recently secured rights to marriage and kinship, demands to cooperate incessantly dismiss queer of color dissent as divisive. As Tavia Nyong'o and Tompkins (2018) discern, the banner of civility "negates the rights of the other to make claims on the space of politics." Insofar as calls for civility dismiss critiques as irrational, unpatriotic, and nonsensical, I revisit Chin's articulation of the angry ethnic fag as a figure of silenced queer of color dissent. Refusing to be civil, Chin was vocal throughout his writings about these silencing measures, and yet, as Jee Leong Koh (2018: 119) has argued, "we have ignored voices such as Chin's." Chin (1999a: 44) critiques how dominant focuses on LGBTQ rights, questions of marriage, and the selective valorization of white gay men as valued consumers elide voices, concerns, and issues affecting women and queers of color: "So we're told that gay rights are important, and we're asked to fight fight and fight for it. But when there are gay rights, people of color will still be people of color and women will still be women and they'll still be fucked while the happy white fags run off to the disco." His writings foreground the erotics of sex acts to dramatize questions about the terms by which some queers can be lifted out of indignity while others are relegated as shameful. He thus elucidates the necessity of revisiting and working through *shame* as a way to question the economy of values that undergird the sign of "queer" in its political and critical deployments.[5]

Shame plays a pivotal role in the shifting discourses of LGBTQ rights and

sexual politics insofar as they make claims for what constitutes acts of indignity that demand our attention and what qualifies as righteous indignant acts for political organizing. Queer studies has been instructive in problematizing these operations of shame, but often unwittingly reproduces its hierarchical values. To nuance these operations, I follow the lead of Sharon Holland, Marcia Ochoa, and Tompkins (2014: 392) in suggesting that we consider how the academic projects of queer studies cluster into a coalitional yet contingent queer body (politic) that collectively engages in consumption, digestion, and abjection: "What happens to fodder when it begins its journey down, in the materiality of what must be cast out, and in the space of the nonproductive—what takes place in the *viscera*"? That is, what objects, topics, and inquiries become valued resources for use in the field? Moreover, what happens when racial difference becomes *eviscerated as* this fodder? To wit, racial difference remains a key source of sustenance for queer politics and studies, as efforts to recuperate shame rely on consumption practices that aim to absorb the other to nourish the (fantasy of an) unmarked queer body (politic). In these processes, racial difference cannot be fully digested; instead, it clogs the value economy as the abject other that forces apprehension. Shame is symptomatic of investments in queer studies that both depend on and disavow the racialized body.

The works of Justin Chin center the erotic *through* racial difference in examining how shame can nuance these processes of consumption and abjection in ways that elucidate both the obstacles and possibilities for queer of color critique. Complicating conventional conceptions about what constitutes resistance, shame "informs us of hidden connections, cultural logics, and histories of fantasies, pain, and attractions" (Stockton 2006: 24). Shame invites us to wallow in the messy entrails of the queer body politic. Indeed, Elspeth Probyn (2000: 145–46) postulates: "[To] feed shame may be to steep ourselves in the murk of our body's toxins, shameful desires and disgusting knowledges." As competing value economies surrounding race, class, gender, and sexuality come into contact and conflict, Chin compels us to ask: What processes of abjection occur alongside our practices of consumption? How might notions about what constitutes "proper" politics marginalize the angry ethnic fag as shameful? In what ways might notions of shame apprehend and stop the angry ethnic fag from being heard?

The disciplinary operations of shame apprehend the angry ethnic fag as a figure of queer (non)sense. Apprehension, Judith Butler (2009) offers, names a mode of encountering, sensing, and perceiving what is not necessarily legible under existing norms of recognition. Meanwhile, it also names the practice of arresting someone for a crime. An archaic definition mediates these modes of sensing and arresting. A verb form of the term *apprehensive*, the act connotes sens-

ing in an anticipatory manner that portends uneasiness, anxiety, or fear. Modes of sensing signal something yet to come and can preempt any encounter with the other, who becomes arrested as an object of fear or guilt. Apprehension capaciously elucidates the affects and practices that create or foreclose possibilities for ethical encounters with others. Capturing this cluster of "ugly feelings" (to borrow from Ngai 2005)—discomfort, uneasiness, anxiety, and fear—that anticipatory apprehension induces, shame can highlight, problematize, and rework the conditions that make queer of color critique unheard and unthinkable.

Chin's oeuvre animates queer of color affect as an analytic for sussing out how such practices of apprehension varyingly elide and illuminate sustained materialist engagements with racial difference. Reworking ascriptions of shame that produce and silence queer racialized bottomhood, Chin's poem "Lick My Butt" theorizes not only its own abject positions within broader discourses but also the pleasures in relishing the bottom. His work centers shame and the erotic to enact what Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2007: 6) terms "productive perversity." Specifically, Chin's poem conceptualizes "eating ass" as an apt way to explore how we can(not) apprehend the "angry ethnic fag." Chin compels us to consider how the vernacular of eating ass and the queer subcultural practice it names confound what is commonly held as axiomatic in scholarly discourses: the unbreachable gap between consumption and abjection. By foregrounding the processes of abjection that accompany practices of consumption and refusing an apprehension that eviscerates the racial other for the queer body (politic), Chin reanimates the sex act of eating ass as a lived material reality, a model for self-reflexive critique, an ethics of care—toward the self and others—and a theorization of radical alternative relationalities, of being-with and desiring otherwise.

Acts of Indignity and Indignant Acts

Undoubtedly, much has changed since the publication of Chin's 1997 poetry collection *Bite Hard*—which was nominated for the Lambda Literary Awards—and his 1999 collection of essays, *Mongrel*. The shifting state for the LGBTQ community has been framed in terms of a progress narrative, emerging from shame to pride, as has been the case for the act of anilingus. Alongside a spate of notable representations of the act on popular television shows, a basic internet search for "anilingus" or "eating ass" yields more than a dozen popular articles from the last five years exploring this sex act, along with anal intercourse, as the "last taboo." This figuration encodes the sex act as a subcultural and marginal one performed mainly between gay men. Given this popularization, what might it mean to resitu-

ate this sex act within queer subcultural histories? As Yasmin Nair (2015) cautions, "There's nothing inherently radical about sex." Meanwhile, the question posed by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker's 2011 collection *After Sex?* suggests that this fatigue around sex reflects a suspicion about the waning intellectual and political value of queer theory at large. What then, if any, possibilities remain for drawing radical politics or critique from sex acts?

The popularization of the sex act resonates with the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US Supreme Court's 2015 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, not through claims of progress, but through the sublimated histories and presents around the stigmatization of queers. Using a "*liberal language of dignity*," the decision "take[s] it for granted that we should not be ashamed" (Warner 2009: 292). Furthermore, the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples assumes that such rights substantiate their dignity, which presumably signals a lifting out of shame as well. Appeals to dignity, however, merely work to recalibrate the value-ascriptions of shame and propriety. In designating marriage as the "most profound" union, the court reaffirms the shamefulness of queer kinships, relations, sex acts, and practices that are outside the (hetero-/homo-)normative bonds of marriage and citizenship. Justice Anthony Kennedy's opinion, in leveraging dignity, is starkly devoid of sex. Instead, sex becomes a right to "intimacy" and marriage a fundamental dignity. The inability to marry signals the impossibility of achieving full personhood under liberal terms.

The sanctification of dignity demonstrates the co-constitutive production of "queer liberalism and the racialization of intimacy" wherein the incorporation of queers into the national citizenry recasts the shame that same-sex couples suffered as the nation's wrongdoing (Eng 2010). However, national shame can work to contain wrongdoings to the past, obscure continuing inequities, and fortify patriotic identification, enshrining national pride in the state as the guarantor of equality and social justice. As Sara Ahmed (2004: 102) argues: "Shame can still conceal how such wrongdoings shape lives in the present. The work of shame troubles and is troubling, exposing some wounds, at the same time as it conceals others." Given this double act of shame, admitting to some wounds *in order to* obfuscate others, declarations of pride after the *Obergefell* decision were met by vocal expressions of anger. Queer of color organizers spoke out against the patriotic sentiment, demanding accountability for the shame of Black death, police violence, mass incarceration, and deportation (Chisholm 2015). Yet these critiques were largely greeted as *un*righteous anger: unjustified, morally suspect, and constituting mere shameful background noise against the celebratory displays of pride.

These indignant acts against the shamefulness of racial injustice are more

vital than ever. While the policies under the Trump administration seem to usher a uniform assault against social justice movements that would arguably facilitate a unified front among various contingents, their effects remain rife with contradictions that speak to the urgency for remaining vigilant to stratifications. Most notably, the increased attack on sex work provides a stark example of the differential "racialization of intimacy." Under the auspices of humanitarian efforts to stop human sex trafficking, the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (FOSTA/SESTA), which became law in 2018, holds websites responsible for posts that putatively advertise for prostitution by users. In effect, these laws conflate sex work with sex trafficking, compelling websites to preemptively close domains and services that have been vital for sex workers in soliciting and screening clients. While the most vocal opponents against these measures were forwarded by large corporations who stake their grounds on indignation against violations of free speech, advocates for sex workers remain the shameful reminder that is seen as potentially undermining the cause.

These recent trends serve as a continuation albeit modification of neoliberal measures of the late 1980s and 1990s that have systemically targeted and criminalized (queer) sex in public spaces (Berlant and Warner 1998; Delany 1999), privatizing sex as intimacy within the sanctioned space of domesticity. Ironically, FOSTA/SESTA forces sex work back into the public (not that it has ever fully been domesticated). These attempts to shove sex back into the closet, making it invisible and unhearable, exclude sex workers from participating within the virtual domain. Such processes correspond with movements that prioritize and value queer liberalism premised on the embrace of a domestic intimacy that abjects sex as the shameful, improper racial other. Of note, a large number of sex workers come from queer / trans of color communities. Racial difference, refracted through sex work, becomes the reminder of the historical and continuing abjection of queerness. Race retains and remains the mark of shame for queer dignity, just as queer sex (work) cannot be wholeheartedly incorporated into the sanctification of domesticity.

Accordingly, attacks on the erotic intimacies of sex work cannot be registered as acts of indignity that call for concerted organizing and defense. Instead, sex work *is* the act of indignity, the shameful behavior that must be disavowed to make claims for the respectability of homonormative domesticity. Deployments of queerness wedded to ideals of liberalism thus accumulate value over and against the devaluation of these racial others, who refuse to mature and enter the bonds of matrimony. Nuancing the possibilities for indignant acts through and against acts of indignity, shame generatively elucidates the economies of value within the body

politics of queer studies, wherein the consumption of certain images, concepts, and ideas work to continually abject considerations of racial difference. Shame at this conjuncture provides a dense transfer point for what Audre Lorde varyingly articulated as the usefulness of anger and the erotic as responses to structural inequity by women of color that are persistently repudiated. On the erotic, Lorde (2012: 53) writes: "We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society." Shame animates the devaluation and power of anger and the erotic, foregrounding uncivil acts through which the apprehension of racial difference becomes unpalatable and indigestible for queer liberalism.

A Queer Appetite for Shame

Far from being untainted by this value economy, the university nourishes judgments of shame through assessments of disciplinary protocol, intellectual rigor, academic professionalism, and collegial civility. The passage of Chin's poem in the epigraph isomorphically gestures toward the frequency with which expressions of queer of color desire are rendered nonsensical under these metrics.[6] Consider the various ways in which such desires become registered as noise within spaces of academe—a symposium, a classroom, or a meeting with administrators. Imagine the scenario. A speaker raises the issue that current institutional practices fail to provide structures of support that account for intersectional concerns, thereby inhibiting the thriving of minoritized bodies—faculty, staff, and students. In this moment of articulation, envision (or, recall) how addressees, hailed by the speaker, turn their eyes away, their face downcast. Expressions of queer of color desire, anger, and demand, embodied in the voice of the poem's speaker, become an act of indignity that induces a shame response, signaling "an interruption and a further impediment to communication" (Tomkins 1995: 137). Or perhaps the shame is inverted; rather than the listeners shaming the speaker for raising such questions, the speaker mobilizes shame as an indignant act, shaming listeners for failing to create conditions of flourishing for minoritized bodies.

To the extent that these conditions are structural, any form of vocalized dissent becomes dismissed as indignant. Consider the fine line between shame and "sham." In discussing shame, one can easily be seen as a sham who is oblivious to communal protocols and interests that render a topic of examination shameful. Or, if they are construed as improperly attaching pleasure and interest to that which is shameful, they, along with the argument, might be written off as being unserious, unprofessional. Discussions of shame, insofar as the affect is intimately involved with the constitution of the self, risk privileging the individual and fortifying a self-

congratulatory mode of academic narcissism. Yet the contagious and fluid motions of shame may evince larger social conditions that underwrite the affect, since "any learned restraint on the expression of any affect, when such restraint is not completely accepted, will evoke shame" (Tomkins 1995: 162). Insofar as queer of color dissent exceeds the "learned restraint" of academic professionalization and institutional civility, shame arises to regulate this disruption back into the fold. How can shame work to register something as non-sense? What may this affect disclose, or queer, in terms of the (re)production of collective values and interests?

The extensive work by queer thinkers and organizers in problematizing the economies of shame ostensibly provides insight into ways to challenge these regulatory mechanisms of institutionality within academe. The 1990s witnessed a reclaiming of "queer" that refused to embrace pride over and against shame. "The Queer Nation Manifesto" (ACT UP 1990) associated queer, and mobilized a sexual politics from it, with feelings of anger and disgust rather than the happiness associated with "gay." Meanwhile, Judith Butler (1993: 238) further asserted that queer theorists must "account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender." Her formulation of "critically queer" (223) underscores the potential of collectivities coming into formation through experiences of shame. Relatedly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003: 36) argues: "Shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating." Thus shame is both collective and individualistic, connecting broader social relations to intensely personal feelings. Shame lays bare normative expectations along with their violent regulatory effects. In addition to securing internal mechanisms of self-policing, shame through acts of shaming (both verbal and physical) manifests via collective practices by which individuals police the actions of those who deviate from the norm. Accordingly, shame underscores how affective and personal experiences are both symptomatic and productive of material conditions and relationalities. For these reasons, reworking the meanings ascribed to what is deemed shameful may reorient conventional conceptions of the political. An eroticization of shame, for instance, can refuse the negative moralism attributed to certain acts and desires. Likewise, José Esteban Muñoz (1999) highlights disidentification and shamelessness as practices by which queers of color rework shame and dominant gender and sexual norms in order to survive the racist and homophobic public sphere.

Queer reorientations toward shame, however, can install other boundaries of demarcation through the "bonds of interest" that they reproduce (Probyn 2005: xi). As Silvan Tomkins (1995: 134) clarifies, shame stems from the "incomplete

reduction of interest or joy" and is predicated on the existence of a degree of pleasure and interest. Gesturing toward social relationality and its policing mechanisms, "bonds of interest" key us into the various values and investments that this affect indexes. Shame animates the collective interests of a group and the binding practices by which it maintains these interests. Operations of shame are perhaps more complicated within minoritarian groups that recognize a community based on shared social difference insofar as the ostensible embodiment of such difference automatically makes an individual part of the group and establishes a bond of interest among those interpellated by this difference. They become implicated in and held accountable for the presumed shared interests of the group. Thus an individual experience of shame as well as acts of shaming both signal and attempt to repair a breach in the bonds of interest. In the first instance, the individual experience works as a mechanism of self-policing that prevents one from committing shameful acts in the future. In moments of shaming, other members of the group reinforce the shamefulness of an act, demonstrate how it violates their collective interests, and take the opportunity to reaffirm such interests. Accordingly, shame underscores the dynamic that Hiram Perez (2005: 188) discerns: "Unruly subjects are expelled to [queer theory's] margins."

The critical pitfalls of shame were exemplified in a 2003 international conference on gay shame held at the University of Michigan. Notably, two of the contributions to the influential special double issue of *Social Text* titled "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" (2005) explicitly draw attention to how the eroticizing and relishing of shame in discussions such as the "Gay Shame" conference work to secure the bonds of interest around gay white masculinity. If queerness signals a failure and denial from the parameters of white masculinity, the reinvestment in shame paradoxically worked to uphold and make claims to what Cheryl I. Harris (1993) theorized as the property of whiteness. In locating shame as a nostalgic prehistory to Stonewall, these discussions reinforce not only a politics of ignorance around questions of shame in the present but also stratifications along the lines of gender and racial difference within the terms of "queer" (Halberstam 2005: 222). In this way, assumptions in queer studies on the properties of shame can consolidate the bonds of interest around whiteness over and against considerations of racial difference.

Critiques against such consumption practices, however, can only be apprehended as non-sense, as noise. Hiram Perez, like other critics of the conference, inevitably reproduced a "politics of identity" that entails a "justifiable outrage" (Moon 2009: 364) that nonetheless "couch[es] his critique in highly personal terms" and in so doing "made race into something that could only be individu-

ally experienced" (365). Within such a framing, the specter of the angry ethnic fag emerges as the shameful, irrational figure who is not only unable to control his emotions and engage with an objective mode of academic critique but also an uncivil drag on the collective scholarly and activist efforts of queer politics. Ironically, such critiques confirm Perez's (2005: 174) startling claim: "Colored folk perform affect but can never theorize it." Shame refortifies the fraught divisions within queer studies, whereby white gay male theorists are championed as the bearers of anti-identitarian critique while the mere mention of racial difference ensnares one within the outdated "politics of identity." By projecting shame onto racialized bodies and eroticizing it for collective academic enjoyment, queer studies reproduces bonds of interest based on a reinvestment in the property of whiteness that relies on and apprehends bodies of color as noisy fodder. This dynamic replicates the processes that bell hooks (1992: 39) observes, whereby "cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten." The false promise of recognition instead commodifies difference, apprehending and eviscerating the racial other through consumption, digestion, and abjection.

Race to the (Peri-)Bottom

Contemplating how race becomes commodified into a form of palatable difference for the shameful consumption and guilty pleasure of queers, Chin's essay "Currency" examines the economy of interests and values undergirding discourses organized around race, gender, and sexuality by inquiring into what gains traction and is discerned as having critical or political purchase. Bottomhood becomes central to his contemplations of value through the erotic as he centers his positioning as a queer diasporic Asian subject in the United States. Here I am thinking alongside Nguyen Tan Hoang's (2014: 2) elegant theorization of "bottomhood as a tactic that undermines normative sexual, gender, and racial standards" while operating "capaciously, as a sexual position, a social alliance, an affective bond, and an aesthetic form." Likewise, Kathryn Bond Stockton (2006) reminds us that "the bottom" metaphorizes a lower position of status and power within socioeconomic and political hierarchies. Nguyen and Stockton show how attending to tendencies and practices *from* the bottom might rework ascriptions of shame, by charting alternative politics, bonds, and relationalities developed from and through positions of assumed powerlessness and passivity.

This capaciousness of the bottom thus explains the significance of abjection and anality in theorizations and debates surrounding the (anti-)sociality of

queerness. Famously, Julia Kristeva (1982) underscored the corporeal process of excretion as exemplary of abjection in which expulsion is both necessary and constitutive to the maintenance of the body. Insofar as queers eroticize the bottom, they are pathologized and shamed, given its generality as the bodily boundary for abjection. In short, the bottom—transformed from a body part to a sexual position denoting the proclivity toward being anally penetrated—embodies and intensifies queer shame. Leo Bersani's infamous "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987) considered how the linkage between sex and death associated with bottomhood under the specter of HIV/AIDS might be recoded as a radical potential for self-shattering that reconfigures modes of relationality. This putatively liberatory potential of the rectum, as so theorized via strands of the antisocial thesis, is a sore subject for nonwhite, nonmale, and noncisgender bodies, raising the question of who can afford to abandon the self and the social. Against these tendencies, scholars have explored how bottomhood and anality are differentially racialized, gendered, and sexualized.[7] They challenge the antisocial claim in queer studies to ask: Which positionalities allow one to turn away from the social? How might analyses of queer sexual practices through the bottom insist on a serious grappling with race and materialist politics?

Bottomhood indexes the positioning of those who have not been able to transition into bonds of normativity. While Asian American masculinity is predominantly defined as synonymous with bottomhood, common assumptions about Asian Americans *in general* view the racial group as being near, but never of or in the bottom. Chin (1999a: 42) suspects that Asian/American-ness is often construed as incompatible with leftist politics: "My great fear is that the Left, and the liberal/radical queer community at large, is fast equating Asian values with conservative values without as much as the blink of an eye."[8] Framed as persistently invested in circuits of normativity, Asian Americans are rarely understood as exhibiting the socioeconomic positioning or racial politics that presumably derive from the multiple valences of the bottom. Chin elaborates: "Sometimes I have this strange feeling in my gut: that the Left is very willing to forgo the Asian-American community in favor of the African-American and Latino/a communities; that Asians have to prove themselves as 'people of color'; that gays and lesbians are growing increasingly hostile toward people of color" (41). He contemplates how various intersecting differences compel modes of *intra*-group abjection based on assumptions of not only communal affiliations but also one's politics. That is, if experiences of racism and homophobia bind a group through a collective positioning of bottomhood, bottomhood in turn signals the potential platform for a radical politics that work through and challenge such structures. Recall that

Roderick Ferguson (2004: 4) formulates as one objective of queer of color critique: to "investigat[e] how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital." Chin speculates that Asian Americans are most commonly construed as enthusiastic conspirators with such normative investments. Unable to approximate the subversive politics and currency theorized of bottomhood, Asian Americans, with their putative desires for normativity, are rendered shameful within the value economies undergirding radical Left politics.

Chin's use of the term *ethnic* further dramatizes the political vicissitudes of Asian/American-ness based on the assumption of a cultural difference that can be transcended, assimilated into the dominant terms of whiteness. Notably, Chin does not work to discredit or disprove claims about Asian Americans' normative investments in whiteness or capital. Rather, he situates his own familial histories to consider how and why differences of class and experiences of migration that place one toward the socioeconomic bottom would condition one's aspiration for transcending these positions. He relays: "My mother tells me this story one night and she admonishes, 'When you don't have money, people treat you like shit, that's why we always tell you to study hard'" (Chin 1999a: 40). The felicitous invocation of "shit" links experiences of racial discrimination with bottomhood. Consequently, the bottom is what must be avoided and transcended. It is through this positioning that his larger oeuvre might be seen as advancing a consideration of bottomhood that meditates on those bodies, desires, and objects that circulate *around* but are not necessarily *in* the bottom. In contrast to accounts of the "power bottom," Chin's contemplations about the more ambivalent status of the angry ethnic fag through Asian/American-ness, I assert, theorizes the (peri-)bottom, that which surrounds and is in proximity to, but not completely synonymous with, the bottom. The (peri-)bottom indexes a distance from the more celebratory claims in queer studies about the subversive potentiality of anality.

The vexed relationship between Asian American masculinity and anality explains the unwillingness to draw on bottomhood to make claims to its political possibilities as intrinsically radical. In many instances, bottomhood dramatizes the historical construction of Asian American masculinity in terms of lack that not only signals a position of racialized shame but also reproduces assumptions of docility and subservience that code Asian Americans as apathetic, apolitical subjects. In his important essay "Looking for My Penis," Richard Fung (1991: 153) highlighted these power dynamics surrounding bottomhood while clarifying that "the problem is not the representation of anal pleasure per se, but rather that the narratives privilege the penis while always assigning the Asian the role of bottom;

Asian and anus are conflated." Building on this equation, David Eng (2001) theorized "racial castration" as the historical condition by which the penis of Asian Americans cannot be seen. Yet such critiques may potentially reinforce the equation of homosexuality with lack.

The possibility of pleasure in the bottom has been foreclosed through conventional modes of Asian American cultural nationalism that aimed to dispel racist depictions of effeminacy by reclaiming an aggressive masculinist heroism. This dynamic has been most prominently associated with the polemics of Frank Chin, for whom anality can only be figured as an ultimate sign of degradation, with queer desire being emblematic of racist love: "The good Chinese man, at his best, is the fulfillment of white male homosexual fantasy, literally kissing white ass" (Chin et al. 1991: xiii). Within this purview, the speaker of Justin Chin's poem and his shameful demand for anilingus can only figure as betrayal. If so, thinking alongside shame might enact what Crystal Parikh (2009) theorizes as "an ethics of betrayal," as an opportunity for reassessing collective norms and strategizing about creating the conditions of possibility for ethically encountering radical difference. Put differently, betrayal demands an active interrogation and reimagining of the bonds of interest that cohere and sustain disciplinary practices.

Inhabiting abjection on the site of the individual body might allow for a means of materializing alternative socialities. Recoding Frank Chin's formulation with a cheeky twist on the expression "kiss my ass," Justin Chin brazenly plays with the racialized associations of ass kissing: how might these readings be complicated when the Asian American male does *not* kiss the ass of the white man but demands that *his* butt be licked? In what ways might this shift of attention away from a privileging of the penile and toward the anal allow for a reconceptualization of the relationship between "Asian American" and "queer"? If the contexts from which Fung's essay emerged necessitated his intervention in interrogating the conflation of Asian and anus, reassessing the possibilities for "anal pleasure" might allow for a consideration of the (peri-)bottom that wallows in rather than disavows its underwritten circuits of racialized shame. Shimizu's metaphor of "straitjacket sexuality" is especially fitting to consider the bonds of interest that cohere around these discussions. According to Shimizu (2012: 3), the linkages between "asexuality, effeminacy, and homosexuality as emasculation" that govern Asian American masculinity as lack have produced binds that compel performances of hypermasculinity that can unwittingly reproduce heterosexist ideals. Yet, as Nguyen (2014: 24) adds, the associations of these traits with the "straitjacket" might not be relevant for those who are already excluded from achieving these dominant ideals of masculinity. Either way, Shimizu's (2012: 5) call for "ethical manhoods" invites us

to imagine masculinity otherwise and opens the possibility for what Nguyen (2014: 14, 113) envisions as a "politics of bottomhood" that "engages openness, vulnerability, and receptivity to others." Justin Chin calls for reveling in the (peri)bottom in order to remain open to other subjects, practices, and desires that do not align with preestablished ideals about critical and political value.

Relatedly, he muses in another essay about how cultural aesthetics demand specific modes of proper representation: "There will always be work that is deemed not queer enough for the queers, not Asian enough for the Asians, not Asian enough for the queers, too Asian for queers, too queer for the Asians, too much, too little, too bad" (Chin 1999b: 74). His irreverent insistence on mis-hearing aesthetics as "ass tactics" interrogates how determinations about what counts as having proper aesthetic value operate by commodifying certain elements of difference over and against other less palatable ones, which are abjected to the bottom. He literalizes this process on the page, as "ass tactics" is printed with a strikethrough in the essay's title. Instead, his approach to the (peri-)bottom enacts "ass tactics" as an aesthetic inquiry that questions what becomes abjected and sublimated as the improper, shameful remainder within deployments of "queer."[9] Refuting desires for the consumption of docile, subservient Asian Americans, Chin's insistence on the indignation of the angry ethnic fag demands a radical reassessment of what constitutes "currency" within our value economies.

Lapping the Rim of Abjection, the Ethics of Chin's "Lick My Butt"

Chin's debut poetry collection, *Bite Hard*, contemplates consuming, digesting, and abjecting racial difference within the (peri-)bottom by fusing and subverting racial and queer significations surrounding orality and anality. On Chin's unique voice, Koh (2018: 113) writes: "That style would include expletives, obscenities, invectives, juxtapositions, improvisations, Fluxus-inspired conceptualism, brattiness, and camp." Mixing biting wit, raw humor, cheeky wordplay, and trenchant critique, Chin's collection takes a distinctive approach to questions relating to (but not a mere reflection of) his multiplicitous subject positions surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. *Bite Hard* facilitates an engagement with shame that provides not only useful ways to counter intra-disciplinary abjection but also an innovative way to challenge uncritical consumptions that devalue Asian American culture as mere commodity.

Channeling the angry ethnic fag, the collection interrogates intra-group fractures, highlighting racial discrimination *and* fetishization within the gay community. Structured around four sections—"Lingual Guilts," "Sold," "Nervous

Days," and "Pisser"—the collection includes pieces of varying poetic forms, primarily free verse and prose poems, that playfully explore themes of queerness, immigration, loss, longing, and illness. "Lick My Butt" is included in the third part. The near-eponymous poem "These Nervous Days" illustrates the recurring thematic concerns of the poems within this section specifically and the collection more broadly. In two paragraphs of prose, the poem deploys anaphora: the first paragraph begins its sentences with "I want"; the second starts with the command "Give me." Together, these opening refrains speak to the pleasures and risks—of violence, illness, rejection, humiliation—in the exchange of queer erotics. This desire for consumption, however, contaminates affective linkages between pride and pleasure: "Give me some cheap sentiment. Give me some sweet pain . . . Give me yr cum, yr piss, yr spit" (Chin 1997b: 89–90). Furthermore, the speaker perversely alludes to and reworks the famous lines from Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus" inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. However, his words do not promise refuge for abject immigrants but, rather, willfully plead for abject bodily fluids. Demanding a mode of debasement, the speaker's call for some "sweet pain" demonstrates a paradoxical desire for adulterated sensations that runs throughout the collection. The closing single line "Give me what I ask for & you can take what you want from me" further speaks to how sexual interactions are ensconced within while also in excess of consumerist understandings of exchange (Chin 1997b: 90). Exceeding notions of capital, this line demands a form of mutual recognition, an affective bond based on ethical relationality and reciprocity.

Chin's poetry collection consciously evokes "sweet pain" through depictions of shameful, queer sex to reframe and contest dominant modes of consuming Asian American culture. The orality of *Bite Hard* plays with and challenges facile processes of sexual consumption. Chin considers how the vernacular of "eating ass" beckons us to approach ideas of consumption otherwise, especially since nothing (for the most part) is being literally consumed. Whereas Shimizu (2007: 1) calls for "shamelessly owning the pleasure and pain that comes from sexual representations of race," Chin intimates that being shameless is not always possible or desirable. Instead, his poetics thematizes Shimizu's conceptualization of "productive perversity" to develop alternative reading practices that locate generative responses to feelings of pain and shame. Chin's *poetics of sweet pain* calls for remembering histories of both violence and pleasure in living under homophobic and racist conditions and how these histories manifest within the everyday. In so doing, his text demonstrates the complex negotiations of queer(s and) Asian Americans through their lived experiences within the (peri-)bottom.

In "Lick My Butt," Chin reappropriates this shameful act of sexual pleasure as a way to illuminate, interrogate, and revel in abjection. In just over two pages, anality and the act of licking serve as the structural thread for the poem. Rhetorically, the poem is arguably divided into three parts. Through the use of anaphora, the stanzas in the first third begin with "Lick My Butt," an imperative directed toward you (the reader). This imperative becomes the opening for a wide range of possible connectivity and social relationality through *the rim of abjection*. Using the tongue otherwise, rimming elicits and relocates the erotics of speech, remembering the roots of desire that structure articulations. This specifically queer orality calls attention to the inevitable processes of abjection that follow from consumption. The rim simultaneously names the physical space, the corporeal edge that mediates abjection, and the act of lapping this edge with the tongue. Furthermore, the rim of the sphincter designates the corporeal contact between the inside and the outside, as rimming invokes the affective values of shame to interrogate practices of abjection and consumption.

The rim of abjection touches on and reimagines the mutually productive interplay between the two processes and, in so doing, provides a method for what Tompkins (2012: 3) calls "reading *orificially*" by lateralizing the hierarchical relations of power embedded in assumptions about the "top" and "bottom." As Nguyen (2014: 16) observes: "What this splitting of top and bottom pleasures obscures is the proximity of a man's ass and his cock . . . The connectedness and blurring of anal and penile sensations obfuscate any strict division between top/bottom and cock/ass." In other words, rimming highlights the physical proximity of the body parts that are seen as metonymically materializing the sexual positions of top and bottom—penis and anus—and thereby confounds their conceived opposition within dominant terms of masculinity. The poem invokes and reworks various symbolic values through the realm of the erotic. Juxtaposing the command "lick my butt" with mundane acts, the poem calls on the reader to question the values and affects associated with these acts. These incongruous juxtapositions beckon an assessment of how and why "lick my butt" cannot induce the same ordinariness as the imperative to "recycle," for instance, questioning the values we attach to behaviors and that structure social relations.

One reimagining of these social relations offers a self-reflexive critique of academic discourse:

> Lick my butt & tell me about
> Michel Foucault's theories of deconstruction
> & how it applies to popular culture,

> a depressed economy & this overwhelming
> tide of alienation. (Chin 1997a: 82)

This dissonant (or perhaps felicitous) juxtaposition blurs boundaries between the literary and the theoretical, extending Foucauldian analyses into the "low art" of popular culture, the realm of economics, and personal affective experiences. The possibility for reimagining academic discourse in relation to the social is framed through the opening act of rimming: "Lick my butt from the center to the margins / & all the way back again" (82). Through rimming, the perineum spatializes the (peri-)bottom as a site that maps the affective geographies of discursive regimes in order to rework the separations of the center and margin. The speaker dares his addressee to take seriously the erotics and pleasures of queer sex. In this way, the command "lick my butt" indexes the interplay between not only shame and desire but also pleasure and pain: "Don't just put your tongue there / because you think it's something you should do / Do it cos you really really want to lick my butt" (82). This imperative entangles obligation and desire, calling for an embrace of shame while addressing both the reservations and need for such an embrace.

The poem's contemplation of these reservations is told not from the viewpoint of the speaker but literally from the bottom. Assigning an ambivalent agency to his bottom through personification, the speaker confesses: "My butt didn't always liked to be licked" (82). The poem's second third begins with this admission about being apprehensive toward the prospect of being licked. Stepping back from the jarring repetition of "lick my butt" thus far, the poem transitions to a more narrative approach, explaining an origin story of sorts as to how and why he now insists on demanding that the reader "lick my butt." His initial hesitation encodes anilingus as a specifically queer subcultural practice while indicating his own uneasy relationship to this community of queers. He mentions how "all those other butts started / crashing in on its turf" and "demanded, / LICK ME" (83). In positing this separation between these other butts and his, Chin also intimates the subject position of the implied reader. In its use of apostrophe, the poem suggests that the implied reading you is not necessarily an "angry ethnic fag" but someone who must nonetheless bear witness to issues and concerns affecting queers of color. Without explicitly raising these themes in this poem, Chin invites us to consider the prevalent anti-Asian discrimination among queer communities, wherein the consumption of Asian American men often fetishizes them as being either complete bottoms or undesirable. Thus he locates the contradictory experiences of pleasure and pain of the angry ethnic fag participating in queer anality:

"At first it approached / the licking with extreme caution" (83). He bases this caution not on shame but the very real threat of violence:

> Hey — my butt had ever reason to be careful
> it knows where it's been;
> it's had enough of this bigotry
> & poverty & violence (83)

Expressing a hesitancy toward approaching the rim of abjection, this description taints the initial association of licking, invoking modes of queer pain by recalling the colloquial use of "licking" as expressing a severe beating. He thus recenters the bottom as a space of abjection and marginalization while establishing the act of rimming as an ethical obligation for apprehending these positions.

His butt materializes the experiences of being at the socioeconomic bottom, so pervasive for queers of color yet often submerged under more visible LGBTQ agendas. The stanza continues by detailing enduring histories of homophobic violence, traumas, poverty, and hate suffered by the bottom:

> it's been on the wrong end of muggings & bashings
> it's been working like a damn dog for years to make ends meet
> it's been on the lam, on the block, on the contrary
> & on sale for far too long (83)

This passage presents the only other instance of anaphora in the poem, and the use of "it's been" to open three lines successively exceeds the number of lines that begin with "lick my butt." Furthermore, the use of conjunction and series in these four lines adds intensity to the rhythm, signaling the persistent and repetitive nature of these experiences. In other words, the poem formally rehearses the particularity and continuity between the different experiences mentioned through this passage that convey where the bottom has "been." The speaker dramatizes how the bottom metaphorizes the "wrong end" that queers of color inhabit and endure. In addition to the violence of "muggings & bashings," they suffer the class toils of labor, conveyed through vernacular expressions of being "on the lam, on the block, and on the contrary" that imply fugitivity and precarity. While "on the lam" suggests flight that encodes the palpable threat of police harassment and brutality faced by queers of color, "on the block" not only implies sex work—what the next line bluntly states as "on sale"—of working "on the block" but also intimates the disproportionately high rates of homelessness, of living on the streets, for queer

and trans youth. Thus the speaker aligns the apprehension of "queer" as being "on the contrary," which is outside of the normative and structurally conditioned by material realities of violence suffered by queers of color for "too long," the shameful pasts that persist into the present within and against the banner of pride.

The butt's decision to be licked occurs not in spite of but through these histories of violence and labor. The poem narrates the sensations from his first lick—"that first slobber, smack, / slurp"—in orgasmic fashion: "it was like the Gay Pride Parade, / the Ice Capades, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade / and Christmas happening all at once" (83). He ironically invokes celebrations associated with liberal pride and corporate multiculturalism, but through an emphasis on queer sex. This sex act and the pleasure it produces insists on its inextricability from materialist conditions of racial, sexual violence and inequities covered over by commercialized Pride. To attend to the simultaneous pain and pleasure of the angry ethnic fag, the poem performs a queer of color critique attentive to contradictory modes and affects, not only shame and anger, but also humor. An apprehension of queers of color through shame elucidates such *tainted affects of (be)longing*. Starting from the (peri-)bottom foregrounds how structures of belonging within specific collectives are not sustained primarily through positive affects of pride. Instead, negative affects of fear, shame, and anger provide important points of critique for conditions of violence. Such tainted affects also wed queer desires and modes of longing to histories and conditions of domination, gesturing toward "the possibility of seizing our sexual imaginations to activate abjection as a resource for a reclamation of erotic-self-determination and world-making" (Rodríguez 2014: 21). Rather than condemn or excuse these abject desires, erotic or otherwise, as complicitous with structures of power, this articulation invites an ethical encounter with others.

Grappling with shame can unsettle commonly held understandings about the complex entanglements among sexuality, race, and power. Rimming enlivens how "the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity" (Sedgwick 2003: 14). Likewise, the acts of touching that the poem depicts animate models of touching across time through intergenerational intimacies that work in collaboration with the theoretical grounds that frame our present moment (Eng 2017). Chin's narrator vocalizes those "subjects that do not seek to overcome injury but those that have learned to live with past and present damage, in particular, everyday injuries marked by gender, race, and sexuality, that cannot find relief or make amends through legitimate social or political means" (Nguyen 2014: 25). Indeed, the act of being rimmed does not radically alter the speaker's life:

Now when I walk down the street
and you see me smiling
it's because I'm imagining
your tongue nestled in my buttcheeks
flicking away like a lizard
in a mad tweak. (Chin 1997a: 83–84)

Nevertheless, the imagining of this encounter post-rim in the poem's final third provides a way to endure by envisioning a utopian world wherein the apprehension of queer pleasures and pain might be desirable and enthusiastically pursued. The intimate contacts rimming performs gesture toward an unfilial relation to time that recognizes what changes, what remains the same, and what remains possible. The rim of abjection refuses to abide by linear narratives that hail progress in liberal terms of equality and inclusion while relegating structural racism to the past and dismissing discussions of inequity as passé.

Attending to the angry ethnic fag demands a persistent encounter with processes of abjection. Such attentiveness refuses to apprehend the object of our study as an "object," instead creating the conditions for mutual reciprocity illustrated by the closing couplet in Chin's poem:

Lick my butt & I'll lick yours;
we'll deal with the shit of the world later. (84)

In concluding, the "shit of the world" resonates again with the experiences of being "at the bottom" politically and socioeconomically, recalling the experiences of violence the speaker discusses earlier in the poem. By prioritizing a mutual act of rimming, this couplet invites readers to bracket preconceived notions about the types of politics and discourses that have the "currency" to lift a group out of the bottom. On the contrary, the angry ethnic fag interrogates these hierarchies that feed on systems of valuation and debase other objects as shameful and abject.

The angry ethnic fag compels such a reckoning with economies of value, failing to neatly align with the ideals of LGBTQ respectability; queer (of color) theorizing; and social justice–oriented anti-racist political activism. Yet these failures do not necessarily amount to anything, nor can they be readily recuperated toward bonds of interest. Such expression of indignation by the angry ethnic fag instead registers as shameful and irritating, as anger without a purpose, without a clear vision for channeling this energy toward an agreed-on objective. Put otherwise, it fails to validate predetermined notions and therefore demands a persistent reas-

sessment of what works in the collective interest of a group. Accordingly, attending to the entanglement among shame, anger, and the erotic through the writings of Justin Chin elucidates the urgency for and possibilities of disrupting the feeding machine of the queer body (politic) and disturbing the eviscerating tendencies of civility.

Notes

I express my deepest gratitude to Damien Abreu, Kandice Chuh, Douglas S. Ishii, Michelle N. Huang, Cheryl Naruse, Melissa Phruksachart, Frances Tran, Sharon Tran, Caroline Charles, Natalie El-Eid, Florencia Lauria, Mark Muster, Alex O'Connell, and Anthony Veasna So—you inspire me. Jennifer Joseph was incredibly generous in helping me obtain permissions for reprinting sections of Chin's poems. I could not have gone through this process without the labor and guidance of Trung PQ Nguyen. Thank you to Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Liz Beasley, and the *GLQ* staff for their editorial support. Finally, my thanks to the readers for their generative comments and feedback.

1. Justin Chin thematizes his diasporic histories and queer journeys throughout his oeuvre. Chin was born in Malaysia. His parents sent him to Singapore for a better English education when he was a child. He later attended college in Hawai'i before transplanting to San Francisco, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, where he naturalized to become a US citizen and published numerous collections of poems and essays. While Chin made a profound impact on the queer (and) literary scenes, especially in San Francisco, there remains little scholarship on him. The engagement with Chin in this essay can hardly begin to grapple with the wit, artistic sophistication, radical political critique, and incisive theorizations that span his impressive oeuvre. Chin passed away in December 2015 after suffering a stroke. Notably, the poet Jee Leong Koh (2016) provided an extended contemplation on Chin's work on the website *Singapore Poetry*, through its "Special Focus" series. Part of this contemplation can be found in Koh's 2018 collection, aptly titled *Bite Harder*. For tributes from artist friends, see Joseph 2016.
2. For more on homonormativity and homonationalism, see Duggan 2003; Puar 2007; and Eng 2010.
3. To be clear, this distancing from discussions of queer sex in LGBTQ politics is not equivalent to the violent consequences of what Arlene Stein (2006: 3) documents as increased efforts by conservatives "to bring back sexual shame, arguing for abstinence-only sex education, limitations on abortion, and prohibitions of gay/lesbian civil rights." For an incisive account of how AIDS activists mobilized emotion, see Gould 2009.

4. For critiques of such tendencies in queer studies, see Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005; Hong and Ferguson 2011; and Puar 2007.
5. Eric Stanley (2018) discusses how the activist group Gay Shame deploys shame as not only trenchant political critique but also a blueprint for envisioning a commons.
6. As Donatella Galella (2017: 5) reminds us, the administrators' valued term of diversity "has the power to obscure righteous anger and profound sadness at continued, covered-up inequality."
7. See Hammonds 1994; Scott 2010; and Nash 2014.
8. The formulation of Asian/American-ness is meant to underscore its abject relationship to Americanness. See Shimakawa 2002.
9. As Kandice Chuh (2019: 3) observes: "Perhaps counterintuitively, because of the role of aesthetics in securing the common sense of bourgeois liberal modernity, aesthetic inquiry provides entry to the apprehension of illiberal, uncommon sensibilities."

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