

IMPROBABLE VISIONS: FILIPINO BODIES, U.S. EMPIRE, AND THE VISUAL ARCHIVES

by

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*To Mom and Dad
and
Noah and Sarah*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BE: *Bontoc Eulogy*

IPI: *In Pursuit of Images*

ANFP: *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*

Untitled 1V: Used to denote first *Untitled* image in *Vector*

Untitled 1I: Used to denote first *Untitled* photograph in *In Pursuit of Images*

ABSTRACT

The American archives of empire have imaged and imagined “Filipino bodies” to simultaneously justify and abnegate colonial projects in the Philippines. Contemporary Filipino American visual artists, however, defy the very representational and ideological constraints of the archives in their visual work. In my interdisciplinary dissertation, “Improbable Visions: Filipino Bodies, U.S. Empire, and the Visual Archives,” the American archives are visual and textual discursive repositories that emerged during the 19th century through a convergence of scientific discourses of race and ideas of American progress and modernity within the nation’s borders and abroad. The American archives are instrumental in constituting the corporeal boundaries of modern “American” identities and the identities of “Others” – these contestations of identity often were often played out within the terrains of visual culture. The importance of the American archives to the compositional and conceptual choices of contemporary Filipino visual artists in the United States, the Philippines, and the throughout the diaspora and their interconnections are often beyond the purview of current historical and visual critiques. My dissertation, however, contends that the American archives are an important point of departure and creative sources for Filipino American visual artists. Overwhelmingly, Filipino American visual production is impelled by what I call an “archival imperative” to critique visual systems of production and distribution channels that have shaped the in/visibility of Filipinos within the period of Philippine-United States colonial and postcolonial relations. The archival

imperatives of Filipino American visual artists encompass a wide array of creative and intellectual strategies that together form the basis for a contemporary Filipino American postcolonial aesthetic.

My dissertation examines the visual practices of three Philippine-born, American-based contemporary artists: photographer-filmmaker Marlon Fuentes, photographer Efren Ramirez, and multimedia artist Stephanie Syjuco. The archival imperatives of these artists facilitate the creation of a rich and dynamic Filipino American visual archive that is socially and politically responsive to the artists' experiences with im/migration and displacements. Their work also speaks to the larger transnational mechanisms that influence Filipino migrancy and diaspora. The visual work of these artists attests to the importance of visual production amid the overwhelming material and psychic constraints of American global hegemony, transnational capitalism, and the legacies of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines. I analyze and theorize the significance of "Filipino bodies" in three important ways. First, "Filipino bodies" denote the Filipino American artists themselves; these artists have transformed their visual productions into alternative maps that chart Filipino modernity into the 21st century. Second, the "Filipino bodies" are also the literal and figurative bodies in the visual work, becoming critical sites of epistemological production. The resulting alternative epistemologies produced by the visual work are the third type of "Filipino bodies" – that is, Filipino bodies of knowledge. The chapters are theoretical meditations and cultural critiques of the archival imperatives of each artist and the ways they and their artwork navigate formations of individual and collective identities through their decolonizing aesthetic and conceptual art practices. What emerges from the work of the three artists is a collective Filipino American vision that is inspired by

the historical configurations of “Filipino bodies” but also whose force ultimately exceeds the visual terrains of the American archives of empire. I argue that Filipino American artists and their respective visual work are American empire’s foil. Together they become embodiments of “improbable visions” that empire could not have imaged, let alone imagined.

INTRODUCTION

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”

– Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.

– Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

SNAPSHOTS

For years now I have had in my possession a snapshot of my father. Its surface is tinged with varying shades of yellows, oranges, and pinks from decades of oxidation and the oils left behind from countless fingers that have clasped its edges (see Figure i). My father stands at the center of the image, frozen in time; his gaze is not fixed at the camera, instead he is focused on his next step. Both his hands are in a state of grasping: one carefully holding onto the white railing, and the other onto a large duffel bag at his side. While my father is the obvious focus of the camera's viewfinder, his is not the only body captured within the snapshot's frame. At the bottom-right corner of the picture, reflected on one of the car's side mirrors, is a partial image of the photographer and camera. Judging by the square shape of the snapshot, the camera used was most likely the popular Kodak Instamatic, with 126 film. The photograph remained lost within an unlabeled box amid other boxes for over thirty years before I uncovered it along with about a hundred other snapshots of my parents. Altogether the snapshots capture my mother and father in their early twenties, newly married, navigating their adopted country, the United States – my father, a recently enlisted sailor for the U.S. Navy, and

my mother, a proud married housewife of an “American” sailor. The pictures document the beginnings of their American dream.

Of the photographs discovered, the snapshot of my dad in his formal navy “dress whites” has taken up permanent residence on a magnetic board wherever I reside. Over time, evidence of my own fingerprints would appear next to the many others that have preceded mine. On many occasions I have held the picture close to my eyes to examine the details of the snapshot; I have marveled at my father’s youthful appearance, often wondering how heavy his duffel bag really was, or how he will steer his way through those next few steps he takes after the click of the camera's shutter. With each passing year, my own temporal and spatial distance from the exact moment of scene’s exposure onto the film’s surface continue to bestow upon the photograph hints of mystery. I have asked my father about the image – querying him about the date of its creation (“1969”); the photographer in the mirror (“a Filipino friend”); the building that the railing is attached to (his “barracks”) – and yet even with his definitive answers certain elements existing within the snapshot continue to rise from its surface whenever I view it. The details in the image only inspire more rumination and certainly more questions.

I am reminded of Roland Barthes’s classic work *Camera Lucida* whenever I look at the snapshot of my father. That which “pricks” Barthes and, as he observes, “also bruises me, is poignant to me” is the unintentional detail in the photograph that he calls the *punctum*.¹ Undoubtedly, my interest in the snapshot stems from my familial and affective connection to my father, as most family snapshots operate in this kind of way; but my fascination with the image also emerges from the details that compose its visual

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 27.

ontology: the uniform that my father sports, the reflection of the photographer in the car's side mirror, and even the faint signs of fingers that have held on to it and have since become a part of the image. The *punctum* in the snapshot entices and sustains my emotional and intellectual interest within and beyond its frames. My act of looking becomes not just a passive activity, but also one that inspires the productive and expansive possibilities, exceeding perhaps the photographer's own expectations of the snapshot's sentimental functions. Of the *punctum*, Barthes observes, "A detail overwhelms the entirety of my reading; it is an intense mutation of my interest, a fulguration."² The details in the snapshot of my father continue to stir my imagination.

My father is 23 in the snapshot and has recently enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He is on his way back to the Philippines from training in Maryland where he and my mother will reunite and marry. While my mother and father have nuanced these details at various points in time for me, the vision of him in his "dress whites" still grabs my attention whenever I look at the snapshot. His uniform is an obvious sign of his military status, an iconic symbol of the U.S. Navy; and it is the detail in the snapshot that is the "fulguration," that lightning bolt of inspiration, that has sustained my interest. In the opening essay to *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present*, Douglas R. Nickel observes, "The snapshot, like other photographs, suffers an excess of potential meaning, but when removed from conditions that normally limit its polysemous nature, it may offer itself to the pleasures of our active, creative imaginations. Like a haiku, it will ask us to complete it."³ The snapshot's poetic status emerges from my very distance, my separation, from the image's creation. The act of viewing the snapshot becomes a heuristic device; as viewers, we are asked to complete the image from its

² Ibid. 49.

³ Douglas Nickel, *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life 1888 to the Present* (San Francisco: SFMOMA, 1998), 13.

surface details. And while my father sporting his dress whites inhabits only a part of the snapshot's poetic structure, it is for me the underlying catalyst that has facilitated the expansion of my reading of the image. The sight of my father in uniform, moreover, provides an entry into what I have termed an "improbable vision." Indeed, his presence in the snapshot, I argue, is an "improbable vision" of U.S. empire.

The term "improbable vision" denotes an unlikely, dubious, unthinkable, inconceivable ... or simply, an unimaginable sight. I deploy the term not to negate my father's enlisted ranking or deny his service in the U.S. Navy, but rather I use it to situate his body within the hegemonic optics of United States empire – a means of control firmly entrenched within the myriad geographies of the Philippine Islands and certainly throughout the globe. Prompted by the defeat of Spain during the Spanish American War of 1898 and the subsequent American occupation of the islands and Philippine-American War, the scopic regime of American empire has maintained its grip on the islands and people even through the eventual declaration of Philippine Independence in 1946 and continuing to the present as a form of neocolonial dominance. My use of "optics" and "scopic regime" specifies the particular regulatory technologies that projects of U.S. empire have relied on to shackle and entrap bodies while also inevitably facilitating the conditions that bring rise to their in/visibility. While these technologies also inform practices of viewing, they also have the power to shape trajectories of forgetting. The inherent function of a scopic regime, as Hal Foster observes, is to "make of its many social visualities one essential vision, or to order them in a natural hierarchy of sight" (itself a challenging task).⁴ My father's body in uniform is a testament to the imbrications of U.S. empire and the quotidian existences of his and other Filipino bodies;

⁴ Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), ix.

the fact that this image is captured as a snapshot points to photography as a site of identity formation and contestation – the latter prominently evidenced by the competitions of vision played out between the viewers of the snapshot, my father, his friend, and the historical eye of U.S. empire. The competitions of vision in the snapshot symbolize the challenges confronted by U.S. empire in its aim to be the “essential vision” and, hence, ultimate source of knowledge.

My father’s figuration in the snapshot as an “improbable vision” challenges the unifying tendencies propagated by the scopic regime of American empire, facilitated by the introduction of photographic technologies to the islands after 1898 as part of the colonizing mission of the United States.⁵ Benito Vergara notes in his investigation of the history of photography during the American colonial period in the Philippines that the medium emerged as “a privilege mode of obtaining knowledge and expressing reality” and “was unusually effective for the presentation and justification of colonialist ideology.”⁶ The “Kodak zone” of American empire proved remarkably effective in consolidating a vision of American national *and* racial identity premised on colonial benevolence, scientific and technological progress, and American “white” superiority and Filipino inferiority.⁷ The notion of “improbable visions,” grounded as an outcome of American imperial projects in the Philippines, establishes the importance of the historical moment to the forces that continue to shape and inform Philippine-U.S. relations, particularly within the realm of visual culture. Visual productions, as a part of Filipino American visual practices and culture (the snapshot of my father, for example),

⁵ To be sure, photography was not the only visual technology employed by Americans in the Philippines as part of the colonial mission of the United States. It was, however, readily available and accessible to Americans in the islands.

⁶ Benito Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in the Early 20th Century Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 4

⁷ For a discussion of “the Kodak zone,” see Chapter 1: “Introduction: The Kodak Zone,” in Vergara’s *Displaying Filipinos*. *Ibid.*, 1-5.

confront the dominant mechanisms that have historically configured representations of Filipino men and women to fit the will of American empire.

While the vernacular or everyday status of the snapshot of my father suggests the creation of sentimental ties by family or friends to the image, the photograph also registers differences in representational objectives resulting from the figuration of my father in uniform, depending on the vantage points of the viewers and the visual producers. Outfitted in the formal navy attire, my father's newly acquired status as a sailor had certainly aligned with the popular Filipino perception during my father's time that enlisting in the U.S. Navy could result in social and economic upward mobility.⁸ His uniform literally becomes his passport to the United States and the world.⁹ Evidence of my father's status in the U.S. Navy would result in countless other snapshots of him in uniform, on the ships, or pictured at various port cities and American bases throughout the world. However, for the particular snapshot being discussed, it is his uniform that carries the sign of his potential economic success and cosmopolitanism, a radical departure from his poverty-stricken life that he experienced in the Orion province of Bataan in his childhood. To Filipino friends and family in the Philippines, his body in the image is not quite an improbable vision, but rather and inspirational or aspirational sight.

And yet, the image of my father in his uniform also connects to historical images of Filipino bodies in the American visual archives, especially ones that capture their

⁸ Yen Le Espiritu points out, "The economic incentive to join the U.S. Navy was high: the salary of a Filipino enlistee often placed him among the top quarter of his country's wage earners." Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 29.

⁹ In *Empire of Care*, Catherine Choy makes a similar point concerning the white nursing cap worn by Filipino nurses. Their caps offered Filipino nurses an opportunity to work in United States and throughout the world. Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 90.

“metamorphoses” from barbarism to civility – following the telos of progress – under the auspices of the United States.¹⁰ While the snapshot of my father is over half a century removed from the early years of the official start of the American colonial period, the image nonetheless houses its legacy in the visual presence of my father in his uniform. To further demarcate the competing representational agendas in the image of my father – from the historical vantage point of American occupation shortly after 1898 – I turn to another snapshot that I discovered while conducting research at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. The snapshot, taken between 1900 and 1902, captures a James Alfred LeRoy and an anonymous Filipino boy (see Figure ii).¹¹

Educated at the University of Michigan and a friend and colleague of Dean C. Worcester, a powerful fixture in the civil government of the islands, LeRoy became the Secretary of the Philippine Commission in 1900 at the age of 25.¹² He would later spend the next two years in the islands before returning to the United States. The snapshot has acquired the telltale signs of age, with a yellow-sheen blanketing its surface; it was most

¹⁰ The curators of the 1998 exhibitions *Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergences: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998*, included in the “Spectacle and Surveillance” section two images that highlight the “metamorphosis” of a Filipino “native” Bontoc Igorot not yet touched by American modernity transformed in the second image as a man in a dapper, Western suit. The metamorphosis of the boy into the likeness of a Western man conveys the progress that American colonial projects in the Philippines has made in civilizing the Philippines and its people. The caption that curator’s provide is: “Two photographs of a Bontoc Igorot Boy, With the Second Taken Nine Years After the First.” See the companion book to the exhibition, *Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergences: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998*, ed. Enrique de la Cruz, et al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1998).

¹¹ The photographer of the snapshot of LeRoy and the Filipino boy is unknown.

¹² Dean C. Worcester was a member of the same Philippine Commission as James Alfred LeRoy and an authority of the Philippines, having participated in two scientific research expeditions prior to 1898. Worcester would become the first Secretary of Interior of the Philippines in 1901. I discuss Worcester’s photographic archives in Chapter 2. With only two years of working in the Philippines, James Alfred LeRoy would be known as an authority on the Philippines and the diverse peoples that called the islands home. His first book, *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1905) was published in 1905. His second book, *The Americans in the Philippines* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1914), was published posthumously by his wife five years after his death in 1914.

likely taken with a Kodak camera, the popular # 1 model introduced in 1888 or the portable “Brownie” camera introduced in 1900.¹³ The snapshot frames James Alfred LeRoy at the center raising a Filipino boy in the air in front of a wooden structure and a garden of coconut or banana trees. In the snapshot, the young LeRoy wears a uniform, a sign of his status as part of the American government in the islands, that differentiates him from the boy wearing shorts, a *camiseta* (“t-shirt”), and rice-paddy hat.

As part of the American civil government in the Philippines, LeRoy considered himself an “optimist” and a believer of the benefits of American colonial management of the islands.¹⁴ In a letter dated February of 1901, LeRoy writes to “Henry,” “I am not saying that the end of the trouble and perplexity has come; but the end of the worst troubles are in sight.”¹⁵ My interpretation of LeRoy’s snapshot is informed by his optimistic vision for the Philippines which I read against the American colonial vision that underscore photography being produced in the islands in the years after 1898. It should be noted that LeRoy attempted to distance himself in his writings (and behavior) from other white Americans who deployed “race prejudice” against Filipinos.¹⁶ These white Americans, as LeRoy observes, “prejudge the people before they have ever seen them, and they come away without having made a single honest effort to find out what

¹³ The popularity of the Brownie camera extended into the realm of children’s literature, as Sharon Delmendo explores in the second chapter, “Marketing Colonialism: Little Brown Brothers in the Kodak Zone,” of *The Star Entangled Banner*. Delmendo reads Palmer Cox’s popular 1904 book *Brownies in the Philippines* as “imperial adventurism” for American children. Sharon Delmendo, *Star Entangled Banner: One-Hundred Years of America in the Philippines* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 59.

¹⁴ In a letter dated February 8, 1901, to “Henry” (surname unknown), LeRoy distinguishes between “the pessimists” as “the military gentry” and “the optimists” as “those here to implant civil government.” “Letter to Henry, February 8, 1901,” Correspondence, 1900 to 1902, box 1, James A. LeRoy Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ James A. LeRoy, “Race prejudice in the Philippines,” *Atlantic Monthly*, v. 90, n. 537 (July 1902), 100.

they really are like.”¹⁷ Marked with optimism and a liberal, if not progressive, attitude toward Filipinos, the snapshot of himself with the Filipino boy, nonetheless, (like other writers and photographs producing work during the early years of American occupation in the islands), as Vergara notes, is “burdened by the common sense of colonialism.”¹⁸

The snapshot of LeRoy and the boy emerge as an iconic representation of Filipino racial uplift that is contingent on the paternalistic presence of the United States.

LeRoy/America is captured literally raising the Filipino boy/the Philippines above his head, as one would a trophy given to a victor – an object to show off or to hold as model for others to respect and appreciate. Barthes observes, “However lightening-like it may be, the *punctum* has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion. This power is often metonymic.”¹⁹ Both LeRoy’s and the Filipino boy’s outfits are each the *punctum* of the image; they guide me to examine their differences, but also connect me to the web of U.S. empire within which both bodies are ensnared and to the respective geographies and spaces that each inhabit and claim. Each *punctum* in the snapshot of LeRoy and boy has the potential to connect to other similar details in other photographs. This act of enlargement or “expansion” of the snapshot of LeRoy and boy establishes its relevance to the snapshot of my father.

When the two snapshots of my father and LeRoy and boy are placed next to each other, the sartorial significance comes into relief in both images, conveying what Vicente Rafael calls “the workings of an order outside their frames.”²⁰ My father’s uniform and the boy’s minimal outfit capture bodies residing on opposite ends of the civilizing

¹⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹⁸ Vergara, 76.

¹⁹ Barthes, 45.

²⁰ Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 83.

spectrum. My father, outfitted in garments of U.S. empire, connects him to LeRoy. The boy, however, wears his “native” garb, distancing himself from LeRoy, and certainly from my father. Indeed, the boy could very well represent my father’s past, as my father’s body, the boy’s future. This temporal progression in the two snapshots – from past to future, from uncivilized to civilized – epitomizes the ethos of the American empire in the islands. What we might clearly surmise from the snapshot of my father, especially when paired next to the photograph of LeRoy and boy, is that my father in uniform embodies the success of U.S. empire in the islands – he, like the boy, is a trophy of U.S. empire. We might think of him as a “recipient” and “carrier,” as Rafael observes, “of promises that emanate from a hidden and distant elsewhere.”²¹ Yet, as I have shown, the time and space that Rafael calls “hidden and distant” can clearly be found in the snapshot of LeRoy and the Filipino boy. Even after countless examinations of the snapshot of my father, certain questions continue to linger: Has my father achieved the same privileges and benefits afforded to LeRoy, given the military uniform that he wears? If my father is the paradigmatic success story of U.S. empire, does the snapshot of him still harbor a critique? Are there any costs to my father’s body (as well as other Filipino bodies) in considering U.S. empire in the Philippines as a success? Is U.S. empire’s apparent success as cosmetic as the clothing that each of the bodies in the snapshots wear?

What interests me in the snapshot of my father is the possibility of going beyond its surface details and connecting the image to the vast visual archives that U.S. empire has configured of Filipino bodies (the snapshot of LeRoy is an example such a connection); and in doing so, I want to flag the expansive theoretical terrains that the

²¹ Ibid., 83.

image possesses (and certainly others like it). How does labeling my father an “improbable vision” impact the study of the cultures of U.S. imperialism within the context of Philippine-U.S. relations? How might the term illuminate the forces that give rise to a particular type of optics that attempts to flatten representation, promote exclusionary racial and national agendas, and produce facile and yet powerful visual teleologies of a linear modernity? To consider my father’s presence in the snapshot an “improbable vision” is to take into account the historical circumstances that have led to his enlistment in the navy – indeed, his seemingly successful incorporation into the American body politic – and the visual cultures of U.S. empire that have led to the snapshot’s emergence. Perhaps most of all, the labeling of my father in the snapshot as an “improbable vision” considers a question, which when asked by itself might appear strange and lofty. Yet when taken within the context of the snapshots of my father and LeRoy and the boy, the question directs us to ways that representational practices by Filipinos of Filipinos – even in the most vernacular of ways – can yield important critiques of the politics and cultures U.S. empire.²² I ask the following question: How might U.S. empire respond to my father in the most iconic of American symbols – the U.S. Navy uniform? It is a question whose origins point to the archives of American modernity and the historical locations of Filipino bodies therein.²³

²² In his discussion of African American vernacular photography, Brian Wallis observes, “These photographs constituted assertions of identity and at the same time political expressions.” Much like African American vernacular photography, my focus on the snapshot of my father taken by his Filipino friend attempts to configure these everyday practices of photography as a means to create Filipino racial, cultural, and political identities. Brian Wallis, “The Dream Life of a People: African American Vernacular Photography,” *African American Vernacular Photography: Selections From the Daniel Cowin Collection* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2005), 9.

²³ There are also clear connections to the question of the historical incorporation of Filipinos to the American body politic to the contemporary events surrounding “the war on terror” and the inclusion of Iraq and Afghanistan and people of Arab descent within the American imaginary. Reynaldo Ileto makes the connection clear when he writes, “When Anglo-American forces invaded Iraq last year, my immediate reaction was one of déjà vu. It was the Philippines circa

And so I return to the snapshot of my father in uniform. Because of my obsession with the details of his uniform, I have noticed that his sailor's cap is about to slide off his head. My father's slim body frame inside the uniform makes him appear more like a child in costume than an official member of the U.S. Navy. And the weight of the duffel bag that he lugs might topple him over at any moment. If the sight of the navy uniform and accouterments signifies his inclusion within the United States, their presence on my father's body registers an awkward sight to behold. It is a vision of my father that speaks to an ill-fitting quality of U.S. empire that might potentially encumber his movements and weigh him down, if not in the image then at other points during his career. The vision of my father as an "improbable vision" captures as much the miscalculations of U.S. empire's vision toward Filipino/colonized bodies as it does empire's limits. Sarita See notes, "Organized by an account of simultaneous interiority and exteriority, the U.S. empire wants to contain its colonies and colonized peoples and yet, by its very nature, it cannot."²⁴ What the snapshot conveys is that the incorporation of the Filipino/colonized body within the American landscape is not as seamless as the visual narratives of transformation, from Filipino boy to American sailor, leads us to believe. The labeling of my father an "improbable vision" performs the ironic task of exploding the flatness of representational practices of U.S. empire. As an "improbable vision," the sight of my father's body dressed in his uniform reminds us, as Luis Francia points out, "the Filipino is *here* because they were *there*."²⁵

1900 all over again." Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Philippine Wars and the Politics of Memory," *Positions*, 13:1 (2005), 215.

²⁴ Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Forthcoming 2009).

²⁵ Luis H. Francia, "The Rind of Things," in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999*, ed. Angel Velasco Shaw et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), xxiii. Original emphasis.

From the time of the snapshot's creation until his retirement, my father would devote over 25 years of life to the U.S. Navy – a career thoroughly documented photographically and secured within my family's visual archives. That our Filipino visual archives exists – housing representations of Filipino bodies by and for other Filipinos – serves as a powerful affront to the visual and historical constraints that have disseminated cosmetic or superficial visions of Filipinos to justify and abnegate its imperial presence in the Philippines. Images like the snapshot of my father as part of larger Filipino American photographic archives act as powerful reminders of the material and corporeal stakes involved in the creation of images.

FILIPINO BODIES AND THE ARCHIVES: THE POLITICS OF EXPOSURE

The discussion of the snapshot of my father captures appropriately a “snapshot” of “Improbable Visions: Filipino Bodies, U.S. Empire, and the Visual Archives.” The discovery of the snapshot, along with others that I have since uncovered, have led to an interdisciplinary investigation and deployment of the notion of “improbable visions” as a guiding optic within my larger project, by analyzing photographic and filmic work that picture in varying ways the creative and intellectual impulses of three Philippine-born, American-based Filipino American artists: Marlon Fuentes, Efren Ramirez, and Stephanie Syjuco. Given photography and film's pivotal role in shaping and disseminating ideas of a unified and exemplary American national culture in the United States, the Philippines, and throughout the globe during the American occupation period and through to the present moment, I pay close attention to the legacies of these visual colonial projects and their relationship to the compositional and conceptual

strategies employed by each of the Filipino American artists in their work.²⁶ I examine specifically how the visual work of these artists critiques representational constraints resulting from the history of American occupation of the Philippines and attendant scientific discourses of race and the colonized body, as well as ideas of progress and modernity that get played out in American visual culture. Thus throughout the chapters that follow, Filipino American artwork and artist become embodiments of “improbable visions” of U.S. empire.

The American colonial period in the Philippines inspired a proliferation of visual and textual discourses on the islands and their inhabitants, introducing the American public to bodies, cultures, languages, and geographies unlike their own. Being able to see and read about the Philippines and Filipinos, and even to stand among and gaze in proximity to “Filipino” bodies at international expositions such as 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair that, at the time, housed the largest population of Filipino inhabitants outside of the islands, provided Americans an opportunity to participate in the larger project of American empire-building without having to leave the United States.²⁷

The deluge of images of Filipinos allowed Americans to formulate their identities based upon the exterior appearances of Filipino bodies that connected to characteristics

²⁶ For a discussion of the role films (or motion pictures) played in shaping the American consciousness about the occupation of the Philippines after 1898, see Nick Deocampo discussion of Thomas Alva Edison’s newsreels that reenacted moments during the Philippine-American War. See Nick Deocampo, “Imperialist Fictions: The Filipino in the Imperialist Imaginary,” in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999*, ed. Angel Velasco Shaw et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 225-236.

²⁷ A 1904 *New York Times* article sums up the success of the Philippine exhibit—“most astonishing of all features”—during the St. Louis exposition, noting that it “offers to visitors in a single day a broader knowledge of the Philippine Islands than could be gained by a trip of months’ duration and the expenditure of many hundreds of dollars.” “Native Filipinos in a Natural Environment: Typical Life of the Islands Revealed in the St. Louis Fair Exhibit,” *New York Times* (1857-Current file), July 17, 1904, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed July 29, 2008). Robert Rydell labels the American “exposition movement,” whose origins date to the 19th century, as a “concomitant empire.” Robert Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876 - 1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 125.

of their interior selves. Shawn Michelle Smith explains, “To ‘read’ a body was to inscribe it with an imagined interiority, an essence that linked one to a specific position within a social hierarchy.”²⁸ Thus, to read a Filipino body – one that was racialized and colonized – was to inscribe it with an interiority that distinguished its body as “Other” within the social and cultural hierarchies constructed by white Americans. We see this interplay between notions of surface and interiority at play in a 1904 *New York Times* article about the St. Louis World’s Fair:

The fame of the Philippine exposition has captured the world’s Fair city, and the most common question which the Jefferson Guards have to answer is “Which way to the Philippines?” This interest is largely excited by the widespread publicity which Igorot dog-eaters and head-hunters, the cannibal Moro, and the aboriginal Negrito have obtained.²⁹

The bodies of Igorots, Moros, and Negritos were each portrayed to distinguish their position within the linear telos of modernity; indeed, each of their racialized/colonized bodies possessed interiorities that were readily deemed as uncivilized and savage (“dog-eaters,” “head-hunters,” “cannibals,” and “aboriginal”), stereotypes that affirmed the subjectivities of the spectators that paid money to see them at the fair. Their corporeal and psychological differences bolstered their popularity at the fair, and certainly allowed Americans, as Catherine Choy observes, “to consume the Philippines and its peoples visually” with relative ease, fueling the material and corporeal divide between colony and metropole and the colonized and the colonizer.³⁰

The support of U.S. imperial projects in the islands also provided Americans the means to articulate an “American” identity against or oppositional to the racialized and

²⁸ Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

²⁹ “Native Filipinos in a Natural Environment: Typical Life of the Islands Revealed in the St. Louis Fair Exhibit.”

³⁰ Catherine Choy, “Salvaging the Savage: On Representing Filipinos and Remembering American Empire,” in *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images*, ed. M. Evelina Galang (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2003), 40.

colonized Filipino body. The large numbers of books and images of the Philippines, as Vergara notes, “would extract it from the fog it was in, making it real to readers.”³¹ The inundation of literature and photographs would also produce enduring representational constraints emerging out of the period of American occupation that would extend through to the contemporary moment. By representational constraints, I refer specifically to the often overdetermined and paralysis-inducing photographic and filmic representational modes of U.S. empire specific to ways Filipino bodies were imaged and imagined. These constraints relied primarily on a convergence of discourses of race, the body, science, photographic technologies, and civilization, all of which worked together to create idiosyncratic modes of visual production specific to the demands of empire. The convergence of discourses also configured the viewing experience of the American spectator, specifically in ways that catalyzed the organization of bodies upon which they gazed. These modes of visual production and reception locked Filipino bodies, for example, within what Alan Sekula calls “the shadow archive” that inhabited the whole of the social spectrum from “the moral exemplars” to “the unworthy.”³² “The unworthy” would encompass the photographs of the ethnically and racially diverse Filipino “natives.” And yet they would continue to be “worthy” of American intervention. Photographic portraits of Filipinos, for example, often accompanied scientific and government reports, adding a layer of legitimacy and epistemological currency to the representations being created and deployed. In these portraits, Filipino bodies are often frozen in full- and side-profile poses that implicate the science of anthropology/ethnography and portraiture conventions of criminals (“the mugshot” poses) or amid geographies untouched by the forces of modernity in their natural

³¹ Vergara, 4.

³² Alan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 10.

habitats. These images also established and promoted positivist inflections in photography that relied on notions of interiority of the Filipino bodies to project trajectories of inferiority within the scopic regime of U.S. empire.

The visual explosion during the years after 1898 produced an excess of visual representations of Filipino bodies that emerged out of a need to manage and control the Philippines and its people, as well as to fill the demands of the American viewing public hungry for images of the ethnographic subject.³³ What I call the American archives of empire take into consideration the private collections of individuals and the official/institutional repositories of documents related to the Philippine-United States relations that are housed in the libraries, museums, and government structures – what is generally thought of as “the archives” – and the resulting dissemination of representational constraints. The visual arsenal of Filipino bodies within American archives of empire ranges the gamut and reveals their contradictory nature: the Filipino bodies are savage and childlike; they are bodies that barbaric, cannibalistic, and simian-like; they are dogeaters and headhunters; they are hypersexualized while also emasculated; obsequious and exemplars of colonial tutelage; and perhaps most of all, they provoke a sense of the justification for U.S. intervention in the Philippines.

A 1903 snapshot attributed to Harry and Mary Cole, two American teachers from Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the Philippines at the turn-of-the-century, conveys the visual and textual representational assault inflicted on Filipino bodies. In the snapshot, Mary Cole is pictured with “Miss Gladwin” playing with two monkeys on leashes; standing in between the women and the monkeys are two Filipino boys. While the surface of the image might register as benign, the caption on the back of the image presents the deeply

³³ For the relationship of “the ethnographic spectacle” and popular filmic culture, see Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and the Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

rooted racist assumptions about the Filipino body captured by the presence of the Filipino boys, projected by the Cole couple. As part of their family photographic archive, the snapshot along with others circulated among the Cole's family and friends in the United States and within the American colony, convey the photograph's reach as well as its power to consolidate and naturalize their "white" American identities. On the back, the Coles have inscribed a hand-written description of the image: "Mary, Miss Gladwin, the Two Monkeys, and the Two "Missing Links" (see Figure iii and iv). The semiotics of the bodies imaged in the snapshot juxtaposed with the back caption reflect a play on the linear evolutionary progression of humans – the monkeys reside on one end of the evolutionary spectrum and Mary Cole and Miss Gladwin are on the opposite end. The Filipino boys are deemed the "missing links," the intermediate step from simian to human. By placing the term "missing link" in quotations, it becomes an "insider" statement that only other white Americans will understand when seen and read.

If the Cole's snapshot (and James LeRoy's) constructs the Filipino body as different, it also projects the American body as the quintessential modern and civilized body. Picturing racialized and colonized "Otherness" of Filipino bodies in photographs projected justification for the presence of Americans in the islands. It is no surprise then that photographers within the colonial setting were quick to document the riches that empire could provide to Filipino bodies. Photographs taken within the classroom of American teachers in the islands – one of the most popular genres of photography – provided, for example, documentation of the civilizing benefits of U.S. empire. The Cole's, like other American teachers in the Philippines at the turn of the century, participated in this photographic activity (see Figure iv). Filipino bodies within these classroom images and within the archives of American empire as a whole project static

and superficial representations that paradoxically concealed rather than exposed the violence of U.S. empire.

The editors of *Refiguring the Archive*, a collection of essays that interrogate the politics and culture of the archives, point out, “The archive – all archive – every archive – is figured.”³⁴ The very existence of the American archives of empire is premised on maintaining a “colonial order of things,” a notion that Ann Stoler identifies in the archival processes that are gleaned from the documents and artifacts housed within the colonial archives.³⁵ Indeed, the configuration of the archives – its *raison d’être* – is premised on sustaining the dynamics of power between the colony and the metropole. The American archives of empire produced the representational terms that locked Filipino bodies within superficial categories. The language of these terms as well as the visual technologies used to organize, manage, and control the Filipino bodies emerge as the very constraints and epistemological encumbrances that the three Filipino American visual artists in this dissertation ineluctably confront and expose through their visual work.

Noting a palpable undercurrent within contemporary Asian American art, Margo Machida observes, “When artists participate in or witness situations in which compatriots and even entire communities, traverse continents and oceans to resettle in faraway and often imperfectly understood land, it should be no wonder that some would make this process a subject of their work.”³⁶ Indeed, the three Filipino American artists examined in this dissertation have each found their way to the United States from

³⁴ Carolyn Hamilton, et al. “Introduction,” *Refiguring the Archive*, Carolyn Hamilton, et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 7.

³⁵ Ann Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 83.

³⁶ Margo Machida, “Out of Asia: Negotiating Asian Identities in America,” *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1994), 68.

the Philippines. Their experiences with migration and settlement have inflected their visual work with kinetic properties in as much the subject matter, specifically their attention to mobile “bodies,” as the compositional and conceptual choices each has made. In Chapter 1, for instance, Marlon Fuentes utilizes the inherent kinetic properties of film to establish the importance of movements and migrations to formations of a Filipino diasporic identity in *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995). And, likewise, in Chapter 2, Fuentes focuses on Filipino bodies and their crossings of affective and spatial landscapes as foundational to the production of the *Face Fusion* series (1985–ongoing), a collection of photographic portraits of faces deliberately abstracted in improbable alignments, folds, and fragmentations. In Chapter 3, the juxtaposition of Efren Ramirez’s *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer* (1973) and his 1976 photographs of San Francisco gay life exhibits Ramirez’s negotiation of the homeland Philippine spaces and eventual settlement in the United States. Finally, the redacted spaces in the digital images of marketplaces and the black sculptural objects in Stephanie Syjuco’s *Black Market Series* (2005), in Chapter 4, become abstracted islands that mediate her separation from the country of her birth.

The Filipino American artists in this project also demonstrate that a negotiation of space – whether within the domestic boundaries of the United States or in the global diaspora – is intimately tied to an archival imperative that influences the production of their artwork. As the overarching aesthetic quality of the American archives of empire is an overwhelming reliance on positivist properties of interiority associated with the Filipino racialized and colonized body, what binds the three Filipino American artists in this dissertation is that each turns to “thinking archivally” when processing their visual compositions. In other words, their work reflects an underlying archival imperative that

suggests the artists' recognition of the constructed nature of the archives, including its fallibility, as well as its inherent functions of knowledge production (one example is the inclusion of Filipino bodies within the historiography of Philippine-U.S. relations). The archival imperative becomes a driving ethos in their conceptualizations and production of their artwork that enables them to critique the very representational systems of production and distribution that have shaped the in/visibility of Filipino bodies within the colonial and postcolonial periods of Philippine-United States relations. Thinking archivally also conveys a self-reflective praxis that affords each of the artists the opportunity to think about their own subjectivities, locations, and experiences as Filipino American artists in relation to the Filipino bodies that are held within the archives of American empire.

The visual work closely read and examined in each of the chapters participates within a politics of exposure guided by an impulse to reconfigure the American archives of empire. This is not to say that each of the artists are grounded strictly to past events or historical representations of the Filipino body in generating their visual work (although in *Bontoc Eulogy*, Marlon Fuentes certainly makes the historical entanglements of U.S. empire to the Philippines and Filipinos his focus); rather each are cognizant of the enduring legacies from the past that have encroached onto and continue to shape the contemporary moment. That is, the Filipino American artists in this dissertation are guided by the challenges that representational politics emerging from the charged period of Philippine-United States relations has imposed onto the everyday struggles with labor, (im)migration, and intra-archipelagic and diasporic relations, as well as transnational, gendered, and sexual events and experiences of Filipinos within the United States and across the world. Indeed, the artists' archival imperatives reflect an

active reconfiguration of representational *and* epistemological processes and products that have sustained the American archive's hegemony.

By inhabiting the label "improbable vision," the Filipino American artists and artwork gaze back at historical figurations of Filipino bodies caught amid the politics and cultures of U.S. empire and actively defying the rigid narratives that presuppose Filipino subject formation. The Filipino American artists actively defy the representational constraints of empire by exposing or making visible its enduring representational legacies that continue to define the artists' subjectivities, the bodies captured in their visual work, and the bodies of knowledge about Filipinos. It is precisely the deliberate and calculated conceptualism – the deeply rooted intellectualism that form the basis of their work – attendant to the politics of exposure through reconfiguration that mark each of the artist and their artwork as "improbable visions" of U.S. empire.

The Filipino American artists in this dissertation actively wrest the burden of representation from the archives of American empire, and through acts of reconfiguration, create a rich and nuanced Filipino American photographic and film archives – or counterarchives – that are socially, historically, culturally, and politically responsive to the corporeal and psychic violence projected by the representational legacies of the archives of U.S. empire.³⁷ This dissertation focuses specifically on photographic (including digital) and filmic work precisely for its inherent documentary and archival properties. Okwui Enwezor, curator of the 2008 exhibition *Archive Fever*:

³⁷ My use of "counterarchives" is greatly informed by Shawn Michelle Smith's analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois's photography portraits of African Americans exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition. As counterarchives, Du Bois's collection "challenges the a long legacy of racist taxonomy, intervening at turn-of-the-century 'race science' by offering competing visual evidence." Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art, observes, “Because the camera is literally an archiving machine, every photograph, every film, is *a priori* an archival object.”³⁸ Within the historical context of U.S. empire, photography and film have advanced notions of the “imagined community” of Americans and have promoted a distinct national culture, demarcating boundaries of belonging in a remarkably efficient and effective manner.³⁹ As Lisa Lowe points out, “It is through the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen,” and photography and film have been paramount in defining the parameters of inclusion within and exclusion from the American body politic.⁴⁰ But if as Jacques Derrida observes in the opening epigraph, “effective democratization” is to occur, “participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” must take place.⁴¹ The Filipino American visual work in this dissertation participates in Derrida’s transformative ethos – an archival imperative guided by a visionary democracy. It is only through an acknowledgment and recognition of the representational constraints and their legacies – embodied through archival reconfigurations – that democracy and decolonization can be achieved. In other words, as “improbable visions” of U.S. empire, the Filipino American artists and their visual work make visible the visual and epistemic processes and figurations that work to actively expose the fissures and fractures of empire’s machinery.

★ ★ ★

³⁸ Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008), 12.

³⁹ The trajectories and implications of national belonging to an “imagined community” is borrowed from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁰ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

Contemporary Filipino American photographer and filmmaker Marlon Fuentes preoccupies the first two chapters of this dissertation. Close analyses of Marlon Fuentes' film, *Bontoc Eulogy*, and his photographic *Face Fusion* series, reveal how Fuentes's work foregrounds the visual archives of American empire and the processes by which they have produced and disseminated flattened representations of Filipino bodies as well as corresponding historical narratives. In his visual work, Fuentes questions the epistemological currency of these representations and the processes that have facilitated their emergence; he also interrogates the reasons why they have endured. Rather than discard the American representations of Filipinos altogether, Fuentes returns to the archives, specifically to photographs and films produced during the first few years after American occupation of the Philippines (the period when representations by Americans of Filipinos proliferated) and uses what he finds to build the visual and conceptual architectures for his film and photographs. The first two chapters, establishes what I call a "surface-depth" analytical framework. That is, Filipino American artists like Marlon Fuentes pay special attention to the surfaces of their work in order to critique the visual processes that have historically defined Filipino bodies and have denied them any agency, interiority, or depth.

In Chapter 1, "Surface-Depth Tactics: Marlon Fuentes' *Bontoc Eulogy* and the Reconfiguration of the Archives," I deploy a close analysis of Marlon Fuentes' 1995 film *Bontoc Eulogy* as an entry into the larger discussion of the archival imperatives of the Filipino American artists in this dissertation. I start with *Bontoc Eulogy* given Fuentes' unabashed reliance on the archives of American empire in the film's construction. The film is visually dependent on the historical archives and the very representational constraints of imaging the Filipino body for its compelling surface, as well as for the

underlying conceptual depth of the film. In *Bontoc Eulogy*, Fuentes is keen on exploiting film's inherent kinetic properties, through smart editing of black-and-white images from the archives of American empire juxtaposed with black-and-white scripted scenes to form a seamless surface. Fuentes' obsession with movement is established by his attention to his fictionalized grandfather's transpacific movement to the United States. His grandfather Markod's journey becomes a larger allegory for the circuits of Filipino (im)migrant movements throughout the globe. Fuentes retells his grandfather's fictionalized journey from the Philippine Islands to St. Louis as part of the Philippine Exhibit as the narrative backbone of the film. Retelling his grandfather's story, however fabricated, emerges as a historiographic intervention. To retell his grandfather's fictional story, all the while maintaining the historical and ethnographic surface, Fuentes must find the pieces of Markod's life from historical archival material – the repositories, with the artifacts and documents therein that Fuentes appropriately labels a “compost pile.”⁴² Fuentes liberates the Filipino bodies from their decaying or stagnant states and infuses the representations with life beyond their original intents. His compositional processes become the basis for the reconfiguration of the American archives of empire.

I continue my investigation of Fuentes' archival imperative in Chapter 2, “Improbable Topographies: Marlon Fuentes and the Kinetic Landscapes of the *Face Fusion Series*.” In his *Face Fusion I* and *II*, a series of abstracted photographic full-frontal facial portraits, Fuentes is again keen on exploring the forces that have facilitated the emergence of the contemporary experiences of Filipino migration. In their abstractions, Fuentes transforms the faces in the portraits into alternative maps of Filipino modernity. The two sets in the series reflect Fuentes exploration of topography, cartography, and

⁴² Marlon Fuentes, phone interview with author, January 21, 2007.

ethnography. His visual explorations in the *Face Fusion* series point to projects that were deployed during the American occupation of the Philippines at the turn-of-the-century to manage the islands, as well as to the popular visual surfaces that promoted two-dimensional images of Filipinos and the Philippines. His turn to mapping and its surfaces produce an ironic and profound if subtle critique of colonial regulatory and visual practices that themselves rely on mapping.

In *Face Fusion I*, Fuentes creates sensual and inviting landscapes from facial parts: noses, closed eyes, lips, and stray hairs are visibly aligned or and fused with one another to create otherworldly landscapes. The *Face Fusion I* portraits defy the expectations and surfaces of conventional ethnographic portraits of Filipino bodies given their abstracted figurations, but also because the bodies captured in Fuentes' portraits project fractious and kinetic interiorities that exceed the static bounds of images found within the archives of American empire. In *Face Fusion II*, Fuentes, again, turns to cartography. Unlike the sensuous landscapes found in the first set, the figurations of the faces in *Face Fusion II* repel more than they attract. Facial parts are fused together randomly, their asymmetrical seams visible; and the faces in each photograph are tied with nylon string, with deep impressions on the faces that impart the sensation of pain. *Face Fusion II* maps the affective trajectories of the Filipino migrant experiences, revealing the contradictions of transnational capital vis-à-vis Filipino labor. The oppositional trajectories projected by Filipino bodies that Fuentes' re-envisions in *Bontoc Eulogy* and that Fuentes maps in *Face Fusion I* and *II* cast the film, the photographs, and the artist as "improbable visions" of U.S. empire.

In Efren Ramirez and Stephen Syjuco's work, in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the archival imperative is not as readily transparent. Unlike in Marlon Fuentes' film or

photographs, Ramirez and Syjuco work does not directly image or obviously return to representational practices or productions of the American archives of empire. Yet, as I argue in both chapters, the archival imperative and the visual and epistemological interventions that address the representational constraints of U.S. empire are never far from the Ramirez and Syjuco's minds. Indeed, their work embodies "improbable visions" of U.S. empire because each artists actively work to expose the limits of visual production and distribution channels of the American archives of empire through their photographs.

I explore the ironic reconfiguration of a "special relationship" between photographer and the subject(s) in Chapter 3, "'But I Am a Photographer!': The Resurfacing of Efren Ramirez's Filipino American Gay Archives." Ramirez actively reconfigures the "special relationship" between photographer and his subjects in his photographs by treating photography as a privileged process whereby sitters have entrusted him guardianship of their "secrets."⁴³ His philosophy of photography is a departure from the photographic conventions deployed by American photographers that participated in advancing the "special relationship" between the United States and the Philippines. Indeed, Ramirez' own photographic process confronts photographic frameworks advanced by American photographers by claiming the right to represent his gay body, along with other gay male bodies. The gay bodies pictured in his photographs are captured with interiorities that are organic, sensual, and inviting. More importantly, gay bodies are pictured rooted to the American spaces in which they inhabit, challenging the heteronormative structures that have relegated gay bodies as deviants within the American landscape.

⁴³ Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (San Francisco: Peace & Pieces, 1976), np.

Ramirez's 1976 photographs printed in *Vector* magazine and *In Pursuit of Images*, I argue, owes its emergence to Ramirez's transnational experiences, in particular his formative experiences as a youth in the Philippines. Published in 1973, *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*, a short piece of work by Ramirez, provides a candid account of the author's childhood amid the oppressive heteronormative domestic order ruled by his mother. I perform a close literary reading of Ramirez's autobiography to establish Ramirez's fixation on the issues of domestic space (their creation and destruction) and belonging, negotiated by Ramirez's Filipino gay body. The commingling of these issues in the Philippines (in the autobiography) creates a vision of liberation from his mother's domestic confines and from the Philippines that, I argue, influences the subject matter and aesthetic choices in his photographs once in the United States. If the autobiography reflects the collapse of the heteronormative domestic order, his 1976 photographs reflect not only his negotiation of the new urban and gay spaces of San Francisco, but also the creation of a gay domestic order that Ramirez's attempts to naturalize in his photographs that could only result from his transnational navigation of his Filipino gay identity. By closely analyzing a selection of his photographs, my goal is to show how his images of gay bodies (including his own) in the United States exposes and critiques a heteronormative national vision of the domestic order of the United States.

The fourth and final chapter, "Here and There | *Dito at Doon: Stephanie Syjuco Blows-Up the Black Markets*," is a departure from the previous chapters in that its focus is on the visual and epistemological consequences of the contemporary present and the location of Filipino bodies amid the web of transnational capitalism. Like the flattened images of Filipino bodies emerging from the historical archives of American empire that

Marlon Fuentes returns to in his film and photographs, so too has the present moment inspired the ease to which images are produced, distributed, and consumed. The present moment has also facilitated a flatness of representation. That is, technological advances in image production and distribution of images have created representations of migrant bodies (including Filipino bodies) that deny agency and interiorities to those pictured. From what I call her “interstitial vantage point,” Stephanie Syjuco is able to expose the limits of transnational capitalism through the production of the *Black Market Series*, 9 digitally altered images of everyday marketplace scenes in the Philippines that she had originally found within the image archives of the Internet. Within each of the images, Syjuco has redacted the goods being sold, leaving behind portraits with only Filipino bodies and large swaths of redactions visible. Syjuco also creates black sculptural object, or “bobjects” to be displayed along side the portraits. The redactions in the portraits instill the images with a depth that gives the images a critical interiority. Rather than leaving the images in their flattened digital states, Syjuco “blows-up” the images by literally exploding the redactions off the surface of the prints – the bobjects become the three-dimensional representations of the redactions. Syjuco also “blows-up” the contemporary systems that have placed constraints on the ways we understand Third-World migrant bodies. The *Black Market Series* is a testament to the reconfiguration of dominant representations of Third-World bodies and bodies of knowledge in an age of transnational capitalism – a system that the United States is intimately connected to – that establishes her art practices and her work as an improbable outcome of Philippine-United States relations.

FIGURES



Figure i: Snapshot of Ricardo Bernabe, 1969 (from the author's collection).



Figure ii: Snapshot of James Alfred LeRoy and Anonymous Filipino Boy, Photograph album with Philippine Islands views, 1900, Box 1, James A. LeRoy Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
© Regents of the University of Michigan



Figure iii: "Mary, Miss Gladwin, the Two Monkeys, & the Two Missing Links," 1903 (front),
Harry Newton Cole Papers, ca. 1900-1904,
Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
© Regents of the University of Michigan

Mary, Miss Gladwin,
The Two Monkeys, & the
Two Missing Links!
At our home,
Palo, Leyte, P.I.
Feb. 19, 1903.

Harry N. C.

Figure iv: "Mary, Miss Gladwin, the Two Monkeys, & the Two Missing Links. At our home, Palo Leyte, P.I. Feb. 19, 1903" (back), Harry Newton Cole Papers, ca. 1900-1904, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
© Regents of the University of Michigan



Figure iv: Mary Scott Cole and students, Palo Leyte, ca. 1902.
Harry Newton Cole Papers, ca. 1900-1904,
Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
© Regents of the University of Michigan

CHAPTER 1

SURFACE-DEPTH TACTICS: MARLON FUENTES' *BONTOC EULOGY* AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE ARCHIVES

To survive in this land we had to forget.
The stream changes course and slowly our ghost catches up.
Now we must remember in order to survive.
—Marlon Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy*

The body has returned with a vengeance.
—Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive"

By 1995 Marlon Fuentes, a first-generation Filipino American, had already established himself as photographer, exhibiting photographs throughout the United States from his notable *Circle of Fear* and *Face Fusion* series.¹ The year also marked the release of *Bontoc Eulogy*, his first major entry into Asian American independent filmmaking.² If the early 1990s signaled a shift from the stillness and silence of photography to the sensory-conscious documentary film for Fuentes, the subject matter

¹ The *Circle of Fear* series was produced between 1980-1981, followed by the *Face Fusion* series (1985 – ongoing). The *Face Fusion* series is perhaps the better known of the two, as it was exhibited and toured between 1994-1996 throughout the country as part of the *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* exhibition. The Asia Society Galleries in New York City, with guest curator Margo Machida, organized the landmark exhibit. See *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1994). I explore the *Face Fusion* series in the following chapter.

² Filmmaker and film scholar Renee Tajima offers a framework built upon two distinct phases that circumscribe the emergence of independent Asian American cinema in the United States from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The first phase coincides with the start of the Asian American student movement of the late 1960s and extends through the 1970s. The second phase saw a growth of filmmakers that were trained and educated in film schools, resulting in narrative-driven and technically competent productions. See Renee Tajima, "Moving the Image: Asian American Independent Filmmaking 1970-1990, in *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, ed. Russell Leong (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991) 10-33. Fuentes' film falls into the second phase of Tajima's framework.

that lay at the nexus of his visual projects surprisingly changed very little, if at all.³ Reflecting on the making of *Bontoc Eulogy*, Marlon Fuentes touches upon an overarching aesthetic and conceptual concern: “On a personal level, I wanted to locate myself within the historical narratives that define the Filipino in America.”⁴ Fuentes’ statement addresses a paradoxical dilemma that Filipinos in the United States continue to confront. For a population whose first settlers, as some historians have argued, reached the United States as early as the 18th century and whose recent numbers continue to top other Asian populations, their inclusions in the United States over the generations have consistently been marred by their persistent exclusions, or absences.⁵ The absences of

³ In 1991, Fuentes entered the M.F.A program in film at Temple University and a year later began the process of making *Bontoc Eulogy*. Fuentes never finished his M.F.A. degree. The film was funded by the influential National Asian American Telecommunication Association (NAATA), which is known today as the Center for Asian American Media. The Independent Television Service and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting also funded the film. Marlon Fuentes, telephone interview by author, January 21, 2006.

⁴ Mia Blumentritt, “*Bontoc Eulogy*, History, and the Craft of Memory: An Extended Conversation with Marlon E. Fuentes,” *Amerasia Journal*, 24: 3 (1998), 76. It is important to note here that Fuentes’ confrontation history in his film, specifically his intent to locate Filipinos within United States history, did not begin with *Bontoc Eulogy*. The *Circle of Fear* and *Face Fusion* series convey similar interrogations as the film.

⁵ It is widely accepted by scholars of Filipino American history that “Filipinos” were among the first settlers from the Asian/Pacific region to settle in the United States. My use of quotations around Filipinos is deliberate, given the anachronistic usage of the moniker to describe these settlers, also popularly named “Manilamen.” The designation “Filipino,” as Vicente Rafael reminds us, originally described and racially demarcated Spanish people born in the Philippines; see Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 6. “Filipino” later evolved into the nationalist-inflected designation, inspired by José Rizal and his usage of the moniker to encompass the indigenous masses, those popularly referred to as “Indio,” during the latter decades of the 19th century; see Sharon Delmendo, “The American Factor in José Rizal’s Nationalism,” *Ameriasia Journal*, 24.2 (Summer 1998), 39. While Filipino American studies have claimed “Manilamen” as progenitors to later waves of Filipino immigration to the U.S., there is remarkably sparse scholarship on these early settlers. For instances in which historians of Filipinos in the U.S. have referenced these settlers, see Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretative History*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 25. Chan description of the Manila galleon trade and the Manilamen relies on Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans: A Pictorial Essay – 1763-Circa-1963* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1983), 1-7. Cordova is informed by Marina E. Espina’s *Filipinos in Louisiana* (New Orleans: A.F. Laborde & Sons, 1988). While certainly Espina’s work is a rare example of scholarship on the “Manilamen” and their descendants, it is not without its problems. The collection of historical and pictorial essays on early “Filipino” settlers in Louisiana lacks in its historical execution; and the absence of citations makes it nearly impossible to re-examine her

Filipinos are in large part facilitated by “the curious historiographic and categorical displacements” of Filipinos that, as Oscar Campomanes argues, have significant epistemological and material consequences.⁶ The shifting legal status of Filipinos alone in the first half of the 20th century – from American nationals to immigrant aliens to American citizens – reflect the multiple ways Filipino bodies seem to appear and disappear with each successive wave of Filipino migration within the American body politic. With their disappearances, however, Filipino migrants are marked by resilience; they continue to reemerge in varying discursive permutations despite the heavy odds stacked against their presence.⁷ Fuentes’ desire to locate himself in “the historical narratives” is an intuitive response engendered by his own migrant experiences in the United States, as well as his perceptions of the curious moments that Filipinos, the Philippines, and diasporic geographies have faded in and out in American history and memory.

Fuentes turns to the mediums of film and photography to guide him through the peripatetic terrains of Filipino migrant in/visibility in the United States. The medium of film, as Fuentes observes, “was a good medium that could capture the process of passage through the various membranes we seek to navigate through.”⁸ Fuentes’ observations on film remark on the technology’s inherent composite and kinetic

primary sources or confirm the historical narratives she constructs. Even today, the pivotal year of 1898 stands as temporal starting point for much of “Filipino American” historiography.

⁶ Oscar Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism*, 2.2 (Spring 1995), 148.

⁷ My use of “heavy odds” is inspired by the double-bind predicament that faces Filipinos in the United States. This double-bind scenario is inspired by Sarita See’s forthcoming book-length work *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, in which she points to the ways American empire forgets its imperial interventions in the Philippines and also the ways it forgets the forgetting. She calls it a “double disavowal.” See Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Forthcoming 2009).

⁸ Blumentritt, 77.

properties, which inspire Fuentes' fixation and deployment. The machinery of film – which includes the component structures that together make film possible – serves Fuentes as an apt metaphor that allows Fuentes to address the possibilities of material, corporeal, and conceptual structures that guide his body of visual work. The visual and conceptual interactions between “bodies” and their component parts become an overarching ethos that permeates throughout his oeuvre.

Fuentes ideas about the composite structures of his body of visual work also reveal his preoccupation with notions of “surface and depth” in his visual work. If Fuentes is fixated on the mechanisms that drive the visibility and cohesiveness of film, then he is likewise intrigued by the relationship and productive tensions that emerge between the visuality of the surface and its legibility and the underlying compositional and conceptual depth. Surface and depth are inseparable in his film and photography. When deployed in his visual projects, the two concepts exceed Christopher Pinney's notion of the production of a “postcolonial surfacist practice.” While Pinney argues that certain postcolonial Indian and African photography reject Western modernist notions of depth and indexicality, opting instead to focus on “the texture of the surface of the image and the possibilities it presents for cultural invention,” Fuentes, however, is not as adamant about rejecting the notion of depth.⁹ Nor does he eschew “surfacist” notions, given the overwhelming archival attention he places in his work. Arising from his oeuvre is the interplay between surface and depth creating a strategic “subaltern

⁹ Christopher Pinney, “Introduction: ‘How the Other Half...’,” in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 13. See also Shawn Michelle Smith's *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) in which she examines the ways 19th century middle-class white Americans produced and read photographs in relation to notions of gendered and racialized interiorities.

backdrop,” specific to the tensions and ambivalences wrought by Philippine-United States relations.¹⁰

“It’s all inside the work,” Fuentes explains, “you need to get at it.”¹¹ Like the cellular building blocks of the human body, the component parts of his films and photography drive the larger surface aesthetics and encourage their legibility. Fuentes began *Bontoc Eulogy* in 1992 and, in the years thereafter, approached his work “as if I was gathering mosaic pieces,” maneuvering each filmic tesserae into their calculated proper positions.¹² Conceptualized as a composite structure, his film can be broken down into smaller film cells, and those broken into even smaller component parts; their finite surfaces, all the while, brim with conceptual depth and compositional possibilities. The medium of film for Fuentes facilitates the semiotic processes that create the visual emergence of Filipino bodies on the screen alongside their purposeful reinventions below the images’ surface. In his efforts to locate himself within the historical narratives of the United States, the American archives – the physical repositories of U.S. empire that houses the visual and textual traces of Filipino bodies – beckon Fuentes. To create

¹⁰ By “subaltern backdrop,” I am channeling Arjun Appadurai in “The Colonial Backdrop.” While Appadurai speaks specifically about photography – both colonial and subaltern – I believe that his work also speaks to filmmaking. Of particular interest are the ambivalences captured in colonial realist photography because, as Appadurai suggests, “it simultaneously seeks to capture individual subjects both as tokens and types.” Thus, this ambivalence, I contend, promote a crisis of categorization, particularly within a colonial context. The subaltern backdrop works to expose the ambivalences embedded in colonial images, as it “resists, subverts, or parodies the realist claims of photography in various ways.” Whereas Christopher Pinney focuses on the cultural work of the staging of photography – the surface performances – and looks beyond depth and interiority in the formation of a postcolonial scopic regime, Fuentes’ photographic and filmic compositional choices speaks to the interdependence of the two. The editing of the film’s frames in *Bontoc Eulogy* produces an ethnographic surface that speaks to the limitations of the colonial visual systems, all the while its surface also guides viewers to the film’s depths wherein formalist notions of visual production and reception get reconfigured and redeployed. This surface-depth interplay create the “subaltern backdrop” in *Bontoc Eulogy*. See Arjun Appadurai, “The Colonial Backdrop,” *AfterImage*, 24 (March/April 1997), 4-7. For a discussion on “scopic regimes,” see Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Seattle Bay Press, 1988), 3-23.

¹¹ Marlon Fuentes, telephone interview by author, January 21, 2006.

¹² *Ibid.*

the film, Fuentes confronts the logic of the archives, both as student of history as well as a postcolonial archivist. That is, the logic of the archives presupposes a depth that one must enter into in order to engage with the documents that are housed in the archives. The logic of the archives also assumes a metaphorical depth found within the documents themselves that have frozen the processes and power relations involved in the production of epistemologies.¹³ The creation of *Bontoc Eulogy* necessitated his physical return to the archives – the architecturally defined repositories of documents, film, music, and photography – while also demanding Fuentes to consider the archival constraints that have historically governed the contours of Filipino in/visibility and have maintained the supremacy of U.S. empire. The filmic act of returning to the archives by Fuentes, thus, enables him to recompose Filipino bodies to ensure their visibility within the American body politic.¹⁴ *Bontoc Eulogy* becomes a Filipino visual archive, its construction driven by its own set of conceptual processes and guided by compositional tactics that hinge precisely on Fuentes' archival imperative. Rather than stifling the creative and political possibilities of his work, the constraints imposed on Filipino bodies by the American archives afford Fuentes a decolonizing vision. It is

¹³ Ann Stoler distinguishes the colonial archives, for instance, as spaces not just for “knowledge retrieval,” but as sites that hold materials whose existences evidences the processes of colonial knowledge production and governance. The latter denotes the archives as dynamic spaces. Ann Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content and Form,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 89.

¹⁴ Asian American studies scholar Lisa Lowe's powerful declaration on the critical work performed by Asian American cultural productions in the United States inspires my use of “filmic acts.” Cultural productions such as literature, visual art, and performance (to name broadly but a few) – or “immigrant acts” – work collectively to destabilize the homogenizing tendencies of an “American” national culture, as well as to articulate the inherent social, economic, political contradictions found therein. My appropriation of “acts” to describe Fuentes' filmic compositional choices and strategies follows, along the same vein of Lowe's intent that “the *act* of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification” (original emphasis). Fuentes' production of the film – in all its component parts – reflect his active engagement with the American archives and epitomizes these “immigrant acts.” Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 9.

through Fuentes' return to the American archives that have ironically allowed him to begin the process of liberating Filipinos from the burdens of mis/representations and the quandaries of in/visibilities. There is no better redemption, for Fuentes, than to destroy the Master's house by using the Master's own tools.

I begin this chapter with an extended reading of the first few minutes of the film's opening scenes to tease out the intertwined conceptual and compositional threads that frame the multiple journeys that Fuentes takes into the archives. During the opening frames, viewers witness Marlon Fuentes immediately engaging the constraints of the archives of Western/American modernity on the ethnographic object/body by strategically deploying an ethnographic surface. In these first few minutes, Fuentes visually exploits the colonial ambivalence of the archives in order to create the spaces for "bodily" re-imagining that carries through to the rest of the film. If in the opening minutes Fuentes bombards his viewers with references to time, space, objects, and bodies that seem to coalesce into a fitting and yet unsettling *mélange* of references despite obvious visual and aural anachronisms, the start of the film also underscores the archival imperative and the metonymic visual possibilities that resonates throughout the 60-minute film. Moving from the opening scenes, the chapter traces the cultural import of the multivalent movements found in the film, ultimately exposing the film as a contemporary Filipino diasporic travel narrative within a reconceived ethnographic surface that draws connections between current global migrations of Filipinos and their historical movements. The chapter examines the rich theoretical and political outcomes of Fuentes' archival imperative alongside the intimate corporeal stakes involved in confronting Filipino in/visibility. *Bontoc Eulogy* is as much a reconfigured diasporic archive as Fuentes is a postcolonial archivist whose conceptual and compositional

strategies emerge from his deeply rooted diasporic sensibilities inspired by the American intervention in the Philippines starting in 1898; his own personal experiences with migration and displacement; and, importantly, his unwavering eye directed towards the Philippine homeland from vantage points outside the islands' borders.

MARLON FUENTES, THE GRAMOPHONE, AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SURFACE

As the opening frames in *Bontoc Eulogy* appear on the screen, viewers are immediately introduced to the keen sense of attention that Fuentes pays to the details of the film's surface and its ties to the film's underlying conceptual depth. His artistic, directorial, and editorial scrutiny wavers very little throughout the opening scenes, a foreshadowing of the film's seeming cohesiveness and unimpeded flow for the remaining 60-minutes of the film. This filmic acumen is largely a result of his unabashed and self-professed "obsessive-compulsive" compositional attention that he puts into his work.¹⁵ His attention to details, including all the perceived "mistakes, all the roughness," responds to the constraints imposed by the American visual archives on Filipino bodies as a means to unify modes of visual production and reception despite the material costs and ineluctable ruptures from such a project—"a unity through disunity."¹⁶ Compositionally, the first few minutes of the film reveal a minimally staged space with an uncannily ethnographic surface. The visual and aural cues in the opening frames point to strangely familiar ethnographic sources yet something (or things) is amiss. The opening frames warrant a closer inspection. It is within the first few minutes

¹⁵ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

¹⁶ Ibid. Fuentes' statement, here, reiterates his own thoughts in the 1998 interview with Mia Blumentritt in the *Amerasia Journal*. Blumentritt, 88. Marshall Berman reminds us of the paradoxical contours of (Western) modernity, what he refers to as "a unity through disunity" that Fuentes clearly confronts and exploits. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 15.

of the film where we find Fuentes teasing out the unsettling visual juxtapositions and anachronisms that have inspired his confrontations with the paradoxes of Western/American regimes of knowledge production that pervade within the visual archives. The opening frames' surface depict an unsettling fluidity that speaks, at once, to the stability of Western modes of vision and visibility, while the iterations of the opening frames mark their fallibility and limitations. The opening frames of the film provide, likewise, an opening of sorts for Fuentes to formulate a conceptual and compositional praxis based notably on surface and depth. In beginning the film the way he does, Fuentes demands the viewer to heed and grapple with the disquieting moments of the opening minutes in order to reach beneath the film's surface.

The start of *Bontoc Eulogy* fades from complete blackness to a black-and-white 16mm camera still shot directed at the meeting of two conjoined white walls. Shadows on the wall outline a window-like structure, producing a third wall out-of-frame; taken together with the imaginary fourth wall of the viewers, the set-up suggests the space is an enclosed cell (see Figure 1.1). On the brick floor sits a latticed mat that bisects the diagonal of the room. Resting atop the mat is a classic gramophone. The large bell of the gramophone and the shadows on the white wall direct viewers to the empty, negative space in front of the machine. While a few seconds elapse during the fade-in until the optimal brightness and black-and-white contrast is achieved, the silence coupled with the precise staging of the scene provokes a feeling of spatial, temporal, and aesthetic disorientation. Is the enclosure part of a house? Could it be a prison cell? Is the scene filmed in the past? Or is it contemporary? Moments later a male figure enters the bottom of the screen toward the empty space. Without hesitation, the man places himself atop the mat in front of the gramophone and sits. Effortlessly, he winds the

phonograph, switches the machine on, and moves the needle of the gramophone to the surface of the record as it spins (see Figure 1.2). The static sounds of needle-to-record emerge, followed by the music of quick staccato percussion beats. To the unaccustomed ear, the music takes on a mysterious and foreign, or non-Western, air; the tribal sounds shatter the calmness of the enclosure. The man remains seated and listens intently to the music that we, as viewers, also hear, until the live shot and sounds recedes slowly back into blackness and silence (see Figure 1.3).

No sooner do the frames fade into black, do they reemerge curiously back into the black-and-white cell, with the same man in front of the gramophone. He follows the identical actions with the gramophone from the initial sequence. The mechanical sounds of recorded static emerge, followed this time by a different and still foreign-sounding recording of percussions from before. After several seconds of the music playing, the scene fades again back into black, only again to fade back into the third seemingly identical iteration of the opening scene. The man's actions from the prior scenes are repeated, and instead of music, a male voice emerges over the static sounds, speaking in an obscure foreign language. Unlike the prior two scenes, Fuentes cuts to a close-up of the gramophone's needle on the spinning record, abruptly halting the foreign voice for the sounds of static. The scene fades slowly back into black, and only then does the title of the film appear, signaling the completion of the three-minute opening sequence and foreshadowing things to come.

The man in the opening frames is the filmmaker Marlon Fuentes.¹⁷ Fuentes' use of his own body in the opening iterations and his engagement with the gramophone are

¹⁷ In their readings of *Bontoc Eulogy*, both Peter Feng and Fatimah Tobing Rony connect the man at the opening of film to Marlon Fuentes. Fuentes, we learn from the screen credits at the end of the film, is also the narrator. While Feng ascribes the name "Marlon" to the man at the opening, he is perhaps less eager than Rony to wholly proscribe to the notion that the narrator and the

worth describing at length, as Fuentes is keen on establishing an aesthetic and conceptual connection between the Filipino body in the opening frames (or the surface of the film) and that of his own omniscient Filipino body as the filmmaker. Fuentes thus moves from the surface backdrop of the nondescript enclosure to the backdrop of his own experiences as a Filipino immigrant, intertwining the two layers and establishing a kind of postcolonial backdrop; he sets into motion a conceptual framework that extends past the opening frames, and indeed, beneath its surface.¹⁸ During the opening frames Fuentes establishes the deliberate construction of the enclosed space, the cell, as an enclosure that houses both surface and underlying tensions and limitations of Western visual regimes. The artifice that Fuentes so purposefully deploys in the repeated scenes emerges from the triangulated relationships between the body of Fuentes (the actor), his body as the filmmaker, and the gramophone. Insofar as the compositional decision to use black and white film and the placement of the gramophone at the room's center marks the opening frames with an ethnographic authenticity, Fuentes' adroit engagement with the machine compromises the seemingly stable temporal connection of

figure are equivalent. In the opening scenes, the silent disembodied narrator emerges not through dialogue, but through the triangulation of Fuentes, the actor and filmmaker, and the gramophone. Indeed, the filmmaker – the off-screen Fuentes – I argue is the silent narrator in the opening scenes. Later in this chapter, I tie Marlon Fuentes visually to the narrator and the actor in the film. Through deixis in the narration and with precise semiotic arrangement of the frames, the connection between the disembodied narrator and the actor is affirmed. See Fatimah Tobing Rony, "The Quick and the Dead: Surrealism and the Found Ethnographic Footage Films of *Bontoc Eulogy* and *Mother Dao: The Turtlelike*," *Camera Obscura*, 52:18.1 (2003), 129-155; see also chapter 1 in "The Camera as Microscope: Cinema and Ethnographic Discourse," in Peter Feng's *Identities in Motion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 19-37.

¹⁸ "Artifice and falsification," as Margo Machida observes of Marlon Fuentes' visual work, propels Fuentes desire to "stimulate audiences to think in more analytical ways about the production of knowledge and representations of the Other." What we find is Fuentes' deliberate deployment of surface-depth tactics in the opening frames. Margo Machida, "The Poetics of Positionality: Art, Identity, and Communities of Imagination in Asian America," (Ph.d. diss., SUNY at Buffalo, 2002), 100.

film's frames to the past.¹⁹ This scene is, of course, a modern construction. Equally unsettling are the recorded tribal instrumentations and the male voice that emerge from the gramophone and the composure presented by the listening actor; this, coupled with the stationary camera shot used for the opening sequence, confronts the objectivity and veracity of Western ethnographic film.²⁰ The repeated scene evidences Fuentes' deliberate deployment of visual anachronism: positioning his own body visually next to the historic gramophone and the subversive substitution of the authoritative Western ethnographer with his own body. By capturing his body on the screen and his kinesthetic performance with the gramophone, Fuentes responds directly to the colonial strictures and structures of disciplinary visual regimes that espouse the stability of visual, aural and kinesthetic referents. The opening sequence allows his audience to envision what Lisa Lowe describes as "the simultaneous imbrications of civilization and barbarism" within the scopic regime of Western modernity and the creative, imaginative, intellectual, and strategic ways in which Fuentes plays with the duality through the imaging of his body (and later bodies of other Filipinos) on the screen.²¹

The actor's body and his calculated kinesthetic performance with the gramophone convey the highly ironic reenactment of Western ethnographic visual practices popularized at the turn-of-the-century.²² For the opening scene to work, and

¹⁹ In 1877 Thomas Edison invented the phonograph that initially used a tin-foil tube to re/produce sound. The device that Fuentes uses in the opening frames is more like the gramophone, invented by Emile Berliner in 1888, that uses spinning disc to produce sound. See George Basalla, *Evolution of Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁰ Feng reads the stationary shot used throughout *Bontoc Eulogy* as indicative of the film's artifice. Peter Feng, *Identities in Motion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 25.

²¹ Lisa Lowe, "Out of the West: Asian Migration and Modernity," in *Fresh Talk Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elain H. Kim et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xix.

²² Fuentes is quite informed of the disciplinary colonial functions of anthropology and ethnography, and certainly the visual projects that emerged from them. Blumentritt, 76. The origins of ethnographic film can be traced to the French doctor Félix-Louis Regnault and his early chronophotographic images of African bodies in motion during the 1895 Ethnographic

certainly the scenes that follow, there was a deliberate attempt by Fuentes in “creating a surface that looked substantial” – that is, a convincing ethnographic surface.²³ Fuentes notes that ethnography is a “primarily observational” genre, and thus he takes great strides to stage the surface of the film using conventional ethnographic representational strategies.²⁴ Fuentes, in the ironic reenactment – mimicking the production of colonial knowledge through the genre of ethnography – transforms himself into “a native” and yet questions the very mechanisms that have inspired the label within the colonial imaginary. The transformation is neither visually complete, nor wholly stable. The opening scene depends on the iconic event of “contact” between civilization and barbarism, modern and unmodern worlds, that becomes discursively (narratologically and visually) legible through the lens of ethnography. Fuentes visualizes contact by transforming his body into the token native, primitive, indigene (popularized by the field of ethnography) – constructions that have all been associated with Filipino bodies – in contact with the gramophone, a technology of modernity. The staging and Fuentes’ on-screen performance directs our attention to specific processes of Fuentes’ postcolonial reconstruction: specifically to his surface strategies and their underlying conceptual moves. Indeed, the instance that Fuentes sits in front of the gramophone, he

Exposition in Paris (*Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale*). Invented by Etienne-Jules Marey, a physiologist, chronophotography proved an important antecedent to motion picture technology. The cameras used could capture motion and movement using an oscillating shutter that individuated frames on the film plate. This technology proved indispensable in the scientific study of the racialized, primitive African body, generating discourses of racial differences based on the African body and its movements. The 1895 Ethnographic Exposition facilitated Regnault’s study of the African body and kinesthetic performances that brought to light, as Fatimah Tobing Rony point out, “the imbricated networks of science, spectacle, and seeing in popular culture, early anthropology and film.” Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 24. Particularly in the opening scenes, Fuentes draws on ethnographic cinema, not just in the staging of the gramophone in the cell, but also through his own kinesthetic movements, which ultimately facilitates the scene’s artifice and compromises the veracity of the ethnographic surface.

²³ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

²⁴ Blumentritt, 83.

consciously anthropomorphizes the iconic image of “the Bushman and the Phonograph,” taken from the archives of early 20th-century ethnographic “observation” and becomes “the savage,” albeit with a conceptual twist.

Becoming the savage in the opening scene of *Bontoc Eulogy* highlights the filmmaker’s “third-eye” sensibilities that are rooted in the history of Western ethnographic contact in the Philippines, as well as other geographies throughout the world. Fuentes takes seriously Fatimah Tobing Rony’s notion of “the third eye” and recognizes the ways ethnographic photography and film produce, through flattened representations, the racialized native, or savage.²⁵ Ethnographic images and, in particular, scientific and popular cinema, in the United States resonate profoundly in the ways in which native, non-white, people have been imagined, imaged, and, importantly, racially naturalized as “the Other.”²⁶ If the third eye guides Fuentes’ transformation into the savage, then Fuentes is aware not only of the iconic image from which the opening scene is inspired, but also to the ethnographic processes and dominant actors that give rise to the image’s creation. The awareness of these processes highlights the significance of the underlying depth of the opening scene’s ethnographic surface.

The opening scene projects an “anti-*tromp-l’oeil*” spirit that Fuentes cites as among the kind of “subvertive [sic]... games that are in *Bontoc Eulogy*.”²⁷ “I have

²⁵ Fatimah Tobing Rony reveals that the third eye is related to W.E.B. DuBois’s influential invocation of “the double consciousness” that African Americans (and other people of color) carry within themselves in the United States. Propelled by the sense of vision in the ways in which people of color are aware of their status as racialized minorities when white people stare at them, Rony’s deployment of “the third eye” is aptly driven by vision as well. The third eye enables one to see the processes involved in the racialization and the fracturing of consciousness, specifically with regard to images of savages and natives in ethnographic cinema. For double-consciousness, see W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989; originally published in 1903). For “third eye,” see Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*.

²⁶ Rony, 8-9.

²⁷ Fuentes’s usage of “subvertive” is a play on the verb “subvert” that connotes the act of undermining institutional and structural power. In this context, Fuentes “subverts”

attempted to make,” as Fuentes points out, “an anti-illusionistic film in the Brechtian sense of the word.”²⁸ As *tromp-l’oeil* relies on the seamless construction of realism, creating a sense of illusion (or faux depth) on a one-dimensional surface, Fuentes deliberately sought to reveal “the seams and sutures” of the surface of the film to create a meaningful depth in spite of the artifice.²⁹ Transgressing the realist expectations of popular *tromp-l’oeil* images, the opening scene – indeed, much of the film – plays on surface-depth tensions motivated, in part, by German playwright Bertolt Brecht’s aesthetic strategy of epic theater: *Verfremdungseffekt* (popularly translated as “alienation effect”). Fuentes challenges his viewers to decipher the constructed nature of *Bontoc Eulogy* in a Brechtian sense, and, in the process he estranges them from their preconceived notions of ethnographic surfaces in order to facilitate a critical viewing praxis that relies on ideas of depth.³⁰ Remarking on the “textual readings” that have been produced about the film, Fuentes points out that “[people] connect the [surface] dots, but the dots that are more substantial are really underneath those dots and those lines.”³¹

The images and ethnographic strategies of Viennese doctor and anthropologist Rudolph Pöch at the turn-of-the-century, in particular, inform the conceptual depth of the opening scene. Fuentes is not so much interested in “reinventing” Pöch’s ethnographic strategies, but rather, as Fuentes points out, “what I want is to change the context so I use the science of surfaces.”³² Fuentes’ visual connection to Pöch’s archive

ethnographic regimes and extends this play to the level of semantics and adds another layer to the conceptual depth of the film. Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

²⁸ Blumentritt, 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁰ For an overview of Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, see Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 22-24.

³¹ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

³² Machida, “The Poetics of Positionality,” 109.

reveals Fuentes' third-eye sensibilities that are intrinsically guided and driven by an archival imperative for the film's opening frames, as well as the rest of the film's production.

While expeditions to "exotic" lands at the turn-of-the-century often used photographic and filmic technologies, they served primarily to supplement the written form of ethnography.³³ Rudolph Pöch, however, espoused the use of photography and film in his research expeditions over relying solely on the written form.³⁴ Pöch had traveled throughout German, British, and Dutch New Guinea between 1904-1906, photographing, filming, and writing about the various indigenous populations within the regions. During this period Pöch produced writing suffuse with remarkable visual descriptions of native bodies and their performances, and with equally vivid descriptions of the geographies they inhabit. His work in the various regions of New Guinea secured additional financing for an expedition to investigate the "Bushmen" of the Kalahari Desert in 1908, during which the iconic images of "Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph" were shot (see Figure 1.4).³⁵

Pöch sought to film the Kalahari-Bushman named Kubi interacting with the phonograph for the first time in order to supplement and validate existing ethnographic views of the Bushmen's primitive racial status (this iconic image shaped the West's

³³ On photography and film supplementing the written form of ethnographic research, see Assenka Oksiloff, *Picturing the Primitive* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 44. Fatimah Tobing Rony, likewise, notes that the field of ethnography initially favored more the written form with academic presentations than the visual counterpart. She also points out that the field was slow in creating a film archives for academic research. See Rony, *The Third Eye*, 65.

³⁴ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 65.

³⁵ See Rudolph Pöch, "Travels in German, British, and Dutch New Guinea," *The Geographical Journal*, 30.6 (December 1907), 609-616. His travels to the different regions of New Guinea and the presentations he brought back to Germany were extremely popular, as he produced "the first ethnographic descriptions of several coastal and highland people," as Assenka Oksiloff points out, so much so that the Berlin Anthropological Society funded his expedition to the Kalahari Desert in 1908. Oksiloff, 44.

conception of itself as distinctly modern and racially superior).³⁶ Pöch's method of filming relied on positioning the camera with an optimal shot of the subject(s) and "just letting the film roll" to record "the spontaneous" reactions of the people being filmed without supposedly the interference and influence of the ethnographer.³⁷ Kubi's physical presence in the film alone did not have the same impact as filming his seemingly "real" performance with the phonograph; his performance with the technology powerfully inscribed and authenticated Kubi's body as a primitive and distinct from modern Westerners.³⁸

The authentic performances and movements of native bodies fascinated anthropologists and non-anthropologists alike. Indeed, the photographs and films of native performances concretized the racialization of the native as primitive, as a spectacle to be gazed upon by the West. Capturing dancing natives certainly epitomized the primitive spectacle for anthropologists, and the scenes, moreover, produced the iconic performances of native bodies in the minds of the Western viewers—bodies performing "frenzied movements by people lacking rationality."³⁹ Fuentes acknowledges the power and allure of dancing and moving native bodies in his use of indigenous instrumentation in the first two opening iterations. The sounds of staccato percussion beats and rhythms conjure images of Westerners gazing upon dancing native bodies. If native bodies engaging in dance captivated anthropologist, so too did the

³⁶ Pöch's film notes identify the older man in the images as Kubi, a 60 year-old Ts-aukhoë, Kalahari-Bushman. Ibid., 52, 46.

³⁷ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 66.

³⁸ Assenka Oskiloff conveys that the *Bushman* footage offered viewers "a vivid and ostensibly 'real' impression of a native who presents himself not simply as a passive specimen to be measured and probed, but as a representative of a living, breathing primitive." Oskiloff, 54-55.

³⁹ Rony, *The Third Eye*, 65. See also Oskiloff, 63. During his expeditions in the Pacific, Pöch highlights the dancing and the costumes of an indigenous group he encounters, capturing it all using a cinematographic photography. "The dance figure," he writes, "are beautiful and well arranged, and the people are still in their original costume." Pöch, 614.

unrehearsed reactions of natives to technologies of Western modernity, like Kubi's "lively" reactions to the phonograph.⁴⁰ Fuentes channels the images of Kubi engaging with the phonograph. The similarities between the two, however, are limited only to the surface details.

Returning to the opening scene, Fuentes' transformation into the native, savage, to Kubi, relies on Pöch's visual archives to stage the revisionist performance. Like Pöch, Fuentes utilizes a stationary camera to record a supposedly unrehearsed, voyeuristic "first-contact" interaction between the native (Fuentes) and the gramophone. Fuentes' kinesthetic performance with the gramophone is flawless. Where one would expect to see a "frenzied" or "lively" interaction with the machine, Fuentes projects a staid and introspective demeanor. Instead of talking into the machine as Kubi does, Fuentes opts to listen to the sounds from the machine. Instead of projecting the uniqueness of native performance with the machine, Fuentes offers three iterations of the scene, disrupting the legitimacy of Pöch's claim to ethnographic objectivity and truth, as well as voyeuristic innocence. And finally, instead of conveying the native bodies' ignorance with technology, Fuentes' actions are strikingly fluid and determined, undermining the notion of "first-contact." Indeed, how can the native body know so much?

Fuentes takes his viewers from the ethnographic surface to the underlying depth of the opening scene, his third-eye sensibility channeling the ethnographic film archives of Rudolph Pöch and Pöch's ethnographic conventions, the archived recordings of indigenous music, and archival technologies (film and music). Within the brief three-minutes, Fuentes establishes the archival imperative for the rest of the film. He uses the ethnographic surface as a popular and iconic visual conduit to facilitate the viewing

⁴⁰ Oksiloff, 55.

experience of his film, inspiring a space for critical self-reflection and viewing praxis.⁴¹ Fuentes' fluid performance with the gramophone hinges purposefully on a decolonizing aesthetic – a direct attempt to reveal all the silent and often hidden acts of native defiance that escaped the purview of popular ethnographic films and those who made them.⁴² Fuentes' opening scene reminds us about the limits of the ethnographic archives and disrupts the irreproachability of the ethnographer's eye, while it also establishes the infinite aesthetic and conceptual possibilities for reconfigurations by postcolonial visual artists. Much like Fuentes' own transformation into the primitive savage, the enclosed space in the opening scene transforms symbolically into a structurally viable archival space within which the decolonizing processes of postcolonial reconfigurations are housed, and from which the rest of the film emerges.

A word of caution should be noted at this point. While the opening scene and the iterations present a compelling argument for Fuentes' individual visual aesthetic and conceptual strategies, his strategies should not be taken as totalizing. I believe that the opening minutes frame Fuentes' recognition of the plurality of perception and heterogeneity of visual art forms within the Filipino diaspora. This recognition is evidenced in the ways he structurally composes the repeated fade-in and fade-out moments that demarcate the iterations. Speaking to the creative impetus behind the organic and seamless facial landscapes of the photographs in *Face Fusion I* series that preceded the production of *Bontoc Eulogy*, Fuentes directs our attention to his awareness

⁴¹ Fuentes' compositional strategies align once again to Bertolt Brecht's conceptions of "the popular." Brecht notes: "Popular means intelligible to the broad masses." Fuentes thus succeeds in "taking over [the masses'] own forms of expression and enriching them." Brecht is quoted in Ian Aitken's *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 23.

⁴² "Acts of resistance were not always so obvious," Rony points out, "rituals could be performed in a false manner, without the anthropologists even knowing." Rony, *The Third Eye*, 70.

of the perceptual diversity within his own body through the kinesthetic act of blinking.⁴³ Fuentes remarks that “closing my right eye versus my left eye, and vice versa, in an enclosed space, created perceptual shifts.”⁴⁴ These shifts in perception are presented in the opening scene as fades, or filmic blinking. That is, Fuentes captures the compositional and conceptual possibilities of blinking, an affront to the monocular vision of the Western gaze. The iterations, specifically Fuentes’ performances with the gramophone, are not a perfect match, nor did Fuentes intend them to be. Fuentes’ use of filmic blinking recognizes the heterogeneity of vision that emerges, even if symbolically, from the inherent plurality of Filipinos. Thus, the archival imperative of the film is driven by an archipelagic sensibility tied to the diversity of Filipino bodies, their dynamic movements, and their local and global intersecting histories.

INTERSTITIAL MOVEMENTS: TEMPORAL, SPATIAL, AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CROSSINGS

Bontoc Eulogy fades from the opening sequence of Fuentes and the gramophone to a close-up of a child’s face that fills much of the screen. The transition begs the questions: Could the filmic blinking be connected to this child? And if it can, then who is this child? From the close-up of the child’s face, the sequence “blinks” into a shot of paper boats being transported away off-screen by eddies in the water; the shot continues through a live-action sequence of a boy playing with a toy camera with quick jump cuts to black-and-white photographs of a younger Marlon Fuentes in the Philippines. The peripatetic filmic transitions between the sequences staged by Fuentes to the images of Fuentes as a young adult convey the importance of movements – temporal and spatial – to the reconfiguration of the archives. The sequence offers up the possibility that the

⁴³ I elaborate on the photographic sensibilities of *Bontoc Eulogy* later in this chapter.

⁴⁴ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

child pictured close-up could very well be Fuentes. In what follows, Fuentes confirms for viewers the autobiographical connections to the images heretofore presented. We are introduced to the narrator of the film (voiced by Fuentes) who explains: “I left Manila for American more than 20 years ago, carrying dreams from the past I now barely recognize. In all these years, not once have I gone back.”⁴⁵ If the opening iterations of the film point to the necessity of ethnographic surfaces and archives in Fuentes’ reconfiguration, the scenes that follow reflect Fuentes’ turn to the importance of Filipino bodies and their movements across time and space and the ways they shape collective Filipino histories. The underlying depth of the film, Fuentes explains, hold the “incomplete fragments of our memories.”⁴⁶ Only by confronting the “official” archives is Fuentes able to start the process of personalizing and comprehending the historical narratives. As a completed film project, Fuentes pieces together a narrative as much about the search for his grandfather, Markod, as it is his own search for himself, and on a grander scale, the search for other Filipino bodies within the historical narratives. Using a popular ethnographic surface, the 1904 St. Louis World’s Exposition, Fuentes is able to travel along diasporic routes that start in the Philippine homeland by returning to and reconfiguring the archives. By re/membering the pieces in the film – the psychic and physical acts – Fuentes is able to visually to return “home.” As the narrator states, “Home is what you try to remember, not what you try to forget (*BE*).”

If in the opening scenes Fuentes deliberately creates an artificial surface to critique ethnographic filmic processes that racially inscribe the native body as savage and primitive, the opening scenes are also a telling reminder of Fuentes’ attempts to locate and comprehend his and other Filipino bodies within dominant historical

⁴⁵ *Bontoc Eulogy*, prod. and dir. Marlon Fuentes, 56 min., NAATA, 1995, videocassette. Hereafter I will use “*BE*” within parenthetical citations to denote to quotations from the film.

⁴⁶ Blumentritt, 77.

narratives. Fuentes establishes a visual and conceptual link between his archival search for native bodies to his own memories of leaving the Philippines for the United States. He defies the dominant expectations of turn-of-the-century ethnography that espoused the belief that native bodies were without a past and history, a popular notion that held native bodies outside of purview of Western modernity.⁴⁷ Speaking generally about the Philippine Bontoc Igorots, American anthropologist and noted colonial scholar on the indigenous group, Albert Earnest Jenks in 1905 wrote: “[The Bontoc Igorot] is remarkably industrious for a primitive man.”⁴⁸ Ironically, Fuentes embodies this legacy of this so-called industriousness through his archival returns and reconfigurations in the film. Fuentes’ film is premised on personal history and memory; his own body, like that of Markod’s, is genealogically traceable in the film and narratives – both bodies are historically intertwined. From the recordings that Pöch produced of Kubi, the Kalahari-Bushman, we discover that Kubi, likewise, defied ethnography’s historical expectations. From Pöch’s film notes about Kubi’s phonographic monologue, Pöch records Kubi’s reference to “former times” when water was plentiful; a time elephants bathed and drank from the same watering hole; and an experience of near-death by an elephant.⁴⁹ During the third and final opening iteration, Fuentes perhaps listens to Kubi’s voice recounting his quotidian experiences.⁵⁰ In establishing the conceptual link to Kubi, the

⁴⁷ See in particular, Assenka Oksiloff’s discussion on the “the temporal elements of evolutionism,” in which she argues that the primitive’s body is understood as “ahistorical.” Oksiloff, 57-61.

⁴⁸ Albert Earnest Jenks wrote the massive volume entitled *The Bontoc Igorot* in 1905. Jenks worked as a government anthropologist for the Department of the Interior, and specifically as the Chief of The Ethnological Survey for the Philippine Islands. Much of his research was conducted over the course of five months in 1903. Jenks worked closely with Dean C. Worcester, who was then the Secretary of the Interior. Jenk’s volume houses many of ethnographic photographs taken by Worcester, as well as Charles Martin, a government photographer. Albert Earnest Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905), 13-15.

⁴⁹ Pöch’s film notes are quoted by Oskiloff. *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁰ Fatimah Tobing Rony postulates that Fuentes is listening to Markod’s voice in the third opening iteration. Rony, “The Quick and the Dead,” 137.

film makes possible important third-eye kinships, across time and space. While Fuentes teases out the possibility of identifying with other native bodies, he also concentrates on looking for other Filipino bodies amidst the colonial history of Philippines and the consequences of American empire on diasporic movements in this film project.⁵¹ If ethnographic film constructs ahistorical native subjects, Fuentes turns precisely to history and memory to bestow Markod and other native bodies historical agency and subjectivity – a filmic act that decolonizes colonial epistemological regimes.

Bontoc Eulogy is thus structured by Fuentes' homage to history and memory that travel and disseminate like the bodies that carry them. The narrator refers to a Filipino "saying" that is infused with a power of kinetics much like the bodies in the film. In Tagalog the narrator states: "*Ang hindi lumilingon sa pinanggalingan, hindi makararating sa patutuan (BE).*" The narrator translates this as, "He who does not look back from whence he came will never reach his destination (BE)."⁵² The masculine agent/subject in the translation detracts from the gender inclusiveness presented in the original Tagalog statement. Offered here is a revised translation: "Those who do not look back to their point of origin, or homeland, will never have the potential to reach their destinations." The revision centrally frames the Philippine homeland to the outward movements of Filipinos to other geographic sites. Fuentes uses the potential verb form of the Tagalog root "*dating*" as "*makararating [sa patutuan]*" to convey not just the potential of "arriving

⁵¹ In her introduction to *The Third Eye*, Fatimah Tobing Rony cites French 19th-century doctor Félix-Louis Regnault's observation that if two savages are placed together in a dark room that both would be able to communicate to each other through their motions – a hypothesis that relies heavily on a racialization of the native body as the primitive "other." Countering Regnault's claim, Rony posits that there perhaps is truth to Regnault's claim. Rony writes: "Perhaps we Savages, plunged in darkness, do understand each other. What we share is the ability to see with the 'third eye.'" I believe that Fuentes' deployment of his third-eye sensibilities is driven by a philosophy of collectivity among native bodies, especially within the Filipino diaspora and not limited to a specific temporal moment. Rony, *The Third Eye*, 4.

⁵² Another variation of this Filipino proverb is: *Ang hindi lumulingon sa pinanggalingan, maliligaw.* Those who do not look back to their point of origins (or homeland) will get lost.

to” or “reaching” a particular destination, but also imparts the affective potential of what happens after arrival such as the potential to feel settled in geographic spaces outside of the islands. Read in this manner, the narrator’s statement imparts the affective stakes of leaving the homeland and sheds light on how Fuentes’ own emotions have facilitated the larger film project. For Filipinos who have left the Philippine homeland, the act of looking back, as the narrator suggests, can potentially ease and restore the psychic pain of dislocation and displacement. Within the film’s narrative, Markod also looks back to his homeland, never quite feeling settled as a participant at the World’s Fair. “In his letters,” the narrator explains, “Markod wrote about the trials of his voyage (BE).” Over time, Markod’s vision of his homeland grew stronger: “The days dragged on [for Markod]...He grew weary. He longed for his village in the mountains (BE).” *Bontoc Eulogy* is Fuentes’ epistolary act – his filmic longing for the islands and history – that likewise conveys the feelings and trials of dislocation from his own experiences with migrancy. Commenting on the production of the film, Fuentes remarks: “For a lot of painful reason...I was still not prepared to visit ‘back home.’”⁵³ In spite of his inability to sojourn back to the islands, Fuentes mitigates the psychic hurdles by compositionally “looking back.” The film’s production and particularly his archival excavations facilitate his affective connection to the islands and allows Fuentes to psychically journey back home – all this made possible by his third eye directed toward his homeland and the negotiation of “the potential” of feeling settled in his new home.

Images of the spinning record in the opening frames, and later, paper boats that drift off-screen, rolling rivers, the soundtrack of indigenous music, and even the Filipino bodies imaged in archival footage always in motion, all become symbolic of corporeal

⁵³ Blumentritt, 83. As of February 8, 2007, Marlon Fuentes has yet to return back to the Philippines. Marlon Fuentes, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2007.

crossings within the dual narratives of Fuentes' personal recollections that intertwine with the narrative of Markod's participation at the World's Fair (see Figures 1.5-1.8). In capturing the sight and sounds of movements in the film, Fuentes envisions how local histories connect to larger historical narratives. It is a metacommentary that Fuentes offers: His film conveys the salience of moving Filipino bodies and the consequence thereof to the production of the film's conceptual depths and importantly to formations of Filipino identities within the periods of colonial and postcolonial encounters of American occupation of the Philippines. It is noteworthy to point out that Fuentes proposes a diasporic quality to formations of Filipino identities, an essence that highlights the socially-constructed transnational cultural ties to the Philippine homeland while also moving beyond the delimited "national" framework to one that flags transpacific movements.⁵⁴ Fuentes utilizes archival images of a variety of American ships and Filipino boats to index the transpacific *and* intra-archipelagic circuits that

⁵⁴ See Jonathon Y. Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998). Okamura's central thesis is that Filipino American should be conceived as a diaspora rather than an ethnic minority precisely because of the socially constructed transnational relationship of Filipinos to the Philippines. He argues that this transnational relationship to the Philippine homeland differs from the other Asian American groups in the United States. The transnational relationship is constructed and maintained by Filipino cultural practices. In many ways Fuentes' film widens Okamura's framework by de-centering "the nation(s)" in the film's construction of the Filipino diaspora with its focalization on Markod's body, rather than his other grandfather, Emiliano, the Philippine-nationalist who was killed fighting against the Americans during the Philippine-American War. Given that the Philippines was not yet a formal nation during the 1904 St. Louis World's Exposition, Fuentes' sense of the diaspora is driven by a "transpacific" ethos rather than purely a canonical transnational one. The ethos centrally figures the Philippine homeland as the point of origin and point of dispersal of Filipino bodies. The film stresses the importance of cultural and affective ties – the notion of looking back – to the homeland rather than solely nationalist inflections or movements between nation-states. Dean Alegado neatly summarizes "transpacific" Filipino diasporic movements at the turn-of-the-century to colonies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Dean Alegado, "International Labor Migration, Diaspora, and the Emergence of Transnational Filipino Communities," in *Filipino Diaspora: Demography, Social Networks, Empowerment and Culture*, ed. Mamoru Tsuda (Quezon City: Philippine Migration Research Network and Philippine Social Science Council, 2003), 6. Examples of the limitations of a transnational framework – movement between nation-states – are brought to relief in contemporary examples, such as Filipinos in American territories such as Guam or even Filipinos as "settlers" in Hawaii.

convey the movements of Filipino bodies impacted by American modernity at the turn-of-the century. Within the film's narrative, American capitalist interests, under the guise of friendship, lure Markod and others to the United States to participate as ethnographic spectacles at the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition. Markod tells us: "[The Americans] wanted us to go with them to America, where many were gathered so we could build a village and show our ways of living (*BE*)."⁵⁵ If cultural bonds that centrally figure the Philippine homeland hold the contemporary Filipino diaspora together, its genesis should propel us to the historical conditions that have, over the decades, propelled its emergence.

Fuentes' own movements from the Philippines to the United States match that of Markod's transpacific journey. The dual narrative frames how contemporary Filipino movements uncannily mirror historical ones. "When one talks of Philippine-American history, and in the larger sphere, Philippine diaspora," Fuentes observes, "you begin to see profound interaction effects."⁵⁵ The lure of an M.B.A. at the prestigious Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania marked the impetus for Fuentes' own relocation to the United States in the 1975. Disenchanted by the program and the "weird" people who only spoke about the stock market, Fuentes immediately turned to photography as a coping mechanism. "I had no particular emotional attachment to taking the M.B.A [degree]," he explains, "I was lost."⁵⁶ As Fuentes recalls, "I was going through the motions," a sentiment that echoes Markod's daily performances at the Fair.⁵⁷ Fuentes' experiences in the United States correspond to his grandfather's disillusionment in St. Louis. "Celebration of birth, marriage, and death," the narrative recites, "these rituals were repeated endlessly [by Markod], devoid of any true

⁵⁵ Blumentritt, 89.

⁵⁶ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

connection to the occasion that inspired them (BE).” In the early 1980s Fuentes worked for a gas corporation in Washington, DC, after receiving his business degree, noting that “the gas company people had no idea what I was, or who I was. They just knew me as Mr. Joe Business.”⁵⁸ For as visible an event the World’s Fair was in 1904, it also promoted the invisibility of those displayed. Indeed, Markod was only seen as a token Bontoc Igorot, as a savage warrior, his identity manufactured for him by American spectators and institutional hierarchies. “The spectators who paid to get in,” the narrator notes, “wanted to see [the Igorots] as they were, wild, and untouched by the reaches of civilization (BE).”

Both Markod and Fuentes’ corporeal movements are motivated by the legacies and interventions of American colonial and neocolonial forces in the Philippines. Historian Paul Kramer puts forth the interdependent notions of “calibrated colonialism” and “inclusionary racial formation” to describe the ways in which American colonial policy “comprehend[ed] and delimited[ed] Filipino participation in the colonial state” and conceptualized “the question of the timetable of colonial rule.”⁵⁹ Calibrated colonialism sets forth milestone markers for Filipinos to participate politically in the American colony, with the ultimate goal of a transfer of power from American rule to Filipinos at some point in time. The milestone markers established were “still an exclusive American preserve,” and thus calibrated colonialism is “predicated on the endless colonization of the future.”⁶⁰ Indeed, calibrated colonialism projects a paternalistic image of United States-Philippine relations. Out this type of colonialism, the United States would help to guide the Philippines to self-rule using criteria it

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 191.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

created; and even after self-rule was established, the United States established itself as a neocolonial “big-brother,” ultimately compromising the sovereignty of the islands with its enduring neocolonial presence. As an aspirational model of colonialism, calibrated colonialism worked together with models of inclusionary racism to promulgate projects of civility and development that American empire set forth for Filipinos – a strategy that helped colonial officials to make sense of the racial plurality of Filipinos.⁶¹ The cultural politics of the benevolent assimilation project set forth by William McKinley in 1898, for example, as well as the Philippine Exhibit at the 1904 World’s Exposition veiled the racist and imperial underpinnings of American occupation in the Philippines by promoting the potential of Filipinos and the Philippines to be civilized and self-governing with the possible goal of incorporation into United States. These cultural projects helped to racialize and bestow Filipinos with a potential of complete inclusion that was almost always impossible to attain. Filipinos are marked, as Yen Le Espiritu argues, by “differential inclusion” in the American body politic, at once included for the possibility of labor exploitation and paradoxically homeless within the boundaries of the United States.⁶²

If as Kramer and Espiritu suggest that inclusionary racism underscores Filipino racial formation it should also be noted at this point that inclusionary racism facilitates corporeal movements, displacements, and the emergence of the Filipino diaspora – allegorized by Fuentes and Markod’s bodies in the film. American colonial projects that set benchmarks for Filipino racial uplift and potential incorporation into the American body politic must also be viewed within the lens of corporeal movements and travel of Filipinos. Colonial projects like the Philippine Exhibit in St. Louis were precisely

⁶¹ Ibid.,192-198.

⁶² Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

premised on transpacific movements of Filipino bodies from the islands for display in the United States. Having the Filipino bodies on display in St. Louis would help to convey “the possibility of good investments and successful enterprises in these Islands” and “to create interest and sympathy for the Philippine Islands, and to give confidence in the intelligence and capacity of the natives.”⁶³ Filipino participation at the Philippine Exhibit was not an isolated period of travel for Filipinos, at the very least it was an early instance of Filipino transpacific movement. Prior to the events in St. Louis, a series of cases called the *Insular Cases* in 1901 adjudicated the legal statuses of newly acquired territories of the United States after the defeat of Spain during the Spanish American War. These cases resulted in a legal identity of inhabitants of unincorporated territory that remained under the jurisdiction of Congress. As members of an incorporated territory, Filipinos became differentially included within the American legal system as American nationals, a “liminal status” that lay somewhere between citizen and alien.⁶⁴ The designation afforded Filipinos the right to travel between the islands and geographies under the juridical purview of the United States, with considerably more ease than other Asian migrants.⁶⁵ The new status of Filipinos helped to generate the

⁶³ *Circular Letter of Governor Taft and Information and Instructions for the Preparations of the Philippine Exhibit for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition to Be Held at St. Louis, MO., USA, 1904* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1902).

⁶⁴ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 100.

⁶⁵ Early examples of travel of Filipinos as American nationals include the students, popularly known as *pensionados*, who participated in the government-sponsored education program – most of whom returned to the Philippines after their programs ended. Ngai astutely describes the waves of Filipino labor migrations that occurred first to Hawaii and then the continental mainland. Mostly single men, Filipino laborers traveled across the Pacific for sugar plantation work in Hawaii as early as 1910, and later thousands found their way to up and down the West Coast, from Alaska to California, working as cannery workers and in agriculture. For histories of Filipino migration to the United States, see Mgai Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003); and

transpacific *and* transcontinental Filipino labor circuit that would inevitably bestow Filipino racial formation its intrinsic sense of movement and mobility.

What we find below the ethnographic surface of *Bontoc Eulogy* is Fuentes keen attention to the symbolic and conceptual thrust of corporeal movements: bodies that cross time and space, as well epistemological regimes. The film conveys the affective energies of Markod, while it also invokes a sense of Filipino agency and historical purpose. The archives help to recreate the relevance of Filipino movement to formations of Filipino identities. By looking back, as Fuentes does, the film is a mediation of the West from a colonized perspective, based certainly with the historical underpinnings of inclusionary colonial and neocolonial projects and their impact on mobile Filipino bodies. The film envisions through the ethnographic surface the displacement of Markod amidst the inclusionary racial and colonial project of the 1904 St. Louis World's Exposition intimately tied to Fuentes' own movements and psychic dislocations in the United States. While Kramer's rubric points specifically to the period of American occupation in the Philippines, it is still remarkably salient to the post-World War II racial formations of Filipinos within the scope of neocolonial American relations with the Philippines.⁶⁶ Fuentes' own move to the United States is framed by the Immigration and

Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Historian Catherine Choy argues, for example, that American colonialism in the Philippines facilitated the emergence of nursing degree programs and formation of a surplus of Filipino nurses from which American hospitals tap into to. The government sponsored U.S. Exchange Visitor's Program, an inclusionary neocolonial project established in 1948, influenced a large-scale migration of Filipino nurses to the United States between 1956-1969. Indeed, as one recruiting advertisement that Choy includes in her work reads "Your Cap is a Passport," an image that touches upon the legacy of Filipino movements of formations of Filipino identities. See Choy, "'Your Cap Is a Passport': Filipino Nurses and the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program," *Empire of Care*, 61-93. The labor phenomenon of Filipino serving in the U.S. Navy highlights both the enduring legacy of calibrated colonialism and stands as a project of inclusionary racism. As American nationals Filipinos were hired mostly to fill the positions of stewards, their numbers rising in the thousands between during the interwar years in the United States. With the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, or Philippines Independence Act, in 1934, which set in motion

Naturalization Act of 1965, which changed the face of immigration by lifting nation-based quotas and influencing an influx of second-wave Asian immigration.⁶⁷ For college-educated Filipinos, like Fuentes, a lack of economic opportunities in the Philippines in the 1970s contributed to the outflow of skilled and educated Filipinos to the United States for work and educational opportunities.⁶⁸ The historical transpacific and transcontinental movements of Filipinos, as Fuentes believes, are inherent part of Filipino racial formation in the United States. It is not a surprise then that Fuentes would weave visually his own personal narrative of arrival to the United States with that of Markod's journeys – their movements, allegories for the larger global dispersals of Filipino bodies. "The Filipino in America," Fuentes aptly observes, "is constantly being bisected by this membrane of passage that does not melt away."⁶⁹ Fuentes projects a dynamic underlying depth to the film driven by a collective and kinetic vision of the Filipino diaspora and an aesthetic and conceptual drive to breakthrough the historical snares of American empire by returning to and reconfiguring the archives.

VISUALIZING THE BEYOND: THE FILIPINO DIASPORIC ARCHIVE AND ITS COMPOSITE DEPTH

Why did we leave our home?
Why have we come to America?
Why have we chosen to stay?
What are the stories that define us as a people?
What has made us the way we are? (BE)

Philippine independence within a ten-year time frame, the status of Filipino as nationals disappeared. Most of the Filipinos in the United States became immigrant aliens. As calibrated colonialism would dictate, the Tydings-McDuffie Act left open a clause that would allow American military bases to remain after Philippine independence. Yen Le Espiritu directs our attention to the 1947 Military Base Agreement (article 27), which allowed the U.S. Navy "the right to continue to recruit Filipino citizens." Yen Le Espiritu, 28.

⁶⁷ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 420-471.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁶⁹ Blumentritt, 89.

Early in the film the narrator of *Bontoc Eulogy* poses several questions. The rhetorical thrust of the questions emerges precisely because of the transpacific crossing completed by the narrator. The questions are Fuentes way of looking back to the Philippine homeland, having relocated to the United States. Fuentes includes archival footage of a boy washing a water buffalo, also known as a *carabao* (a paradigmatic symbol of the Philippines), in what looks like a river (see Figure 1.9). He has slowed the speed of the archival footage, allowing him to alternate jump-cuts between archival photographs and the slowed footage. The photographs seem to offer visual answers to each of the questions posed. For the first question, it is a traditional grass hut that stands in for “our home” (see Figure 1.10). And in the second, it is an image of a nondescript gathering with the iconic American flag at its center (see Figure 1.11). The next two questions remark on the ways in which Filipino identities have been defined by larger disciplinary regimes. For the third question, Fuentes uses an image of an anonymous white woman and an indigenous Bagobo man at the St. Louis World’s Exposition in 1904 (see Figure 1.12).⁷⁰ An image of a confident white man posed atop a carabao follows (see Figure 1.13). Finally, Fuentes settles for a portrait of a carabao as a response to the last question (see Figure 1.14). The juxtaposition of narration and images play on Fuentes’ acute sense of constructed surfaces – the images all participate in the circulation of ethnographic discourses of Filipinos – and also of his critical perceptions of corporeal and conceptual movements that underscore the narrative’s depth. Using the questions and corresponding visual answers, Fuentes guides us through the migratory and affective circuits of Filipinos who depart the Philippine homeland for the

⁷⁰ The same image is reprinted in Eric Breitbart, *A World on Display 1904: Photographs from the St. Louis World’s Fair* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 46. The image is attributed to the Sarah and Elizabeth Metcalfe, an amateur photographers and sisters from Massachusetts. The Bagobo, like the Bontoc Igorot, are an indigenous group from the Philippines who were exhibited as part of the Philippine Exhibit.

United States, ultimately to return either physically or psychically back to the islands – to the *carabao*, which “has made us the way we are” (BE). By imaging iconic images that define American empire – the flag, the white woman with the native body, the white man commandeering the *carabao* – Fuentes guides viewers to the hegemonic structures that have defined Filipinos and have caused them to be separated from the islands.

From this short sequence Fuentes presents to us a compositional and conceptual strategy that facilitates a return to the islands via the American archives. Indeed, we might consider this conceptual movement toward the archives as the basis to call the film a travel narrative; instead of tracking Markod’s travels to the St. Louis World’s exposition, the film directs our attention to Fuentes’ movements.⁷¹ What are we to make then of Fuentes’ own journey? Or importantly, what are we to take from his compositional impulses and his attention to the archives? Fuentes’ movements offer us a window to the compositional choices that he deploys. For the duration of the film, we have accompanied Fuentes throughout the Philippines and the United States in search for his grandfather, absorbing both the sights (archival footage) and sounds (ethnographic field recordings of tribal performances) of the Philippines and the diversity of bodies found therein. Even though Fuentes has not physically traveled back to the Philippines since the making of the film, he succeeds in his return home through the American archives. A return to the archives fulfills Fuentes’ inherent desire to look back at the homeland in order to start the processes of reconfiguration and counterarchival production.⁷² While *Bontoc Eulogy* invokes, and indeed, relies on

⁷¹ Fatimah Tobing Rony has likened *Bontoc Eulogy* to a “a travel narrative,” though it is Markod’s travels to the St. Louis World Exposition that inspire the designation for her. Rony, “The Quick and the Dead,” 137.

⁷² In her compelling interrogation of W.E.B. DuBois’ Georgia Negro Albums, exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition, Shawn Michelle Smith explains the ways in which the albums functioned as counterarchives, whose cultural and political strength lie in their abilities to challenge the

Western ethnographic surfaces, it nonetheless resists a complete interpellation reflected autoethnographic and archival reconfigurations.⁷³

More than two-thirds of the way through *Bontoc Eulogy*, the scene fades quietly into a shot of Fuentes, the actor, sitting alone on white bleachers (See Figure 1.15). His gaze is fixed off into the distance as the narrator's voice intrudes on the scene. Having already mapped the contours of Markod's physical and psychic movements in the microsites of the World's Fair by this point in the film, the narrator's voice punctures the contemplation of the actor on screen. The narration shifts from Markod's experiences at the Fair to the concerns of the narrator and the actor being filmed. "The ending of my grandfather's story," the narrator states, "continues to elude me. And the question of whether he ever returned home still remains (BE)." Prior to this scene, we witnessed Markod's arrival to the Fair and the psychic toll inflicted on him; we watched his attempted escape from the Fair, only to be caught; and we viewed Markod's brutal beating and inevitable confinement. While the narrator intimates an absence of

dominant photographic viewing practices and modes of photographic production. Smith argues: "Du Bois produces a counterarchive that reconfigures the contours of institutional knowledge, refocusing photographic meaning and visual identification out from the archival margin, shifting the apex of normalcy to rest squarely on an African American middle-class." Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

⁷³ Like Du Bois' Georgia Negro Albums and the dominant modes of Western photographic production and portraiture performances that Du Bois relies on for their creation, Fuentes must rely on Western filmic techniques and conventions to produce *Bontoc Eulogy*. Fuentes' film links to Shawn Michelle Smith's notion of "counterarchive" and Mary Louis Pratt's use of "autoethnographic expression." This connection conveys the idea of counterarchival resistance that relies on the relevance, as Mary Louis Pratt has noted, of "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves through literature in ways that *engage with the colonizer's own terms (original emphasis)*." As a corollary to Pratt's statement, autoethnographic visual production by colonized subjects such as filmmakers and photographers like Marlon Fuentes, I believe, must also engage with Western modes of production and technologies. While being beholden to Western visual technologies and discourses, colonized subjects work within the visual conventions, yet also produce work that is something other and beyond its parameters. These acts produce the "terms" of visual production that bestow it with cultural and political meaning and power. Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

knowledge about his grandfather's fate after the Fair, the narrator's statement nonetheless conveys the possibility of Markod's re/discovery. Even though there is no immediate closure for the narrator, the spectral presence of his grandfather lingers beyond the Philippine Exhibit in St. Louis and unfolds during the few moments of this scene. Fuentes' offers an oppositional and provisional ending to Markod's narrative by guiding his viewers to the American archives.

Both the voice of the narrator and the body on the screen conjoin shortly thereafter, as the man's head turns slowly and faces directly into the focal plane of the viewers (see Figure 1.16). As his head turns to the viewers, the narrator speaks: "Traces of his whereabouts disappear soon after the closing of the Fair that December (BE)." Markod's presence, however fragmented and far removed from the Fair, is palpable to the narrator, as though the ghost of his grandfather has caught up to the temporal present in the scene. The narrator points out: "I continued my investigation and followed up on leads I discovered in the National Archives and the Library of Congress (BE)." It is at this point in the film that projects the conspicuous conflation of the disembodied narrator and actor on screen. While the deictic use of "I" in the narration could only refer to or index the disembodied voice of the narrator speaking, the filmic juxtaposition of the utterance coinciding with the man rising evokes a unity between the two.⁷⁴ The figure on screen rises from the bleachers the moment the narrator utters "I"

⁷⁴ A similar, abridged version of the scene of Fuentes, the actor, on the white bench, occurs early on the film. In the earlier sequence, a similar deictic and semiotic coupling occurs between the disembodied narrator and the actor. The voice of the narrator begins, informing viewers that "In the beginning I lived in two worlds (BE)," while on screen the man's gaze breaks the fourth wall toward the viewers off screen. This early example also momentarily breaks the surface-depth tension by capturing their union – "the two worlds." I focus on the later sequence to make this case because of the frames that follow of the narrator and the man walking toward the archives outside the film's frame. For a concise description of "deixis," see Mieke Bal, "Seeing Signs: The Use of Semiotics for the Understanding of Visual Art," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical*

and exits the frame; he reappears in the following wide-angle, side-profile shot on a pathway that he eventually traverses (see Figure 1.17). Together the narrator and the actor leave the scene as a conjoined entity to resume searching for Markod in the two official American archives stated that we presume reside outside of the frame: the National Archives and the Library of Congress. The filmic union of the narrator and the actor momentarily disrupts surface-depth distinctions by projecting the significance of the archival imperative to both the film's surface – the actor crossing the surface of the film into the archives – and the underlying depth – the disembodied narrator (and the filmmaker) doing the same. Although the film ends shortly after the scene, the filmic moment establishes the conceptual and material beginnings of the film – indeed, the film's genesis. Martin Fuentes, in all his filmic roles, locates for the viewers the archives in which Markod is to be re/discovered.

By film's end Fuentes and his viewers are no less nearer to knowing the fate of his grandfather, Markod despite "the leads (BE)" that compel him into the archives. The narrator informs us: "I'm still not sure of my grandfather's whereabouts (BE)." Rather than giving up the trail for his grandfather and concluding the film on a futile note, Fuentes offers a provisional ending. In one of the concluding scenes of a young boy and girl playing, the narrator explains to us that the "story has ended, but my search has just begun. If I don't find Markod, perhaps my children, or my children's children will. If they see him, I wonder if they will recognize him (BE)." The sequence abruptly returns back to Fuentes, the actor, in the wide-angle, side-profile, shot with white bleachers in the background. The man walks to the center of the frame, pauses, and stares out of frame to the viewers, only to exit again in the same direction of the aforementioned

Objects in Contemporary Perspectives, eds. Mark A. Cheetham et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77.

archives that exists outside the camera's frame (see Figure 1.18). It is at this point that film fades to black and the credits enter.

The rich sequence of events that close *Bontoc Eulogy* provide the foundation for the film as a travel narrative; the sequence frames Fuentes' multiple returns on-screen while also limning the compositional journeys of the filmmaker to produce this film off-screen. To be sure, the scene with Fuentes, the actor, walking across the pathway toward the archives occurs only twice. While the number of times the particular scene occurs might appear trivial, the repetition of the actor's traversal of the pathway conveys the importance of the archives to Fuentes' aesthetic and visual strategies; to the project of locating his grandfather; and importantly to the provisional ending of the film and the conceit that the film's end is only the beginning. If a defining premise of *Bontoc Eulogy*, is its critique of Western ethnographic filmic and photographic visual regimes in the construction of Filipino bodies, Fuentes' use of repetition in this scene (among other instances) not only function to "destabilizes the [ethnographic] authority of the scene" as Fatimah Tobing Rony observes; the scene, moreover, emerges "as sign of something else."⁷⁵ In other words, the repetition of Fuentes' movements into the archives gestures to the larger constraints imposed by the archives and the variegated colonial histories of Spain and the United States and the corporeal and psychic legacies they have imparted on Filipino bodies. The challenges that the Filipino bodies pose require Fuentes to return the archives time and time again. For as much as the archival footage and photography had at one point in time evidenced the certainty of racial and scientific

⁷⁵ Fatimah Tobing Rony refers specifically to the opening sequence of Fuentes with the gramophone and the repetition of it three times. While, for Rony, "the something else" that this opening scene gestures to is Fuentes attempts "to parody our desire to see authenticity in such a scene," I use it here to remark on the compositional and epistemological challenges Fuentes faces in his use of Filipino bodies in his visual projects. Rony, "The Quick and the Dead," 140. Original emphasis.

discourses about Filipino bodies and the use of such knowledge in the colonization and management of the islands and their people, Fuentes offers us an oppositional vision through the film's conceptual depth. It is an aesthetic resistance through the provincialization of colonial knowledge production that Fuentes commands through his filmic acts.⁷⁶ Fuentes produces an autoethnographic film that images the vision of improbability that besets the colonial visual archives, and the resultant production of knowledge and that has correspondingly influenced his own failure to find and comprehend holistically his grandfather by the film's close. The Filipino body becomes a figurative palimpsest of racial and scientific inscriptions and reinscriptions – composite figurations – that pose a challenge in claiming an authentic Filipino identity independent of the material consequences of colonialism.

What is left of Markod by the end of *Bontoc Eulogy* are “traces” among the “many objects, identities unknown. Labeled but nameless (BE).”⁷⁷ The traces are scattered among and within the official narratives that have defined Markod's body, resulting in discursive fictions that have retained epistemological currency even in their fragmented states. These traces, or fictions, of Markod motivate Fuentes to seek out the archives in order to recompose his grandfather's narrative in his own terms; in doing so, Fuentes establishes a historicity and veracity of his grandfather's existence in the film. Fuentes

⁷⁶ Poet and scholar Meena Alexander remarks that the works in the 1994 exhibit *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* – an exhibition that included Marlon Fuentes' photographic series *Circle of Fear* and *Face Fusion* – perform “aesthetic resistance” to the dominant mythology of America. The art in the exhibit, as Alexander argues, “was born out of dislocation, art that enshrines disjunction.” Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflection on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 152. For the task of “provincializing” Western epistemological projects and historical methods, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Differences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ I contend that the historical vestige of Fuentes' grandfather is comparable to the “verbal fiction” of “historical narratives” that historian Hayden White argues is “as much *invented* as *found*.” Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1713. Original emphasis.

observes “he finds it necessary to improvise” and claim “a provisional Filipino identity.”⁷⁸ It is through his returns to the archives that Fuentes can begin to renarrativize the fictions of Filipino identities that were once constituted by American empire; and it is through the medium of film that has given him the “power to impose a sense of order, purpose, and interconnectedness amidst this vortex of events.”⁷⁹ As the final credits roll through, viewers are informed of *Bontoc Eulogy*’s fictional status; that the stories of events and people, as the credits note, were “inspired by actual events” and similarities between fact and fiction “purely coincidental (BE).” The film transgresses its faux or fake documentary status in its attempts to put to trial precisely these modifiers and the ways in which they apply to Filipino bodies in the archives.⁸⁰ Even after the last of the credits have shown, the film leaves open the plausibility of Markod’s lived experiences. That is to say, fictional or not, Markod’s presence still haunts the American archives.

Insofar as Fuentes can name his “fictional” grandfather, as a Bontoc Igorot who was part of the Philippine Exhibition in St. Louis, Markod nonetheless remains beyond whole – compositionally and discursively fragmented by the film’s end. In his attempts to find this person or even remnants of Filipino bodies like Markod, landscapes of the Philippines, and spaces touched by Filipinos, Fuentes must consistently return to the archives to piece together the Filipino bodies and geographies, images, and histories in order to sustain a compelling ethnographic surface. To break the ethnographic surface,

⁷⁸ Machida, “Poetics of Positionality,” 98.

⁷⁹ Blumentritt, 77.

⁸⁰ John Homiak, in his review of *Bontoc Eulogy*, describes the real tensions of the ways Fuentes deliberately pits fact against fiction. Reaction after a 1997 screening of the film convey the unwillingness of viewers to accept film as fiction. Homiak writes: “Some insisted that if they could ‘only get more information’ they could get to the ‘truth’ of the whole thing.” John Homiak, “The Body in the Archives: A Review of *Bontoc Eulogy*,” *American Anthropologist*, 100.4 (December 2000), 891.

as Fuentes points out, “would have dissipated the emotional momentum generated by the historical gravity of the actual story.”⁸¹ To maintain the affective connection to the Filipino bodies in the film, Fuentes creates a simulacrum of Markod produced from the “several Bontocs who died at the Fair,” from which the filmmaker “envisioned the Markod character as a composite of the group, encapsulating their experiences at the fair.”⁸² What Fuentes achieves is the construction of a composite image of Markod, one produced through the selection of archived artifacts.

What rises out of Fuentes’ archival reconfiguration is the composite nature of Markod, driven by a strategy of metonymic imaging found throughout the film. That is, to reflect the process of the emergence of Filipino bodies through time, Markod’s composite nature stands in for a larger Filipino population and gestures not just to the fixed past—for example, the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition—but the larger movements across geographies and temporal moments that Filipinos have endured and the myriad ways their identities have been constituted by the visual archives. Markod’s composite formation likewise stands in for the film as a whole. Moreover, by placing himself as an actor in the film, Marlon Fuentes enacts the same compositional, creative, and conceptual license on himself as he does with Markod. At times, the bodies of Fuentes (the actor) and Markod become visually interchangeable, composites of each other, and caught within the intimate and interstitial spaces of Filipino identity formation.

⁸¹ Blumentritt, 81.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 79.

INTIMATE DEPTH: IMAGING THE FILIPINO BODY AS THE ARCHIVE

The metonymic visual strategy takes on added currency when placed against Fuentes' other conceptual projects and photographic work.⁸³ Like the composite figure of the actor in the film and his visual coupling with the disembodied narrator, Marlon Fuentes enacts a similar strategy in the conceptual piece produced in the late 1980s entitled *Limbic Survey* and a 1990 work entitled *Schemas and the Strategy of the Image: The Work of M.E. Fuentes*, both created by the fictitious Dr. Mia Blumentritt, a play on the name of José Rizal's friend Dr. Ferdinand Blumentritt, a noted 19th-century Austrian scholar of the Philippines.⁸⁴ Scholars of *Bontoc Eulogy* will recognize Blumentritt's name, as the 1997 article "*Bontoc Eulogy, History, and the Craft of Memory: An Extended Conversation with Marlon E. Fuentes*," published in the canonical Asian American studies publication *Amerasia Journal* stands as an oft-cited source for the film.⁸⁵ Her biography in the journal describes her "a cultural anthropologist with interests in

⁸³ Of the scholarship devoted to Marlon Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy* has garnered the most critical attention.

⁸⁴ Margo Machida's dissertation stands as the rare example of scholarship about Marlon Fuentes that addresses critically his conceptual and photographic pieces that predate *Bontoc Eulogy*. Indeed, it is her dissertation that drew my attention to the fictitious identity of Dr. Mia Blumentritt and "her" corresponding work *Schemas and the Strategy of the Image*. See Machida, "Poetics of Positionality," 108. In an interview with Fuentes on January 21, 2007, he confirmed the fictitious identity of Dr. Mia Blumentritt and pointed out that her character was inspired by José Rizal's good friend Dr. Ferdinand Blumentritt. Ferdinand Blumentritt was a supporter of Rizal and the Philippine Revolution. A district in Manila is named after Ferdinand Blumentritt, and it is in the district that Fuentes lived prior to his arrival in to the United States. Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

⁸⁵ This chapter relies on Blumentritt's article as well. While acknowledging the author's fabricated identity, the interview proves helpful insofar as it offers compelling insights about the film by the filmmaker himself. To be sure of the interview's viability as a source, I rely not only of its publication in *Amerasia Journal* as basis for its academic integrity, but more so on Fuentes' underlying motives for the article, which I believe to be strikingly similar to his thoughts about the conceptual *Limbic Survey* and *Schemas and the Strategy of the Image*. Margo Machida addresses his motivation for *Schemas and the Strategy of the Image* as part of a larger edifying strategy to inform those "[in]capable of understanding the motivation for much of the photographic imagery he made at the time." I believe the *Amerasia Journal* interview is Fuentes' attempt to educate viewers about some of his motivations behind the film. Interestingly, the production of the published interview itself becomes concurrently part of his conceptual oeuvre as well. Machida, "Poetics and Positionality," 109.

contemporary art, visual anthropology, and Asian-American politics and culture,” all of which establishes her position of authority in the interview.⁸⁶ Fuentes’ creation of Blumentritt in *Limbic Survey*, *Schemas and the Strategy of the Image* and the *Amerasia Journal* interview serve as telling bookends to *Bontoc Eulogy*, and frame the metonymic visual strategy that Fuentes’ deploys. The survey questions that comprise *Limbic Survey* focus on an assessment of value of limbs of different ethnic groups that results in the production of a final report. Likewise, in *Schemas and Strategy of the Image* “personal medical records, transcripts of imaginary interviews, and even criticism of the ‘project’” are “bound together like a scholarly report.”⁸⁷ *Bontoc Eulogy* reflect a similar impulse to “bind” collected archival material to compose Filipino bodies within the film. *Limbic Survey* and *Schemas and Strategy of the Image*, moreover, portends the reversal of roles between anthropologist and postcolonial native informant that Fuentes extends visually in the film. It is this compositional strategy that he decidedly returns to in the *Amerasia Journal* interview. The conceptual textual pieces and the film are intimately linked – joined by a postcolonial archival imperative, which foregrounds the conceptual and compositional strategy of metonymic visual imaging.

Fuentes points to the materiality and constructed nature of the film and engages, viewers to think critically about the “the body” (in its many manifestations) throughout the film.⁸⁸ On one level, as conveyed in his compositional strategy of imaging the role-reversal of the observer and observed, Fuentes evidences his intellectual attraction to “representational strategies” of “certain bodies of knowledge” – Western ethnographic archives, being the most obvious.⁸⁹ Thus through precise juxtapositions of voiceover

⁸⁶ Blumentritt, 75.

⁸⁷ Machida, “Poetics of Positionality,” 108.

⁸⁸ Blumentritt, 80.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

and scripted scenes, Fuentes is able to draw out an intimacy between his body and that of the disembodied narrator, demarcating the hegemonic boundaries of the authoritative Western imperial gaze that has visually produced the Filipino body. In so doing, Fuentes reconfigures the colonial scopic regime that has so purposely constituted the intimate relationships between colonizers and colonized.⁹⁰ Indeed, to draw attention to the ways colonial vision structures and produces intimate ties to the colonized body, Fuentes must compositionally tie his own body to that of other Filipino colonized bodies.

If on one level Fuentes draws viewers to the colonial mechanisms and bodies that have dominated knowledge production about Filipinos, Fuentes also renders visible the intimate relationships between his body (played by the actor) to that of Markod's, along with the other Filipino bodies visualized on-screen. His foray into the archives enables his own corporeal transformation into the likenesses of the other Filipino and native bodies (certainly in his transformation into Kubi, the Kalahari-Bushman early in the film). Fuentes' visual metamorphosis depicts not only the shared kinship or genealogical ties to the other bodies through his third-eye sensibilities and the strategy of metonymic visual imaging, but his transformation also alludes to the Filipino body's epistemological depth as an originary entry-point to knowledge production. Not only does Fuentes demarcate the physical and architectural spaces of the archives sought

⁹⁰ I am particularly drawn to Ann Stoler's astute assessments about the ways domains of intimacy in the colonies structured relationships between colonizer and the colonized. Citing a French colonial educational policy maker in 1929, George Hardy, Stoler asserts that Hardy's use of the "le regard" (or gaze) "was at once broad, reflexive and intimate." The colonial gaze matched the certainty of the colonial mission, and also possessed an interiority structured by sex. See Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-21. Fuentes' filmic act comes into focus next to Hal Foster's assertion that scopic regimes attempt "to make of its many social visualities one essential vision, or to order them in a natural hierarchy of sight." Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1998), ix.

after by the conjoined narrator and actor in the film's provisional ending, but the filmmaker also delineates the boundaries of the Filipino body – Markod and others – as embodied archives in their own right. What is established then through the production of *Bontoc Eulogy* is the film's double-reliance on "bodies" of knowledge or points of epistemological production: the official institutional archives and the embodied archives. Fuentes relies on both not as independent structures, but as archives that are also intimately tied; both lure the artist to return to their depths in order to facilitate the production of his visual work.⁹¹

Fuentes' film reveals how American colonialism influenced visual practices and discourses of identity and the nation, especially in the late 19th century, and certainly thereafter.⁹² Images of Filipino bodies emerging from this period – many found in *Bontoc Eulogy* – reveal the interdependence of visual conventions that sought to differentiate class and racial hierarchies: ethnographic photography, criminal portraiture conventions, and vernacular (touristic) practices, all of which helped shaped American views of Filipino bodies and the production of an American national identity based on

⁹¹ Fatmiah Tobing Rony forcefully conveys the work performed by Fuentes in the archives, observing "Fuentes turns the archives on its head by raiding it." Rony, "The Quick and the Dead," 141

⁹² Shawn Michelle Smith argues that by the latter half of the 19th century, photographic visual practices and production were inscribed by a racial quality that white-middle class people used to constitute their individual, family, and communal identities. The confluence of scientific and criminal photography and white middle-class portraiture conventions, for example, added depth to visual practices; photographs were inflected with racial interiorities, in addition to gender, and class, that were readable and knowable. A consequence of this, as Smith conveys, were photographic practices tied to the production of American national identities. Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-10. While Smith's argument that white, middle-class photographic viewing practices and production were inflected with a racialized quality after the Civil War, historian William Johnson has compellingly shown that race underscored the culture of vision and visual production in antebellum New Orleans, particularly within the context of selling slaves. To know how to read slave bodies was a privilege and a skill learned. Indeed, the exterior surface of the slaves provided a window to his/her interiority. This knowledge facilitated the ways slaves were written about and examined at the slave market. See "Chapter 5: Reading Bodies and Marking Race," in William Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 135-161.

the culture of American empire at the turn-of-the-century.⁹³ As if to assuage viewers' doubts to the connections between visual production and practices to American nationalist formations of identity, Fuentes arranges a sequence of full- and side-profile anthropology-inspired mugshots of Filipino natives as John Philip Sousa's paradigmatic arrangement, "The Stars and Stripes Forever," accompanies the sequence of images (see Figure 1.19). The ironic sequence and juxtaposition remark on the paradoxical exclusionary nature of the scopic regimes of American empire while simultaneously placing Filipino bodies within the purview of the American body politic. Fuentes establishes in this sequence why these imaged Filipino bodies matter to film and to knowledge production.

Fuentes semiotic arrangement of the images of Filipino bodies are configured precisely because of their interiorities that they carry and are able to promulgate in their original and unadulterated surfaces. In the images, the legibility of Filipino native interiorities are facilitated by the ways photographers had positioned their subjects within the photographic frames. Take for example the following scripted scene in the film: An actor in a scripted scene dressed as a Filipino native – Markod's doppelganger – spins slowly in the center; the camera focuses on his body from the neck

⁹³ Fuentes' reconfiguration of the imaged Filipino bodies housed in the colonial archived footage and photographs constructs "the shadow archive" precisely to critique it. Defined by photography historian Alan Sekula as a photographic archive that "encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain." The social terrain for Sekula is bifurcated into the honorific and repressive – the former composed of "heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities" and the latter composed of "the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the nonwhite, the female, and all other embodiments of the unworthy." While Sekula defines the shadow archive as emerging in the mid-19th century, the legacies of the archive are no less significant in its incarnation at the turn-of-the-century onward, particularly displayed through the anthropology-inspired images of Filipino bodies that permeated the American landscape after 1898. Such (repressive) scientifically-driven images were not only sought after by the American public, but were also important to the construction of a American (honorific) colonial *and* national subjectivity, premised on territorial and corporeal acquisition and display of the racialized and colonized Filipino body. Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39 (1986), 10.

down, and then slowly the camera pans upward toward his face. Lights emitted to the white screen behind the man direct viewers to the contours of the body of the Filipino native. As he spins like an object on display, his body becomes a topography of signs to be read for insights to his interiority (see Figure 1.20). The scene is repeated several times shortly thereafter, suggesting the extent to which the Filipino body is scrutinized. The repeated sequence hints at the improbability of “knowing” the Filipino body with certainty.

The Igorot and Negrito bodies imaged in the film demarcate the boundaries between the modern and the primitive; the civilized and the savage; the privileged fairgoer and the colonized spectacle; and the American and the Filipino. Like the slave owners who professed their skills of reading the bodies of African American slaves at the slave market, fairgoers so too read Igorot and Negrito bodies to gain insight on their primal psychology through their physical qualities. Audiences, as the narrator states, witnessed Igorot’s weekly slaughtering of dog: “Fairgoers marveled at this authentic display of barbarity (*BE*).” Fuentes explains that the Igorot bodies “became the repository of all the voyeuristic and racial fantasizing that was going on at the time.”⁹⁴ What resulted then was “the malleability” of the Igorot and Negrito bodies at the Fair; Filipino performances at the fair conformed to the fetishistic demands of the audiences increasingly influenced by American colonial projects in the Philippines.⁹⁵ It is precisely this pliancy that Fuentes appropriates in order to facilitate the possibility of his own filmic transformation into the bodies that he visualizes in *Bontoc Eulogy*.

Fuentes’ corporeal transformations owe much to his photographic sensibilities. Because the film utilizes archival footage, photography, and sounds, Fuentes is

⁹⁴ Blumentritt, 78.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

cognizant of the importance of time and spatial sequences in filmmaking. Indeed, the production of the film offers Fuentes vital lessons on film editing. Fuentes observes, “the only variable that you can control is how long a viewer see an image by itself and other images that proceed and succeed it.”⁹⁶ Reflected in Fuentes’ precise editing and control of time point to the underlying photographic strategies that Fuentes had honed in his photographic work that predate the making of *Bontoc Eulogy*. “A lot of my editing,” Fuentes points out, “is informed by how long a good picture reader reads a still [shot].”⁹⁷ It is not surprising then that Fuentes relates “editing” to taking a good picture. An awareness of timing can influence the affective connections that the viewer makes to images displayed on the screen. The emotive power generated from a photograph, as Fuentes observes, “is dictated by the time you spend looking at it.”⁹⁸ Moreover, precise editing impacts the cohesiveness of embedded narratives within the film. Thus, Fuentes’ photographic touches resonate profoundly in the control of “the gaze”: the gazes of film’s viewers and those from Filipino bodies that break the fourth wall of the film to reach their viewers.

The last scripted film sequence depicts Marlon Fuentes, the actor, walking across a pathway – one that viewers have seen before – and momentarily stopping to turn his head to face into the focal plane of the film’s viewers. He gazes beyond the fourth wall of the film meeting his viewers gaze then continues to walk outside of the film’s frame (see Figure 1.18). While there are other moments in which Fuentes’ edits the film to bring forth the centrality of the gaze, one particular sequence of archival footage found

⁹⁶ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

in the film conveys the intimacy between Fuentes and the Filipino bodies he images.⁹⁹ It is a black-and-white archived film clip taken in the years after American occupation in the Philippines. The clip depicts a young Filipino boy emerging from the bottom left of the frame crossing a stationary camera's focal plane towards an American soldier situated at the center-right. Before exiting the frame, the boy momentarily pauses (much like the actor in the last film sequence) and turns his head to stare off-screen at the viewers (see Figure 1.21-1.23).¹⁰⁰ Fuentes' editing disrupts the playback of the clip. Instead of an unadulterated playback of the footage, Fuentes pauses the boy's head turn and pans into his face, allowing the viewers of the film to feel the his gaze.

The arrested gaze in the archived clip establishes a linkage to the actor's paused gaze in the last film sequence. Indeed, the two scenes evidence Fuentes' transfiguration of his body to that of the young boy's. During the film clip of the young boy, the narrator's voiceover supports the bodily connection. "I haven't given much thought of Markod as a child," the narrator observes, "But I suspected there was a much larger story behind his disappearance. (BE)." Both Fuentes and the boy, in their halted gazes, establish a corporeal and conceptual union.¹⁰¹ The juxtaposition of the narrator's voiceover with the film clip suggests, furthermore, that the boy's body harbors the clues to Markod's existence. Despite Fuentes' reliance on the official archives, Fuentes must turn to the Filipino bodies to glimpse that which is not officially recorded. The inclusion of the boy's frozen gaze likewise evidences Fuentes act of looking back to his homeland

⁹⁹ Film scholar Peter Feng takes interest in this final film sequence, noting in particular the actor's pause and gaze toward the off-screen camera. It is this scene that, for Feng, marks the reversal of roles from the observed to observer that calls into question the ethnographic gaze. Feng, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Feng provides useful details about this archival footage. He notes that the U.S. Army in the Cordilleras region on the island of Luzon filmed the sequence in the 1920s. *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰¹ This corporeal union is like the opening iterations when Fuentes substitutes Kubi's body with his own. The difference, however, is that the archival image of Kubi is never shown in the film, while the boy that gazes off-frame is very much part of *Bontoc Eulogy's* immediate surface.

through the eyes of those long passed and forgotten.¹⁰² For it is through the eyes of the Filipino boy and those like him that beckons the filmmaker. The boy's body, thus, emerges as an embodied archive.¹⁰³ Pausing the boy's gaze allows Fuentes and the film's viewers to read an unspoken moment in history and to link the boy's body to Fuentes' for signs of the "larger story."

Through his use of the archived film clip, Fuentes makes visible the mechanisms that have created the composite identity of the boy through the triangulation of the boy's body caught in between the two American cameramen. These processes that

¹⁰² Fatimah Tobing Rony likewise reads this scene similar to Peter Feng's assessment. While acknowledging the returned gaze that the boy gives, Rony adds that the halting of the archived footage actually spotlights the visibility of the boy who would otherwise be veiled in invisibility. Rony, "The Quick and the Dead," 143. As Fuentes has shown throughout the film, events such as the 1904 St. Louis World's Exposition were contingent and driven by the hypervisibility of Filipino bodies in the construction of an American modernity driven by empire at the turn-of-the century. American occupation of the Philippines instantiated a discursive deluge about the islands and their people, resulting in an abundance of archived film and photography that Fuentes returns to for the production of the film.¹⁰² While photographic practices were paramount to American colonial projects in the Philippines, the increased visibility of the islands and people conversely facilitated the emergence of a shroud of invisibility. The hypervisibility blanketed the violence wrought by American empire in the Philippines. Many images that correspond to U.S. intervention in the islands mask the both the psychic and physical violence that remains hidden behind the guise of "benevolent assimilation" despite its conspicuous visibility. At the beginning of the film, for example, Fuentes directs our attention to an event in which "three Filipinos were shot by American soldiers outside of Manila." Juxtaposed with the narration is archival footage of Filipino men being shot (*BE*). While images of dead, wounded, or incarcerated Filipino circulated from 1898 onward, such images were read to signify American benevolence and justify its presence in the islands rather than the brutal and violent consequences of American empire. See Nerrisa Balce-Cortes, "Savagery and Docility: Filipinos and the Language of the American Empire After 1898," (Ph.d. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2002).

¹⁰³ My approach to tease out the desire of the filmmaker here toward the boy in the archived footage is influenced by Gayatri Gopinath's brief yet powerful read of a scene in *My Beautiful Launderette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1995), between the gay, Pakistani character Omar and Johnny, a British white, working-class gay. In the scene Gopinath reads the queer desire of Omar for Johnny as summoning for him painful memories of an anti-immigrant parade in London—Johnny had participated in the event. Thus, Gopinath argues that the "queer racialized body becomes a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other." While Fuentes' desire in spotlighting the young boy's gaze is arguably one that indexes the metaphoric "returned gaze" of "the native," I nonetheless read the scene as also focusing attention to the ways in which the postcolonial artist, through aesthetic choices and compositional filmic acts, constructs the colonized body as an archive of history and memory. Desire toward the Filipino embodied archive conjures for Fuentes the history of American imperialism and its corporeal consequences. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-2.

would otherwise be taken for granted are flagged and visualized. The mechanisms – the Western gaze and the film technologies and conventions – have produced the boy’s visibility in the film, provided that these visual processes are extricated from the shadow of imperial complacency and invisibility. Fuentes’ reliance on the aesthetics of metonymic visual imaging forces viewers to index his own transformation into the archived body of the boy in the scene. Not only is the boy’s body a source of knowledge to be read, so too is the actor’s body. Visualized in this syncretic somatic union is the metamorphosis of Fuentes’ body into an embodied archive – an aesthetic that is foreshadowed in his earlier photographic work.

★ ★ ★

Throughout *Bontoc Eulogy*, Marlon Fuentes has exploited the ethnographic surface to lead his viewers into the underlying conceptual depth of his film, and ultimately to the formation of a Filipino diasporic archive. His compositional and conceptual maneuvers are informed by the historical entanglements of Filipinos and the Philippines to American empire, visualized through the intertwined transpacific narratives of Fuentes and his grandfather to the United States. The dynamic reconfiguration of the American archives has yielded an aesthetics guided by an intimacy between Fuentes and the Filipino bodies found in the American archives; these bodies have inspired postcolonial strategies of metonymic imaging and composite identity formations attributed to his photographic sensibilities. The Filipino diasporic archive that Fuentes constructs is as much a dynamic space of imagination as it is a space that houses the processes of decolonization. It is representative of a collective aspiration for the Filipino diaspora to imagine itself as a community in motion – bodies that traverse oceans and continents from the turn-of-the-century to the present. The

Filipino diasporic archive, most importantly, is a collective ethos that frames the Philippines at its core. *Bontoc Eulogy* houses Filipino bodies from the American archives that have resurfaced from their dynamic depths with a decolonizing vengeance.

FIGURES



Figure 1.1: Opening scene in *Bontoc Eulogy* – The gramophone.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.2: Opening scene in *Bontoc Eulogy* – Fuentes, the actor, winding the gramophone.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.3: Opening scene in *Bontoc Eulogy* – Fuentes, the actor, listening to the gramophone.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).

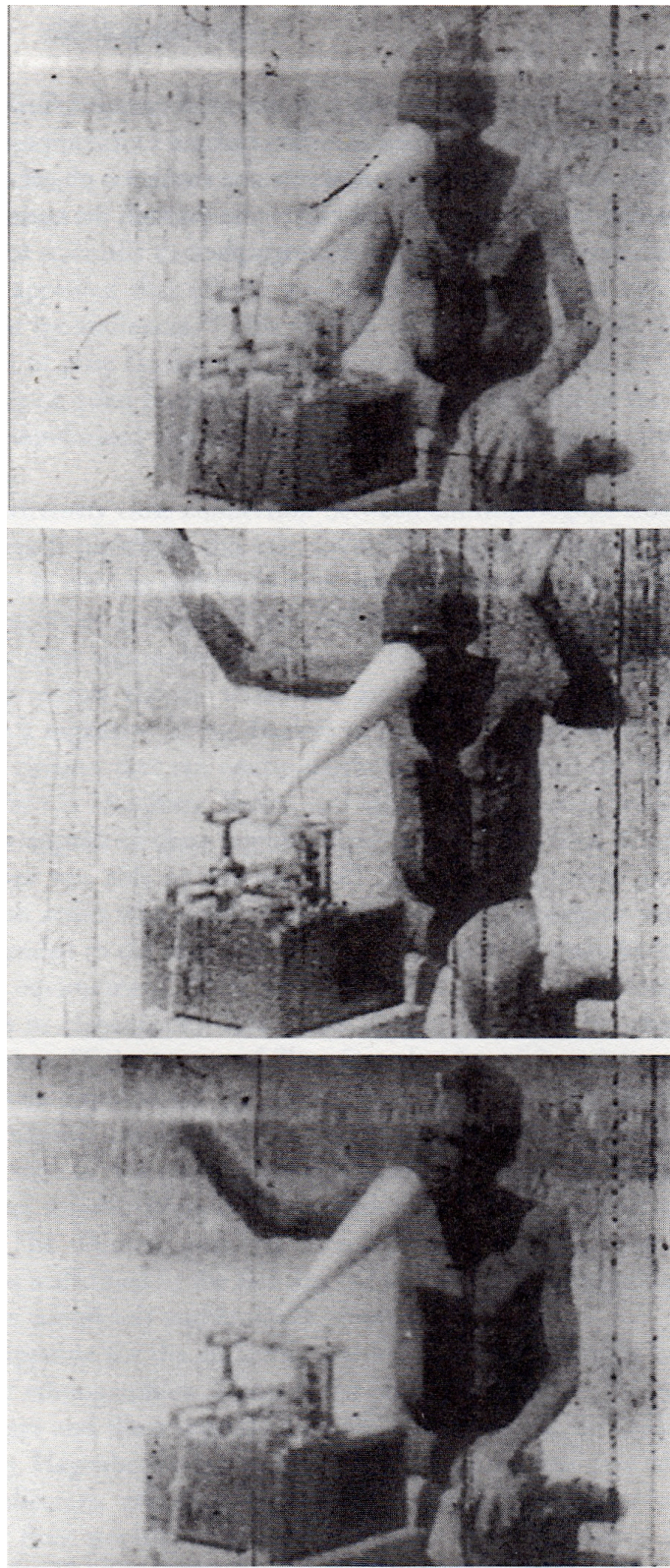


Figure 1.4: Rudolph Pöch, "Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph," 1908.
Reproduced from Assenka Oksiloff, *Picturing the Primitive* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

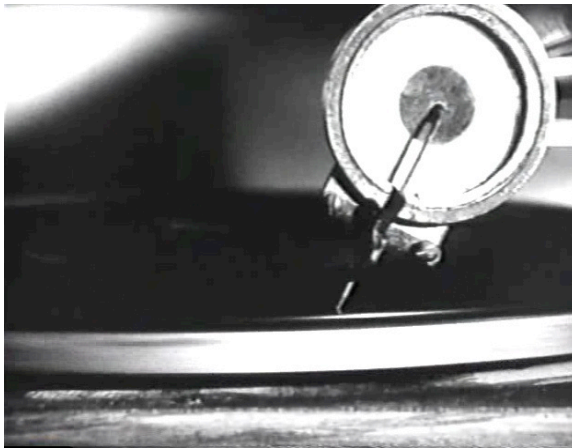


Figure 1.5: Record spinning in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.6: Paper boats in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.7: Rolling river in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.8: Ship leaving port in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.9: Boy-washing *carabao* [water buffalo] in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.10: Filipino hut – “Why did we leave our home?” in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).

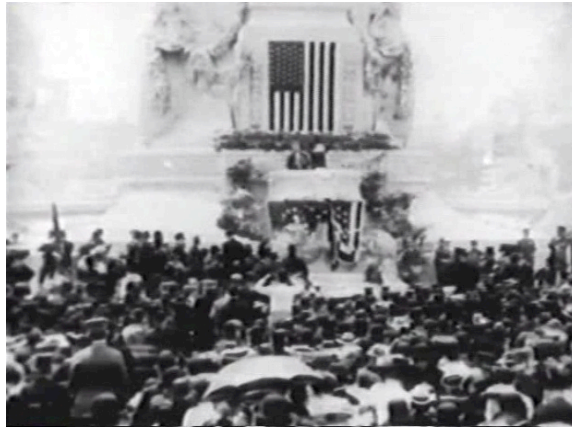


Figure 1.11: Gathering – “Why have we come to America?” in *Bontoc Eulogy*
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.12: Anonymous white woman with Bagobo man at the St. Louis World’s Exposition
(attributed to the Metcalfe sisters) – “Why have we chosen to stay?” in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.13: Anonymous white man on *carabao* [water buffalo] – “What are the stories that define
us as a people?” in *Bontoc Eulogy*. Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by
Marlon Fuentes (San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.14: *Carabao* [water buffalo]—“What has made us the way we are?” in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.15: Fuentes, the actor, stares out into the horizon in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.16: The coupling of the narrator and actor in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).

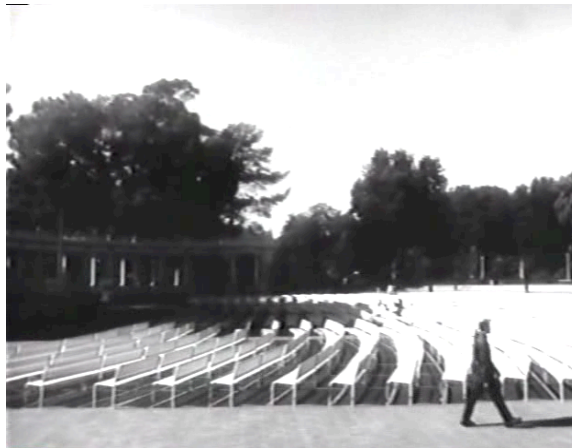


Figure 1.17: The narrator and actor leave for the archives in *Bontoc Eulogy*. Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes (San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).

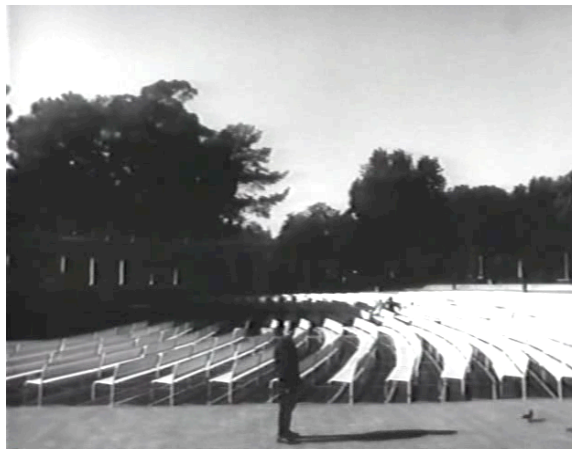


Figure 1.18: The narrator and actor leave for the archives for the second time — actor pauses at center and stares out in *Bontoc Eulogy*. Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes (San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.19: Anthropological mugshots displayed in the film — mugshots are juxtaposed with John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever" in *Bontoc Eulogy*. Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes (San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.20: Filipino native spins around for viewing in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.21: Filipino boy emerges on-screen, bottom left in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.22: Arrested shot of Filipino boy gazing back to camera in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).



Figure 1.23: Close-up of Filipino boy gazing back to the camera in *Bontoc Eulogy*.
Reproduced from *Bontoc Eulogy*, Videocassette, directed by Marlon Fuentes
(San Francisco: NAATA, 1995).

CHAPTER 2

IMPROBABLE TOPOGRAPHIES: MARLON FUENTES AND THE KINETIC LANDSCAPES OF THE *FACE FUSION* SERIES

I would wake up in the morning with my face close to my wife, and I would open my left eye and my right eye – open my right eye, close my left; open my left eye, close my right. There would be a shifting a landscape.
– Marlon Fuentes, interview with artist

The vocabulary of geology is especially useful in visualizing the ground of tradition as active and substantial and subject to dramatic or imperceptible processes of subduction. Slippage, fissuring, accordions, folding in, absorption, collapse; building up – all irruptions within highly local dynamics – elude confinement in fixed strata. Specialists need to direct their attention toward volatile chemistries and tracteries of ancient and current traumas. And if potential for equilibrium or disaster is calibrated with a healthy respect for the indeterminate, it may be possible to gain an understanding of forces that reverberate jaggedly and fracture the binary formulations so fundamental to Western epistemologies into capillaries – not just vivid fault lines – of stress.
Marian Pastor Roces, “Bodies of Fiction, Bodies of Desire/*Mga Katawan ng Kathâ, Mga Katawan ng Pagnanasa*”

As we have seen in *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Filipino photographer and filmmaker Marlon Fuentes prefigures the American visual archives as a defining point of departure for both his conceptual and compositional moves in the autoethnographic film. The visual archives emerge as an architectural *and* conceptual location that Fuentes must return to in order to piece together and reconfigure the ways Filipino bodies have historically been imaged and imagined by American empire, during the decades after occupation of the islands through to the contemporary moment. Fuentes’ postcolonial filmic act of reconfiguration gestures to a grander vision of forming a Filipino diasporic archive, one in which is beholden to the images of Filipino bodies culled from the American archives, but also one that moves beyond colonial visual regimes. This movement away from the tightly-constructed boundaries of the American archives

materializes from the structural and historical entanglements of Filipinos and the Philippines to the United States. In constructing a Filipino diasporic archive, Fuentes grapples compositionally with the kinetic consequences of American empire on Filipino bodies by infusing his film with symbolic movements – objects, people, and landscapes – in relation to the intertwined movements of his own body and that of his fictional grandfather, Markod (both bodies becoming metonymic representations of the larger transnational and intra-archipelagic movements of Filipinos). Fuentes’ compositional acts likewise direct viewers to the dialogic relationship of the film’s surface to its conceptual depth; and in doing so, Fuentes establishes the primacy of a postcolonial epistemological kinetics. That is, surface and depth are hardly static. Their interactive properties catalyze the movement of thoughts and ideas that nuance the visible movements found on the surface of the film. Fuentes deliberately utilizes a Western ethnographic surface in the film and yet establishes an underlying depth that moves away from hegemonic notions of colonized interiorities and ultimately propels the film into postcolonial and decolonizing terrains.

If *Bontoc Eulogy* marks the emergence of Marlon Fuentes as an independent Filipino American filmmaker, much of the film’s compositional and conceptual thrust, indeed its success – the generative dialogue that it produces between the surface and depth of the film – point to Fuentes’ involvement with photography that predate his foray into film. The kinetic terrains in the film – the embedded visual and epistemological movements – are a reflection of Fuentes’ fraught and often confrontational relationship to the archives of American photographic modernity. At the very least, the film’s production and Fuentes’ deft handling of the minutiae of the film, specifically his awareness of building a cohesive narratological *and* affective

architecture from an array of visual and aural primary sources and compositional repertoire, owes heavily to years spent learning the craft of photography, especially the years he spent producing the *Circle of Fear* and *Face Fusion* photography series that predate *Bontoc Eulogy*. While Fuentes admits to “an obsessive filmic sensibility” in his production of the *Face Fusion* series, particularly referring to the painstaking task spent producing each portrait, what he calls “an editing exercise,” it is my contention that Fuentes’ photographic work and his photographic sensibility reside at the heart of his visual oeuvre.¹ The production of the film attests to his status as a photographer first and foremost. His photographic work thus acts like a visual compass and emerges as the compositional and conceptual foundation, and as a personal visual archive, that Fuentes returns to over and over again, especially in *Bontoc Eulogy*.

Fuentes demonstrates in *Bontoc Eulogy* the importance of an archival ethos to the production of the fictional film’s strategic ethnographic surface and in the conceptualization of Filipino bodies as archives in their own right. This chapter extends the latter concept by examining Fuentes’ negotiation of the American photographic archives in his *Face Fusion* series. Fuentes started the *Face Fusion* series in 1985, nearly a decade before the release of *Bontoc Eulogy* and a decade after his arrival to the United

¹ During my interview with Fuentes, I asked him how much of his photographic sensibilities went into making *Bontoc Eulogy*. Fuentes emphatically answered “huge,” after which he spoke about the time-consuming task of editing and the lessons he learned by shooting and editing photographs and their translation over to the film process. Only a short moment later, while speaking to the production of the *Face Fusion* series, Fuentes referred to the “obsessive filmic sensibility” depicted in his photographs. I want to clarify these seemingly contradictory points. My contention that Fuentes’ photographic sensibilities carry through much of his visual work stems from Fuentes’ visual trajectory. Fuentes spent years working primarily with photography before entering Temple University to work on his M.F.A. degree in film (which consequently he never finished). While in hindsight Fuentes acknowledges that the production of *Face Fusion* mirrored in many ways film editing, it is ultimately his expertise and experiences in photography that drive him to filmmaking and not the other way around. The framework that I am proposing here demands us to consider the uncanny parallel between the teleology of Western cinema’s emergence and Fuentes’ own turn to film. Both histories are indebted to the emergence of photography. Marlon Fuentes, telephone interview by author, January 21, 2006.

States from the Philippines. He continues to produce photographs for the *Face Fusion* series to this day. Over the span of twenty years, Fuentes has produced three distinct sets of photographs for the *Face Fusion* series, each set labeled with a number, I, II, or III, and demarcated by discrete aesthetic concerns while simultaneously bound together by an archival and historical imperative that informs Fuentes' compositional and conceptual moves and his focus on "the face." The underlying conceptual depth of the *Face Fusion* portraits of Filipino faces reveals Fuentes' confrontation with epistemologies derived from American visual disciplinary regimes, a strategy that Fuentes deploys more transparently and confidently in *Bontoc Eulogy*.

In the groundbreaking collection, *Fresh Talk Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, cultural critic Lisa Lowe reads the artwork housed in the collection as "offer[ing] an alternative 'map' of the modern: as global, as cosmopolitan, as unevenly yet simultaneously experienced across the globe."² Lowe reminds us of the contradictions of Western modernity – a period marked by the allure of freedom and civilization and the threats of exclusions and displacements of Asian bodies – and the ways in which imaged Asian bodies within Asian American and Asian diasporic visual work have become windows and certainly alternative maps of modernity.³ She refers to Yong Soon Min's photography series *Defining Moments* (1992) as an example that captures Min's own Korean body visually transformed into a series of maps of the artist's personal history interwoven within the historical period of American military

² Lisa Lowe, "Forward: Out of the West: Asian Migration and Modernity," in *Fresh Talk Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xx.

³ Lisa Lowe uses both "Asian American" and "Asian diasporic" as monikers to encompass the range of artists housed in the collection, the latter term denoting and acknowledging subject formation contingent on the movements of Asians globally within the contemporary moment of transnational capitalism. Ibid., xxii.

occupation in Korea (see Figure 2.1).⁴ This chapter springboards off of Lowe's assessment of Asian American/Asian diasporic visual art as "alternative maps" by focusing on Marlon Fuentes' *Face Fusion* series. I argue that Fuentes' *Face Fusion* photographs offers a lens to view the consequences of modernity on the Filipino body, specific to the colonial and postcolonial relationship of the United States and the Philippines. Fuentes turns to the photographic archives and locates Filipino bodies among but perhaps more importantly somewhere in between or even beyond the honorific and repressive photographic portraiture practices.⁵ If the female body absent of the female head and face for Yong Soon Min becomes, as Elaine Kim maps, a "site of creation, contradiction, and conflict emerging from the continual collisions and transformations that comprise Asian American cultural experiences," Fuentes turns solely to "the face," or more accurately, "faces" to locate the spectrum of Filipino experiences in the age of U.S. empire, transnational global economics, and diaspora (see Figures 2.2 and 2.20).⁶ Devoid of the rest of the body and less literal as Min's cartographic images, the faces in the series nonetheless chart the improbable and interstitial locations of Filipinos within the shadow archive of photography. This chapter exposes Fuentes' *Face Fusion* series as alternative maps that on the surface are unabashedly cartographical and topographical in nature, while also possessing a

⁴ Marlon Fuentes and Yoon Soon Min were both part of the *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* exhibit that toured the United States from 1994 to 1996. Ibid., xix-xx.

⁵ I invoke Alan Sekula's seminal essay "The Body and the Archive" when discussing Fuentes' turn to the photographic archive in the creation of the *Face Fusion* series. Sekula's essay reminds us that 19th century photographic production and practices were guided by a "shadow archive" – an archive that encompassed the entire social landscape bifurcated into honorific and repressive categories. In his portraits, Fuentes returns to the archives and comments on the location of Filipino bodies within the photographic archives. His portraits exceed the delimited spaces of the honorific or repressive categories and reside somewhere in between or beyond the dichotomy. Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39 (1986), 6.

⁶ Elaine H. Kim, "Introduction: Interstitial Subjects – Asian American Visual Art as a Site for New Cultural Conversations," in *Fresh Talk Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 36.

complex and dynamic interiority that points to an inherent multiplicity of Filipino subjectivity (matching the islands' racial and ethnic plurality) that exceeds the colonial order. I argue that Fuentes' cartographical and topographical impulses mirror uncannily the regulatory projects of American modernity during the American colonial period. Fuentes turns to these projects to facilitate his aesthetic critiques of American empire. The images return to early colonial survey and mapping practices while also exceeding their expectations. In this chapter, I focus only on the photographs in *Face Fusion I* and *II*. Each set of images, I contend, captures terrestrial and affective topographies.⁷ In *Face Fusion I*, the faces emerge improbably as shifting, fluid, and sensual landscapes driven by a kinetic, diasporic, or more specifically, what I call a dia(e)scapic sensibilities. Fuentes, I argue, returns to popular ethnographic typological conventions of photography in *Face Fusion I*, brought into relief by my reading of his series alongside the early 20th century photographic archive and colonial imperatives of Dean C. Worcester, zoologist, colonial administrator, and photographer. In *Face Fusion II* the portraits capture conversely the brusque terrains and affective ruptures of Filipinos global migrancy. Their affective trajectories reveal the contradictions of transnational capitalist production in its reliance on Filipino bodies. The portraits in *Face Fusion I* and *II* become an archipelago of shifting landscapes and affect that speak powerfully to the contemporary Filipino diasporic condition. Taken together, each set of images ultimately limn the creation of oppositional photographic archives whose production are beholden to, while also confronting, the affective, cultural, and historical entanglements of Filipinos to the visual and regulatory regimes of American empire.

⁷ As of the writing of this chapter, Marlon Fuentes has not let anyone view the *Face Fusion III* photographs. However, he did briefly state that the faces were solely of himself but did not elaborate on their compositional concerns. Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

MAPPING THE AFFECTIVE TOPOGRAPHIES IN *FACE FUSION II*

The word “topography” should easily inspire images of maps. Topographical maps capture geographic spaces in highly-detailed relief, denoting perhaps the varying elevations and degradations of landscapes using a graduation of colors. To associate the word with science, as imparted by the primary definition found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is to recognize the empirical quality that underscores the discipline of topography. The *OED* defines “topography” as “the science or practice of describing a particular place, city, town, manor, parish, or tract of land; the accurate and detailed delineation and description of any locality.”⁸ Topography is thus contingent on the particularities of demarcated spaces and the relationship between geography and all those within its boundaries, be they people, animals, or even plant life. Insofar as topographical mapping provides a source of localized geographic details, it also functions as a useful visual tool. Topographical maps, for example, are important sources of visual knowledge production exemplified by early American topographical projects. The “great surveys,” for example, conducted initially by the Department of War during the post-Civil War years (later incorporated into the United Geological Survey in 1879), utilized photography alongside topographical surveys. Photography historian Alan Trachtenberg argues that the photographs “played an integral role in redefining the geological survey as a modern activity,” and importantly provided the means for the American public to possess, even if visually, the Western frontier, a tactic deployed later in the United States’ occupation of the Philippines.⁹ Indeed during the early years of American occupation in the Philippines, colonial administrators were quite aware of the importance of recording the topography of both the terrestrial

⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 124.

surfaces of the Philippine Islands and the surrounding oceanic depths to the colonial management of the islands.¹⁰ This topographical urgency echoes resoundingly in the 1905 *Sixth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission*. Projects that surveyed the landscape of the islands inevitably shaped the ways Americans interpreted its inhabitants in order to control them. “With each succeeding year,” states the Philippine Commission report, “the necessity for a general topographical survey of the islands increases.”¹¹ Topographical information would inevitably facilitate the construction of roads and highways across the islands and ship travel between them, advancing the Philippines with the guidance of Americans, into a period of modernity. Succinctly stated by one American colonial commissioner, “a people without roads are necessarily savage, because society is impossible (see Figure 2.21).”¹²

Captured in the *Face Fusion* series is Fuentes’ uncanny turn to the science and aesthetics of topography. While Fuentes’ topographical aesthetic impulse directs our attention to the material consequences of American imperial usage of topography and photography in the Philippines at the turn-of-the century, Fuentes’ photographs also nuance and reveals the limitations of early-American topographic endeavors in the islands. He does so by going beyond the bounded dimensions of localized geographies in his photographs and expressing landforms and landmarks using abstracted faces. Fuentes treats the Filipino body as an agent of cartographical production, as well as the visual text from which knowledge is gleaned. The *Face Fusion* photographs exceed the

¹⁰ A United States Coast and Geodetic Survey office was established in Manila in 1900. The office managed the mapping of the waters surrounding the islands for navigational purposes. *Report of the Philippine Commission 1901* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 52.

¹¹ *Sixth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission 1905 (In Four Parts) Part 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 41.

¹² *Reports of the Taft-Philippine Commission Message from the President of the United States Transmitting A Report of the Secretary of War, Containing the Reports of the Taft Commission, its Several Acts of Legislation, and Other Important Information Relating to the Conditions and Immediate Wants of the Philippine Islands* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 71.

expectations of early-American topographical projects by imaging Filipino faces as maps that chart the postcolonial Filipino geographical and affective topographies in the aftermath of American modernization projects in the Philippines.

Fuentes' compositional choices in the *Face Fusion* series boldly convey the affective consequences of colonialism on the Filipino body, shedding light on Filipino subject formation in the age of diaspora. The emergence of the series in the 1980s shapes much of Fuentes' own conceptual impulses in creating both photographic sets and in *Bontoc Eulogy*.¹³ Reminded of the mid-1980s, a period when much of the *Face Fusion I and II* series were produced, Fuentes describes it as a very turbulent and emotional period in his life. Fuentes produced the *Face Fusion* series amidst tackling "depression, loss, cultural issues, displacement, and [his] identity as an artist."¹⁴ Both photographic sets in the *Face Fusion* series are influenced by the affective trajectories of his movement from the Philippine Islands to the United States, as well as the movements of other Filipino migrants. The brusque and fractious compositional tactics that he deploys in *Face Fusion II* comment on the emotive underbelly of U.S. colonialism and its legacy on the larger Filipino body politic. Fuentes photographed just one person, his male friend, for *Face Fusion II*, using the technique of double-exposure and tying nylon wires around his friend's face to produce ten haunting and very different images of distorted full-frontal faces, open orifices and voids, and eyes that stare perhaps in pain and confusion in unknown directions. The set produces an oppositional affective relationship to the

¹³ In Chapter 1, "Surface-Depth Tactics: Marlon Fuentes' *Bontoc Eulogy* and the Reconfiguration of the Archives," I explore in detail the "affective potential" of the aftermath of arrival in new geographies for Filipinos in the narration that Fuentes uses in *Bontoc Eulogy*. The narrator's comment in the film – "*Ang hindi lumilingon sa pinanggalingan, hindi makararating sa patutuan*" – conveys, I argue, the affective consequences of arrival, less one forget to look back at one's homeland. In the *Face Fusion* series, Fuentes again returns to "affect" through his compositional choices and facial figurations.

¹⁴ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

Face Fusion I series (discussed in detail below). If the photographs in *Face Fusion I* seduce the viewers by their organic bodily figurations, the *Face Fusion II* images jar and potentially repel them. Indeed, the compositional vision in the *Face Fusion* series remarks on the contradictory affective structures that govern Filipino bodies; the photographs negotiate the telos of integration and assimilation of the migrant body within the large socio-cultural and capitalist geographies created by the colonial center – the United States.¹⁵

Suspended within the photographic frames are powerful reminders of the affective consequences of colonialism on the Filipino body, or more precisely, the face. The lines that impress harshly on the faces – both from the nylon wires and the abrupt displacements produced by the double-exposure – when taken together become imaginary routes; they become indices of movement along different points of the face (see Figures 2.22 to 2.3). The lines moreover evidence the geological equivalent of divergent and convergent zones. The lines become seams or fault lines that pull apart or push together; they reveal the composite and kinetic nature of the photographs, a conceptual nuance that Fuentes captures in a more fluid and organic manner in the *Face Fusion I* photographs. The arbitrary triangulation of lines transforms the faces into ten unique maps that are bound together by an affective trajectory of displacement, trauma, and pain. As cartographical depictions of migrant emotions, the photographs become uncanny representations of American early-twentieth century triangulation, topography, and hydrography (TTH) maps of the Philippine Islands and the

¹⁵ See Jeffrey Santa Ana's fascinating and important materialist critique of U.S. literature, specifically examining the ways emotions of minority people depicted in literature sheds light on the contradictions of capitalist production. Minority affect becomes a window to glean the processes of capitalist exploitation on minority bodies and an important critical analytic to comprehend minority subject formation within capitalist geographies like the United States. See Jeffrey Santa Ana, "Critical Emotions: Affect, Politics, and Ethnic American Literature in an Age of Global Capitalism," (Ph.d. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2003).

surrounding waters (See Figures 2.24 to 2.26). TTH maps, produced by the Coast and Geodetic Survey (established in 1901), facilitated mapping of the waters around the islands as well the coastal landmasses. The triangulations on TTH maps between coastal ports and towns also facilitated and organized commercial sea travel. Fuentes' use of nylon wires in his images, furthermore, inspires a conceptual connection to the method of wire-drag that was used to succor sonic modes of sea-mapping.¹⁶ If the TTH maps evidenced American modernity and progress in the islands, as well as its capitalist intentions, then the *Face Fusion II* photographs forces us to consider the Filipino face as reconfigured TTH maps, whose triangulation lines evince the contradictory realities of capitalist and colonial enterprise on the affective subjectivities of Filipinos.

Certainly then the *Face Fusion II* photographs reveal Fuentes topographical impulses that rely on a surface-depth photographic strategy. Interestingly, the wire-drag method that was used to produce TTH maps relied on a horizontal fixed wire at "fixed depth," held together by weighted buoys and tugged by two boats. And as the boats moved forward, the horizontal wire below the surface advanced behind the vessels, vibrating only when it hit obstructions on the sea floor. The surface motoring of the boats and the wire-drag underwater survey forms an apt metaphor for Fuentes' conceptual move in the photographs.¹⁷ Fuentes begins conceptually with the surface of the Filipino face and images the inherent heterogeneity of Filipinos as they inhabit diverse terrestrial landscapes and contradictory affective ontologies present in their photographic depths. If modernity facilitates a unification of vision through the

¹⁶ R.F. Luce, "Coast and Geodetic Completing Palawan Survey," *The American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 13.10 (October 1933), 17

¹⁷ The wire-dragging method to chart oceanic depth is described as: "The wire drag method, keeping a horizontal wire at a fixed depth between launches at the wire's ends, has been introduced from the United States to disclose hazards, such as reef elevations, that ordinary soundings may have left concealed." *Ibid.* 17.

processes of modernization, it has also inspired an aesthetics of fracture and shifting and ever-changing outcomes for Fuentes – a plurality of form and composition epitomized by the archipelagic-esque facial landscapes in the *Face Fusion* series.¹⁸ It is through the *Face Fusion* series that Fuentes can begin to comprehend his own historical and spatial location and ultimately that of other Filipino bodies.

VISUALIZING THE DIASPORA, PRODUCING DIA(E)SCAPES

Fuentes' photographs are inspired by the history of American colonial management of Filipino bodies, particularly through the use of visual disciplinary tools such as topography and map-making. Fuentes' topographical impulses in the *Face Fusion* series are also significantly tied to his own experiences as a postcolonial artist in the United States. The *Face Fusion* series captures a melding of both the historical influences of topographical mapping by Americans during the early years of occupation in the Philippines and a mapping of his own immigration experiences to the United States during the last three decades. Working in the U.S. enables him to confront and negotiate the layers of his identity: as an immigrant, as a student of business and later a white-collar employee, and importantly as emerging photographer and filmmaker. During his late-twenties, a crucial period in his life, Fuentes began what he calls his "mature work." Thinking back to this period, Fuentes remarks: "when you are that age, identity is rather important."¹⁹ It is during this period that Fuentes begins to survey the

¹⁸ The second opening epigraph by Filipino Art Historian Marian Pastor Roces clearly captures, I believe, this idea. Her insistence on using the vocabulary of geology is fitting, especially given my argument that Fuentes' portraits are topographical in nature. For Roces, Filipino art tradition is constantly in flux given the history of multiple colonialism in the Philippines, and in her words, "elude confinement in fixed strata." The *Face Fusion* series, I argue, pictures these tectonic shifts. See Marian Pastor Roces, "Bodies of Fiction, Bodies of Desire: *Mga Katawan ng Kathâ, Mga Katawan ng Pagnanasa*," in *Contemporary Art in Asia*, (New York: Asia Art Galleries, 1996), 82-92.

¹⁹ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

historical photographic archives to help inspire his visual oeuvre. His early photographic work while an MBA student at the University of Pennsylvania focused on landscapes. He admits: "I didn't know what I was doing. I was just trying to do some landscapes, understanding the craft, and reworking the history."²⁰ It is this preoccupation with landscapes that carries resoundingly through to his *Face Fusion* photographs. By mapping his own personal history in his photography, Fuentes eventually reworks the photographic archives, capturing the kinetic and affective topographies in the *Face Fusion* series and transforming Filipino faces into organic maps and landscapes.

Other Filipino American artists have relied on a cartographical and topographical aesthetics in their work much like Marlon Fuentes. In his ink on paper series *Drawing Maps to Nowhere* (1997-1998), Lordy Rodriguez, for example, uses the very real cartographical boundaries of the fifty states in the United States and re-imagines the interior geographies of each state, relocating and purposely misplacing cities and towns and geographic features that were not originally there inside the states (see Figure 2.27). Much like Fuentes' topographical landscapes, Rodriguez's fantastical two-dimensional maps disrupt conventional modes of reading and viewing the didactic functions of cartography. *Drawings of Maps to Nowhere* becomes for Rodriguez "a dreamscape."²¹ The visual work of Fuentes and Rodriguez reveal the ways geography centrally figures in the visual production of contemporary Filipinos artists in the United States.²² Geography becomes for these two artists an intrinsic part of their identities

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Lordy Rodriguez," *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum), 114.

²² In chapter 4, "Here and There | *Dito at Doon: Stephanie Syjuco Blows-Up the Black Markets*," I elaborate on how Stephanie Syjuco utilizes map-making and cartographical conventions in her

such that their work captures the very real spatial dislocations and equally visible corporeal movements. For Rodriguez, the maps are “fantasy land[s]” and “Nowhere” is rooted (and routed) in “‘possible destinations’ and ‘possible roads.’”²³ Fuentes’ portraits, on the other hand, center not just an abstract notion of spatial possibilities for Filipino bodies; rather they direct our attention to the archives of lived realities and the plurality of spaces occupied by Filipinos. The abstraction of the faces is fueled by the conflicted moments of in/visibility, especially within an exclusionary and forgetful American landscape. The portraits’ surfaces capture the contours and improbable juxtapositions of facial skin and facial parts while also capturing transformations. Skin and face transform into organic landscapes, fluid, and in motion. Fuentes readily associates the process of producing visual work in the United States as an “orienting device,” bestowing his photographic work with inherent cartographical and topographical qualities.²⁴ His portraits in *Face Fusion I* are visual compasses for his existence in the United States, and like Rodriguez’s drawings, the facial abstractions act as an escape of sorts – destinations emerging from the past form maps that symbolize the kinetics of the diasporic present. Fuentes’ sense of “nowhere,” unlike Rodriguez, is in fact tied to the current conditions of the Filipino diaspora, hence grounded globally and mediated through photographic technologies. Fuentes’ landscapes can be thought of, more pertinently, as dia(e)scapes.

The term dia(e)scapes and its relationship to Fuentes’ *Face Fusion* series takes seriously the diasporic conditions that have befallen Filipinos, especially considering the political and economic stakes involved in the historical global outflow of Filipino

1996 *Pacific Theater Operations* series – a series of 10 cross-stitched portraits of World War II battles in the Philippines.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Margo Machida, “The Poetics of Positionality: Art, Identity, and Communities of Imagination in Asian America,” (Ph.d. diss., SUNY at Buffalo, 2002), 97.

laborers from the Philippines and the country's emergence as a "labor brokering state."²⁵ Dia(e)scapes are the visual and creative manifestations that capture the ways diasporic Filipinos, such as Fuentes, mediate media and visual technologies. The term "dia(e)scape" is not meant to usurp the usefulness and the generative impact of the term "diaspora" to the ever-growing transnational and diasporic theoretical models within Filipino American studies scholarship even in its contentious form.²⁶ Sarita See, for one, voices her discontent with the triangulation of the terms "home," "homeland," and "everywhere else as the 'diaspora,'" expressing disapproval for the ways it "privileges men and heterosexuality and also sets up a too strict and calcified relation between the idea of home and place" – and yet submitting "I need to use this term, there is no other for now."²⁷ Instead dia(e)scapes reflect the visual strategies of diasporic artists like

²⁵ See Robyn Rodriguez, "The Labor Brokering State: The Philippine State and the Globalization of Philippine-Citizen Workers," (Ph.d. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2005). My thoughts on the term diaspora are informed by Arjun Appadurai, who posits that the cultural dimensions of modern subjects – one of which is "the work of the imagination" by modern migrants (which includes those within diasporas) – is significantly informed by media technologies, or what he calls "mediascapes." See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁶ See for example James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3 (1994), 302-328. In the essay, Clifford describes what the political and intellectual stakes of what he calls "contemporary invocations of diaspora."

²⁷ See Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Forthcoming 2009). I take seriously Sarita See's assertion to the rigid boundaries of "diaspora" and the ways in which the term is deployed in the field of Filipino American studies. Current scholarship in Filipino American studies tend to overuse the "home" and "homeland" models, while claiming Filipino presence elsewhere as the "diaspora" – this is the *de rigueur* standard of transnational methodology in Filipino American studies. I argue that it is time to critically look at "the everywhere," the diaspora, as an analytical lens and to use its limitations for productive and perhaps resignifying ends. In the illuminating survey "Diaspora," Clifford reminds us that the term is not perfect, though it is within these imperfections "that we need to sort out and specify," for the "phenomenon" that is the diaspora has "range." Moreover, my inability to discard of the term follows Clifford's assessment that "[p]ositive articulations of diaspora identity reach out the normative territory and temporality (myth/history) of the nation-state." Diasporic identification, especially for Filipinos, can potentially disrupt the teleology and hegemony of the U.S. nation-state and national subject formations. The processes of identity formation within, between, and among diasporic communities globally and in transit can, I believe, glean the limitations and burdens imposed by the nation-state on migrant bodies. Clifford, 303-304, 307.

Fuentes and opens up the visual possibilities beyond just rarefied notions of home, homeland, and the “everywhere else.”

Fuentes’ *Face Fusion* series thus warrants pause over the term “diaspora,” especially given the ways the photographs direct us to geographies and topographies, even in their abstracted corporeal forms. Yet, the bodily terrains in *Face Fusion I*, for example, complicate and exceed the current definition of diaspora precisely because of their very abstraction of space unlike the named and extant locations in Lordy Rodriguez’s drawings. The boundaries of home, homeland, and diaspora are indistinguishable in Fuentes’ portraits. Indeed, the etymology of diaspora broken down to “dia-,” Greek for “through,” and “-spora,” Greek for “to sow, scatter” demands us not only to locate that which are scattered or dispersed – here, Filipino bodies – but also to situate “the where” – the spaces or geographies of those displaced. Simply put, the word “diaspora” demands us to visually register this process of movement of bodies across the varied, yet named, global geographies. Therefore, across what geographies in *Face Fusion I* are Filipino bodies being dispersed or do the Filipino bodies represent? If we can ground the current Filipino diaspora to charted locations globally, how might what might we label the abstracted islands of flesh and face in the *Face Fusion* portraits? Furthermore, how might we consider the portraits as diasporic representations or representations of the Filipino diaspora? Can current definitions of diaspora account for the visual demands, namely the compositional forms and figurations in the *Face Fusion* series? It is within these perplexing questions that the term “dia(e)scapes” emerges. Dia(e)scapes allows us to register the importance of movements of bodies across aesthetic terrains.

Dia(e)scapes relies on the underlying kinetic and dynamic terrains of the diaspora, yet specifically addresses the creative negotiations of visual media and technologies by those that have been displaced globally. In Fuentes' case, these negotiations take on considerable visual dimensions. James Clifford has labeled diaspora as a "travel term" based on its multiple usages in intellectual discourse vis-à-vis the ever-changing global conditions. Diaspora, as Clifford asserts, cannot be "reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism."²⁸ Clifford's statement conveys the potential for comparative diasporic studies that take into consideration the variegated contours of "diaspora" to broaden the term's epistemological parameters.²⁹ Dia(e)scapes seeks to monopolize on Clifford's astute observation and attempts to bridge the theoretical, kinetic and corporeal foundations of the diaspora to the ways in which Arjun Appadurai ties together the contemporary circuits of migrancy, media, technology, capital, and images – what he calls "the five dimensions of global cultural flows."³⁰ What emerges are visual representations that are socially responsive and historically mediated. The *Face Fusion* series as dia(e)scapic productions are a visual manifestation of Fuentes' negotiation of multiple axes of his diasporic identity, geography, history, and photographic technologies and emerge from the productive tension between American photographic modernity and Fuentes' photographic reconfigurations.

²⁸ Ibid. 302.

²⁹ Ibid. 303.

³⁰ Appadurai, 33.

KINETIC BODIES AND IMPROBABLE VISIONS IN *FACE FUSION I*

Together Appadurai calls the five-dimensions “landscapes ... imagined worlds.”³¹ Dia(e)scapes add to Appadurai’s dimensions by its inherently visual dimension. Dia(e)scapic productions are indeed visual landscapes and topographies of diasporic realities. That is, the *Face Fusion I* portraits become visual and symbolic representations of geographies produced on and by the Filipino body. As dia(e)scapic landscapes, the portraits permit Fuentes to travel once again along the diasporic circuits, escaping to imagined lands that exceed the categories of immigrant home and homeland.³² Even though Fuentes has not traveled back “home” since 1975 (his initial arrival to the United States), the photographs in the *Face Fusion I* act as a vehicle to escape back to the origins of his own history of migration without having to bear the psychological burden of being present in the islands.³³ For Fuentes much of this burden stems from the issues of death and demise that he associates to events that occurred in the islands: particularly to the shocking and unexpected death of a classmate at an anti-Marcos rally in Manila that Fuentes was photographing for a high school newspaper; to the demise of any artistic or photographic ambitions while in the Philippines because of his family’s strong rebuke of art as a profession; to the deaths of his father at the age of three and his mother’s death in the mid-1980s, which sent him into clinical depression; and to the demise of an authentic Filipino culture due to the islands’ colonial history.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² The significance of the term “escape” is in its etymological relationship to “dia(e)scape.” If dia(e)scapes are the visual products of diaporic artists, such as Fuentes, that take into consideration the movements of migrant bodies and their negotiations of the five global dimensions of cultural flows, these visual projects enable both viewers and visual producers, a respite, or an escape.

³³ Fuentes has stated in the *Amerasia Journal* that he has not returned back to the Philippines for emotional reasons. See Mia Blumentritt, “Bontoc Eulogy, History, and the Craft of Memory: An Extended Conversation with Marlon E. Fuentes,” *Amerasia Journal* 24 (1998): 75-90.

³⁴ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

The *Face Fusion I* set becomes surrogate islands for Fuentes to escape to. The portraits, when viewed together, become an otherworldly archipelago composed of skin, hair, and facial features: skin folds form hills that abut bottomless valleys and canyons; hair and eyelashes are swept in every which way across the rippled landscape by phantom winds; and displaced eyes, ears, and noses, fused within the dermal terrain lose their anatomical properties momentarily and take on the qualities of topographical landmarks. Fuentes points out: "I wanted the camera to fulfill the function of an orbiting satellite, in current language, doing GPS or aerial photography, covering the landscape of the face and an MRI with its camera going left to right, left to right."³⁵ While Fuentes admits that surfaces fascinate him, he is also a believer of depths that objects innately possess, intuitively pairing the surface-oriented tendencies of GPS technology with MRI technology that digitally maps the inner-reaches of the human body.³⁶

Fuentes never loses sight of the primacy of the face and the surface-depth details of its component parts. Fuentes conceptualizes the underlying depth of the face as "the primary repository of an individual's history as well as the site of emotional struggle."³⁷ The faces in *Face Fusion I* also harbor the photographic histories and the negotiations and choices that motivate their production. The compositional choices that Fuentes makes reveal a struggle to comprehend the multiple axes that compose his identity, as a diasporic Filipino, a heterosexual man, a white-collar laborer, and as a photographer. During the formative transition between white-collar worker and photographer, Fuentes remarks: "I started showing [photographs] when I was 27. I was actually kind of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Margo Machida, "Out of Asia: Negotiating Asian Identities in America," *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1994), 93.

confused from an identity standpoint because at that point I didn't know ... was I 'Joe Corporate' who shot on the side? Or was I a photographer who had a day job?"³⁸

Moreover, the faces emerge as the conduit for Fuentes to confront popular Western photographic conventions: scientific portraiture practices and landscape photography to be precise. The abstracted landscapes capture Fuentes confrontation with and critiques of photographic modernity – the ways the American gaze underscored photographic representations of the colonized body and landscapes in the Philippines. The resulting American archives become a generative repository of images for the *Face Fusion* series and his later work, *Bontoc Eulogy*.

Both genres of scientific portrait (studio and non-studio) and landscape photography were used liberally throughout the American occupation of the Philippines as an important visual and disciplinary tool of U.S. empire. The advent of American occupation in the islands marked the emergence of a photographic economy driven by technological innovation of the Kodak camera, namely its portability and expeditious film development process, and the regulatory demands of the American colonial government in the islands. Colonial management of Filipinos on a governmental level functioned in tandem with popular visual cultural forms (photography and film) to create a visual economy based on discipline, management, and dis/possession, resulting in consumer demand that went beyond just visual productions.³⁹

Ethnographic photography of Filipino types epitomized the popularity and availability of portraiture practices performed on the Filipino body. Scientific discourses

³⁸ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

³⁹ Benito Vergara forwards convincingly the argument that the notion of "possession" undergirds the popularity of photographic postcards of the Philippines and Filipinos. American audiences, intrigued and fascinated by the new American colony, could own a small piece of the Philippines by purchasing a postcard, which were mass produced and relatively inexpensive. Benito Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in the Early 20th Century Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 25.

of race and the body advanced by the discipline of anthropology and its offshoot ethnography influenced American colonial policies in the Philippines early into the formation of a civil government in the islands.⁴⁰ Dean C. Worcester, for example, the first Secretary of the Interior of the Philippines, trained in zoology at the University of Michigan prior to his appointment in 1901, participated in two expeditions to the Philippines prior to the islands annexation as a colony in 1898, first as a college student and later as a zoology professor. He accumulated scientific data and produced publications about the islands fauna, which interestingly included the diversity of human inhabitants. His knowledge of the Philippine “peoples” culminated in the 1898 publication of *The Philippine Islands and Their People* and would propel Worcester as an expert of the islands and into key positions within the American colonial administration. Worcester, like others in his field, utilized photography to supplement his writings. It was during the second expedition to the Philippines, one he attributes as “semi-official in character,” that granted Worcester “exceptional opportunities for observation.”⁴¹ “We were thrown among all classes,” Worcester writes, “from the highest Spanish officials to the wildest savages.”⁴² The fortunate circumstances of the second expedition offered Worcester the opportunity to surround himself among the diverse Filipino peoples and “gain their confidence,” helping him secure a substantial archive of ethnographic photographs of the islands’ inhabitants as well as landscape photography.⁴³ Indeed,

⁴⁰ In 1900 President William McKinley formed the first Philippine Commission, led by a university president, a diplomat, two military officials, and a scientist. The lone scientist was Dean C. Worcester, a professor of zoology at the University of Michigan, who in 1898 had published the popular *The Philippine Islands and Their People*. Its publication influenced by “the rapid marches of events,” a direct gesture to the defeat of Spain during the Spanish-American War that resulted in the annexation of the Philippines as a colony. Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippine Islands and Their People* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1898), x.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines: Past and Present* (Vol. 1) (New York: MacMillan, 1914), #

many of Worcester's images found their way into official government publications, notably the annual *Philippine Commission* reports, and his own books about the Philippines (see Figures 2.28 and 2.29), contributing to a visual archive that conveyed, as Benito Vergara notes, "the machinery of the state engaged in the obtainment and display of knowledge."⁴⁴

Worcester was by no means alone in his fervor "to observe" or rather "to photograph" Filipinos and their environs. The aftermath of the Spanish-American War and the popularly described "Philippine Insurrection" (or Philippine-American War) led to an outpouring of publications and images of America's new possession, of which Worcester's own photographic archive comprises an important part.⁴⁵ It is the ubiquity of Worcester's images of the Philippines and Filipinos and the images' transparent cultural, political, and theoretical claims that make his photographs an important historical and visual archive. Worcester's images document the colonial mechanisms in motion in the islands at the turn-of-the-century and the pervasive need to categorize the people and land to consolidate an American national identity. The demands of regulatory projects shaped and encouraged the commodification of images, greatly capitalizing on the United States' new possession. Indeed, for Filipino diasporic artists like Fuentes, Worcester's archive becomes an obvious source to return to, especially in light of the ways in which Filipino bodies and the processes of American colonialism

⁴⁴ Vergara, 38.

⁴⁵ The use of "Philippine Insurrection" over "Philippine-American War" to describe the conflict-ridden and brutal events that followed the Spanish-American War, especially within U.S. historiography, points the rhetorical lengths involved in maintaining power relations between the United States and Philippines. What is secured by using "Philippine Insurrection" is the "special" and "benevolent" relationship between the Philippines and the United States. Historian Paul Kramer notes, "Following [U.S. historians'] lead, they have minimized the Philippine-American War as an 'insurrection,' the shadowy aftermath of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. The war's historians also depicted it (as U.S. generals had) as not one of 'cruelty' but of restraint and 'benevolence.'" Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, and the United States, & the Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 15.

have taken iconic standing in his images.⁴⁶ The *Face Fusion I* set expresses Fuentes early compulsion to utilize and critique the surfaces of Western visual projects, as seen readily in *Bontoc Eulogy*. In *Bontoc Eulogy*, Fuentes returns to colonial images by Worcester and others, juxtaposing them together with scripted scenes to create a larger narrative that questions the epistemological certainty of American historiography and the visual technologies of U.S. empire.

Aware of the iconic status that the Filipino body takes on within American visual projects, epitomized certainly by images produced by Worcester, Fuentes turns to the medium of film and its inherent semiotic properties to challenge the very iconicity that American empire in the islands has inspired. If Fuentes “sutured” frames together in *Bontoc Eulogy* to create a narrative that sought to undermine the official historical narratives and challenge the scopical regime that they inspired, the very postcolonial act is foreshadowed by his compositional techniques and conceptual archival ethos in the *Face Fusion* series.⁴⁷ Unlike his film in which Fuentes pieces together discrete photographic frames to compose the larger project, Fuentes turns to a blank photographic frame and seamlessly produces fused facial components by sandwiching negatives together to create a finished, composite portrait in *Face Fusion I* without any further computer-assisted manipulation.⁴⁸ Despite the differences in compositional techniques, Fuentes’

⁴⁶ When asked about his familiarity with Worcester’s photographic archive, Fuentes admitted that he had seen many of the images, stating directly: “I have the images in the Worcester collection.” Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

⁴⁷ Fuentes likens the creation of *Bontoc Eulogy* to a project that relied heavily on “suturing.” The film, as Fuentes, remarks, is “kind of a Frankensteinian project.” Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

⁴⁸ Fuentes calls the production of the *Face Fusion I* series “very simple.” Fuentes layered or sandwiched negatives together to produce the fusions of facial parts, essentially creating a composite portrait, an important compositional nod to nineteenth-century scientist and photographer Francis Galton and his composite photographs (discussed later in the chapter). This process, what Fuentes calls “obsessive work,” all occurred prior to the advent of digital imaging and manipulation software such as Adobe Photoshop. Indeed, the manual labor and energy expended to produce the *Face Fusion I* portraits reflect Fuentes’ keen sense of the

film and photographic projects are driven by an awareness of semiotics and its power to create oppositional narratives or narratives of resistance.⁴⁹

The attention to facial alignments and, more generally, body positions and positioning in the *Face Fusion I* set, moreover, offers further evidence to support Fuentes' return to the American visual archives, particularly to photographs that directly image contact between colonizers and the colonized through scientific portraiture practices. Colonial photography that captured the juxtaposition of American and Filipino native bodies together conveyed a visual semiotics that facilitated and maintained the narrative of American empire. Often such photographs were staged; photographer imposed poses on their sitters; and a majority of these types of images were composed guided by the dictates and aesthetic conventions and economic demands of American colonialism, in all its intended benevolence and scientific and technological prowess.⁵⁰ To document and elucidate differences between colonizer and the colonized, American photographers turned to photographing Filipino bodies alongside other white American bodies, often placing their own bodies within the staged photographic frame. While photographs by Americans of Philippine landscapes, architectures, and the multitude of Filipino bodies certainly proved to be effective in consolidating a national sense of modernity and progress, "contact photographs" that pictured both white and brown bodies demarcated differences at the level of the body and materialized conceptions of U.S. empire in

hermeneutical force of semiotics and the narrative oppositional possibilities that the facial parts together offer to the viewers. Ibid.

⁴⁹ In his analysis of Asians in American popular culture, Robert Lee asserts: "The power of movies was both social and semiotic." Americans movies, as Lee suggests, helped shape a national consciousness and identity, as well as creating a narrative of national belonging and citizenship through moving pictures' inherent semiotic function. I invoke semiotics similarly in my read of Fuentes' film and claim that his photographs likewise take on a similar semiotic dimension. Robert Lee, *Oriental: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 119.

⁵⁰ Vergara, 11.

racialized *and* sexualized language. These images of contact between white and brown bodies, like other images, helped to fuel the voyeuristic obsession on the Filipino body guised in discourses of race, science, and modernity.

Worcester's large photographic archive is replete with images of the Philippine archipelago, in all its varying landscapes and abundant and diverse peoples who he calls "natives" and "wild tribes."⁵¹ He uses these designations interchangeably, producing the unintended and yet paradoxical effect of effacing the racially and ethnically plural landscape of the islands that he sought to systematically record on film. In all its scientific objectivity and methods, Worcester's archive conveys the limits to U.S. empire's epistemological objectives. What we find in Worcester's archive – an archive that Fuentes has admittedly encountered – are photographs that depict the *du jour* ethnographic aesthetics of displaying Filipino bodies as types – bodies profiled in makeshift photographic studios outdoors in "the wonders of the tropical forest."⁵² However in the same ethnographic typologies, Worcester has included himself, often standing next to a Filipino body. These images capture Worcester and the half-naked Filipino men or women who stand next to him facing the camera, creating iconic representations of U.S. empire (see Figures 2.30 to 2.31). Photographic types, as photography historian Brian Wallis argues, sought objectivity within the image, often ignoring compositional styling and denying the sitter any agency or subjectivity.⁵³ The value of portraits, on the other hand, emerges "principally because of the viewer's relationship to the sitter, and the ability to recognize the subject when he or she is absent."⁵⁴ While Worcester's

⁵¹ Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippine Islands and Their People* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 57.

⁵² *Ibid.* 57.

⁵³ Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes," in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco et al. (New York: Henry Abrams, 2003), 177.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

photographs show clearly the lack of agency and subjectivity bestowed on the Filipino person, the inclusion of Worcester's body within the frames evidence the hybrid functions and palpable tensions of the images as both photographic types and photographic portraits. White American viewers of these images would be able to identify with Worcester's body, stepping momentarily in his shoes and feeling superiority over the Filipino bodies that he stands next to. Moreover, a sense of titillation would perhaps befall the viewers by the proximity of Worcester's body next to the half-naked men and bare-breasted Filipino women.⁵⁵ It is this unspoken sexual undercurrent produced by the proximity of bodies in the photographs and the ambiguity and epistemological limitations of American colonial photography that Fuentes' *Face Fusion I* images respond to in his attempts to undermine the visual iconicities (or typologies) inspired by ethnographic photography.

Fuentes' *Face Fusion I* photographs rely on their affective topographies to lure the viewers into the frame. Remarking on his compositional process Fuentes notes, "it was very emotional; my work has always been about affect and feeling."⁵⁶ In this sense, the photographs in the series are portraits, as Fuentes establishes an affective connection to the fused faces. Yet similar to Worcester's photographs of himself with Filipino bodies, Fuentes' visualizes the tension between photographic types and portraits, exceeding Brian Wallis's theoretical framework and warranting pause. The *Face Fusion I* images reflect Fuentes' turn to the ethnographic archives, and arguably, to images that visualize the iconic representations of American/Western dominance over Filipino/native bodies,

⁵⁵ Brian Wallis references the tenuous line between the exotic and erotic in representations of the African body in 19th-century American photography. Wallis submits: "While there is no absolute connection between photographs of the nude body and pornography, the vaguely eroticized nature of slave daguerreotypes derives from the unwavering voyeuristic manner with which they indiscriminately survey the bodies of the Africans, irrespective of the subjects' lives." Ibid. 176.

⁵⁶ Fuentes, phone interview with the author, January 21, 2007.

and the transformation of his photographs into both photographic types and photographic portraits. As types they capture a new and perhaps improbable vision of Filipino bodies that far exceed the expectations of American visual regimes. Fuentes' method of layering negatives together, resulting in fused facial parts, makes a compositional and conceptual reference to the 19th-century composite photographs of Francis Galton. Galton used photography to validate his scientific theories of race, driven by his beliefs in eugenics. By layering negatives together of faces from particular social and racial types (criminals and Jewish people, for example), Galton promoted the belief of knowable interiorities based on exterior features – an enduring conceit that underscores ethnographic visual production (see Figure 2.32). And yet, as photographic types, Fuentes' images resignify viewing practices; the Filipino faces, in their fused forms, confuse and entice more than they promote clarity or repel. Their interiorities are fractious rather than orderly. That is to say, the images are kinetic, transgressing the static boundaries of ethnographic typologies, and affording corporeal agency to the artist and those captured within the frames. Fuentes relies on the productive tension inherent in Worcester's images to tease out the limitations of American photographic archives. And by placing himself within the photographic frames, Fuentes establishes the importance of affect and interiority that ethnographic photographs have previously denied to Filipino bodies.

The faces captured in the *Face Fusion I* set belongs to Marlon Fuentes and his first wife, a Caucasian woman. Because of Fuentes' compositional styling of the photographs, particularly the black-and-white composition and the meticulous dodging and burning that he employs, coupled with the seemingly arbitrary facial fusions, the racial identities attached to the facial parts are not immediately known. It is only

through the excavation of background information about the portraits do we discover the inclusions of Fuentes' face alongside his wife's face within the frames – their racial identities mirror the bodies captured in American “contact photographs” that display white and brown bodies. Had the portraits been conventional ethnographic photographs, we would perhaps expect Fuentes standing alongside his white wife, staring directly into the camera. And yet in the *Face Fusion I* photographs, Fuentes deconstructs precisely the semiotics behind the iconic American images by juxtaposing his own face alongside his wife's. In doing so, Fuentes highlights a seemingly organic sexual undercurrent rising forth from the face fusions that in Worcester's images are relegated to grounds for speculation. Amid the portraits of the Philippine landscape, structures, and seemingly benign images of Filipino bodies, however, Worcester's photographic archive houses images of Filipino women, bare-breasted, and in suggestive sexualized poses – what one would expect certainly to find in pin-ups or pornographic publications (see Figures 2.33). Captioned benignly as “Benguet Igorot woman, type 19. Full length front view, half reclining near stream, holding flowers,” the female body is relegated to a type in an effort to maintain scientific objectivity and obscure innuendo (see Figure 2.34). The image, however, illuminates the gendered and sexualized gaze of Worcester, and U.S. empire as a whole. If Worcester's photographic archive attempts to legitimize American colonialism in the islands, veiled in discourses of progress and modernity, then it is a colonialism that is inseparable from a visual regime driven by race, sex, and domination.

Fuentes' sexual and sensual fusions, between himself and his wife, capture palpably the colonial structures and visual regimes driven by regulation and control of

the Filipino body.⁵⁷ As the photographer, Fuentes steps into Worcester's shoes, and dictates the staging and composition of the photographs. Colonialism visualized by Worcester is driven by controlling and disciplining the native Filipino body that Fuentes' subverts, staging, in effect, the visual and epistemological possibilities of controlling not only his own body, but seductively transforming the body of his Caucasian wife. Asian American art historian Margo Machida reads a reclamation of agency exerted by Fuentes in the *Face Fusion I*. For Machida, Fuentes produces the photographs as a way "to confront his sense of cultural and emotional dislocation."⁵⁸ While the "bimorphic" fusions of Fuentes' face and the face of his wife certainly lend itself to Machida's reading – underscored by cultural adaptation within a racially exclusionist American landscape – it is precisely the ways in which the *Face Fusion I* set returns to the American ethnographic archives (epitomized by Worcester's images) that highlight the subversive and tactical properties of the series.⁵⁹ If the *Face Fusion* photographs depict Fuentes "allowing himself to accept his presence here [the United States]," they, in part, allow him to do so through a return to and reconfiguration of the American archives.⁶⁰ The agency visualized in the photographs speaks contrary to the representational constraints or the improbability of self-representation by Filipino decreed by U.S. empire. The images, likewise, confront the unimaginable reality of Filipino men engaging and controlling white female bodies not coercively, but sensually and sexually, touching upon the popular and damaging paranoia in American culture

⁵⁷ Interestingly, one of Marlon Fuentes' photographs from the *Face Fusion I* series is featured in the Asian American anthology *On a Bed of Rice: An Asian American Erotic Feast*. The image is an epigraph of sorts for the chapter entitled "Mating." See Marlon Fuentes, "Untitled (from the *Face Fusion Series*)," in *On a Bed of Rice: An Asian American Erotic Feast*, ed. Geraldine Kudaka (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 228.

⁵⁸ Margo Machida, "Out of Asia: Negotiating Asian Identities in America," 93.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and history that has resulted in representations of Filipino men as sexual predators that have resulted in violence and death.⁶¹ The meticulous attention to the light and dark properties of the skin index seamless fusions of the two races that present an improbable vision of the progeny of colonialism: Filipino bodies that control rather than submit; bodies that affirm the inherent plurality of Filipinos and defy the iconic representations produced by U.S. empire; and kinetic bodies that traverse geographies and disciplinary boundaries beyond the unsettling dichotomies propositioned by American modernity.



The Filipino face represents for Fuentes a window into the varying landscapes and often-contradictory emotions that Filipinos confront on a daily basis. In the *Face Fusion* series the faces transform into fantastical geographies, landscapes carved out by colonialism and affects rooted (routed) to personal and collective struggles.⁶² His faces take viewers beyond the surface details of the photographs and into the underlying archival motives of his creations. Indeed, the faces exemplify the tactical use of topography, cartography, and ethnographic imaging practices to confront the paradoxes and inconsistencies wrought by each disciplinary regime. Fuentes returns to the American archives in his creations in order to image their limits and failures through his *Face Fusion* series.

⁶¹ The 1929 Watsonville Riots in California exemplifies the paranoia and hysteria of White Americans toward Filipino male laborers who were sexual predators. A raid by about 400 white men on a dancehall frequented by predominately Filipino led to riots and caused numerous counts of physical abuse of Filipinos and death. See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 327-238.

⁶² The notions of “routes” and “roots” are informed by Vicente Diaz and J. Kehaulani Kauanui’s important contribution in assessing the fraught boundaries and productive tensions between native studies, Pacific studies, and cultural studies in “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge.” Rooted Pacific traditions and cultures are also routed “both metaphorically and literally, as in the sense of moving islands.” I believe the notions of “roots” and “routes” can be applied to the Philippines and Filipinos. Fuentes’ *Face Fusion* series capture the fluidity of movement he attaches to Filipino diasporic subject formation. Vicente Diaz and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13.2 (Fall 2001), 319.

The faces are windows to “geohistorical” moments. Each face “gives rise to artistic and cultural representations that imagine, remember, and trace the more complex, longer genealogies of colonial encounter, war, occupation, and forced displacements that are antecedents to Asian migration to the West.”⁶³ In coming to grips with the consequences of American modernity on the Filipino body, Fuentes images varying levels of desire in the photographed faces: a desire for his viewers to comprehend the impact of modernity and modernization projects through and on the Filipino body. Each photograph in the series thus becomes a field of vision for Fuentes, a visual technology that enables the mapping of history and memory and brings into clarity what has been ignored or forgotten.⁶⁴ Moreover, the photographs capture a desire to undermine and reformulate the index-referent (sign-signifier) tendencies of photographic and scientific modernism. Where American scientific projects fixed particular “types” of Filipinos to land (unmanaged lands, for example, are equated to uncivilized people), Fuentes’ photographs destabilize the hegemony of such a

⁶³ Lowe, xviii.

⁶⁴ In Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, he has convincingly argued through a critique of the 19th-century poem, “The Family of Eyes,” by Baudelaire that the process of modernization in 19th-century Paris and the city’s move into a period of modernity relied significantly on the radical shifts in the culture of vision engendered by the urban development of Napoleon-Haussmann boulevards. Conveyed in Baudelaire’s poem are the consequences of the radical structural alterations of the Parisian landscape, especially by the ways those that were formerly hidden from public purview had become suddenly visible. (“As the lovers sit gazing happily into each other’s eyes, suddenly they are confronted with other [poor] people’s eyes.”) The new Napoleon-Haussmann boulevards acted as fields of vision or visual technologies that brought into visibility the consequences of modernity among the inhabitants of Paris. My comparison of the Filipino body in Fuentes’ photographs to the Napoleon-Haussman boulevards is deliberate. As a field of vision or visual technology, the boulevards shaped the ways in which people visualized themselves and their surroundings, and indeed, how they understood their modern existence in relation to their history and nation. The Filipino body, the face, in the *Face Fusion* portraits, function in much the same way. The faces bring to focus the impact of modernity and the modern technology of photography on the Filipino body. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 148-164.

relationship.⁶⁵ Indeed, the faces in the photograph never fully become stable referents. The faces in *Face Fusion* series impart instead kinetic and shifting terrains, indexing a fluidity of subjectivity. This destabilization, furthermore, speaks against the notion of photographic possession: If faces and bodies cannot be fixed or do not index particular subjectivities, can they really be owned? Captured furthermore in the series is a desire to image affect – the emotional investments and stakes of displacement. Fuentes' faces center affect in the production of Filipino subjectivity within a moment driven by transnational capitalism. Without the aid of dialogue and narration as he has in *Bontoc Eulogy*, Fuentes relies solely on form and composition to impart the affective consequences of the global dispersal of Filipino bodies. And finally the images reveal a desire to conceptualize the Filipino body as an archive, a source of cartographical knowledge. Filipino bodies, for Fuentes, are resilient despite what they have endured during the period of modernity. Their resilience become potentially threatening to American empire in the ways the body can be read as maps that project dislocation and as archives of history whose narratives have been so readily forgotten. That is, as dia(e)scapic visual productions the *Face Fusion* series emerge as a powerful visual critique against the scopic regimes of American empire.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Describing the Negritos of the Philippines, the iconic savage and oft-written about indigenous group, a Philippine commissioner wrote in 1901: "Centuries ago [Negritos] were driven from the coast regions into *wilder interior portions of the islands* by Malay invaders." Not being able to defend themselves from the stronger and perhaps more advanced Malays, Negritos, as conveyed in the report, are often relegated to the "wilder interior portions of the islands," a location, to this day, they continue to be fixed. *Report of the Philippine Commission to The President Vol. I. January 31, 1900* (Washington, Government Printing Office 1900), 11. My emphasis.

⁶⁶ Although I do not delve into the performative aspects of Fuentes portraits, my analysis of the Filipino body as archive and critique of American empire is informed importantly by Asian American performing artist Denise Uyehara. Performance for Uyehara "provides a necessary vessel for remembering ... [and] provide[s] a central site from which to remember what happened to our bodies and the bodies of our neighbors." Denise Uyehara, *Maps of City & Body: Shedding Light on the Performances of Denise Uyehara* (New York: Kaya Press, 2003), 15.

FIGURES



Figure 2.1: Yong Soon Min, *Defining Moments*, 1992.
Six-part black and white photograph ensemble. 20" x 16"
Reproduced from *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*,
Elain H. Kim et al., eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)



Figure 2.2: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.3: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.4: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.5: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.6: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.7: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.8: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.9: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.10: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.11: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion I* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes.



Figure 2.12: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes



Figure 2.13: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes



Figure 2.14: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.15: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.16: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.17: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.18: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.19: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.20: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
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Figure 2.21: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8"
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes



Figures 2.22: F.J. Lamphere, *Topographical Party*, 1908, black-and-white print. Reproduced from Jonathon Best, *A Philippine Album: American Era Photograph 1900-1930* (Makati City: Bookmark, Inc., 1998).



Figure 2.23: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8."
Emphasis added with outline of the nylon string.
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes

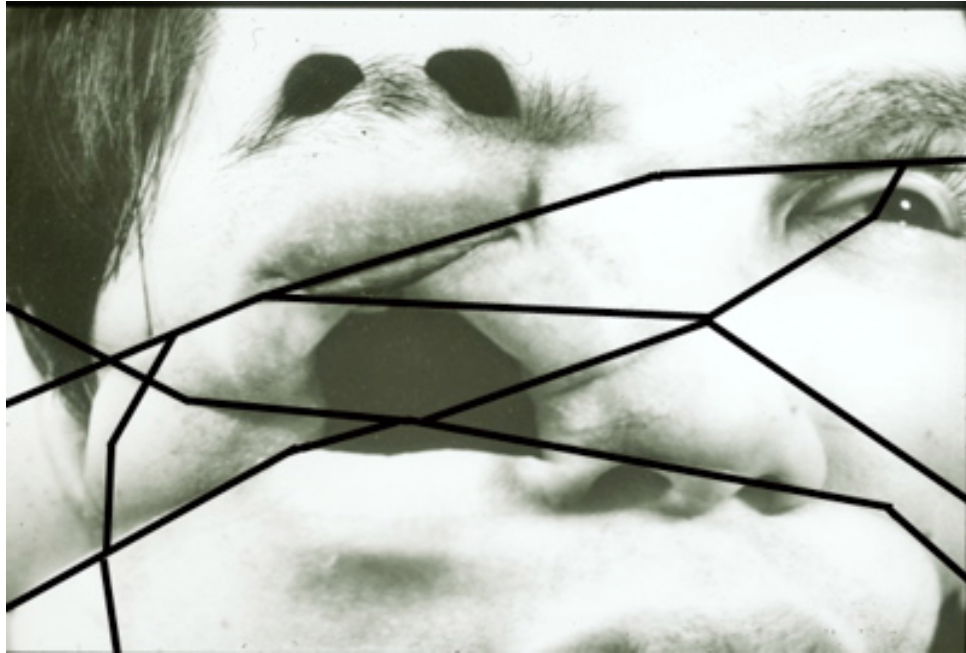


Figure 2.24: Marlon Fuentes, *Untitled*,
from the *Face Fusion II* series, 1986-90, black-and-white print, 10" x 8."
Emphasis added with outline of the nylon string.
© Marlon Fuentes. Used with permission from Marlon Fuentes

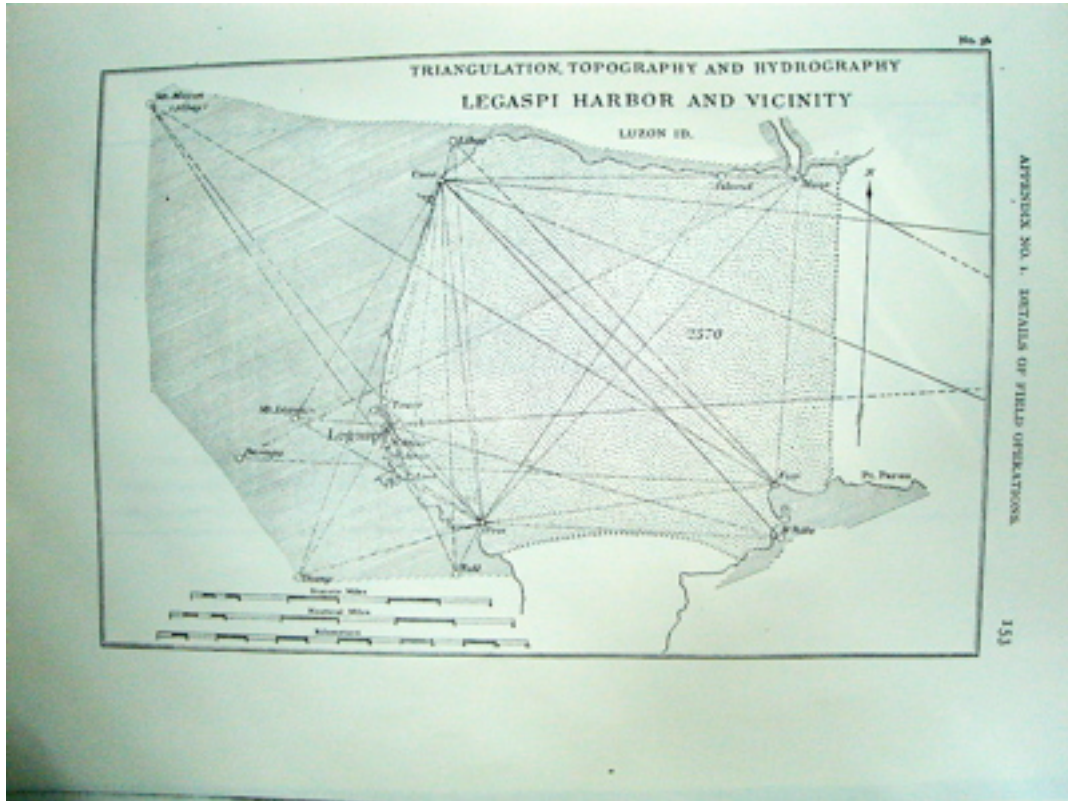


Figure 2.25: Triangulation, Topography and Hydrography Map, Legaspi Harbor and Vicinity, 1903. Reproduced from *Report of the Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey Showing the Progress of the Work From July 1, 1901 to June 30, 1902* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903).

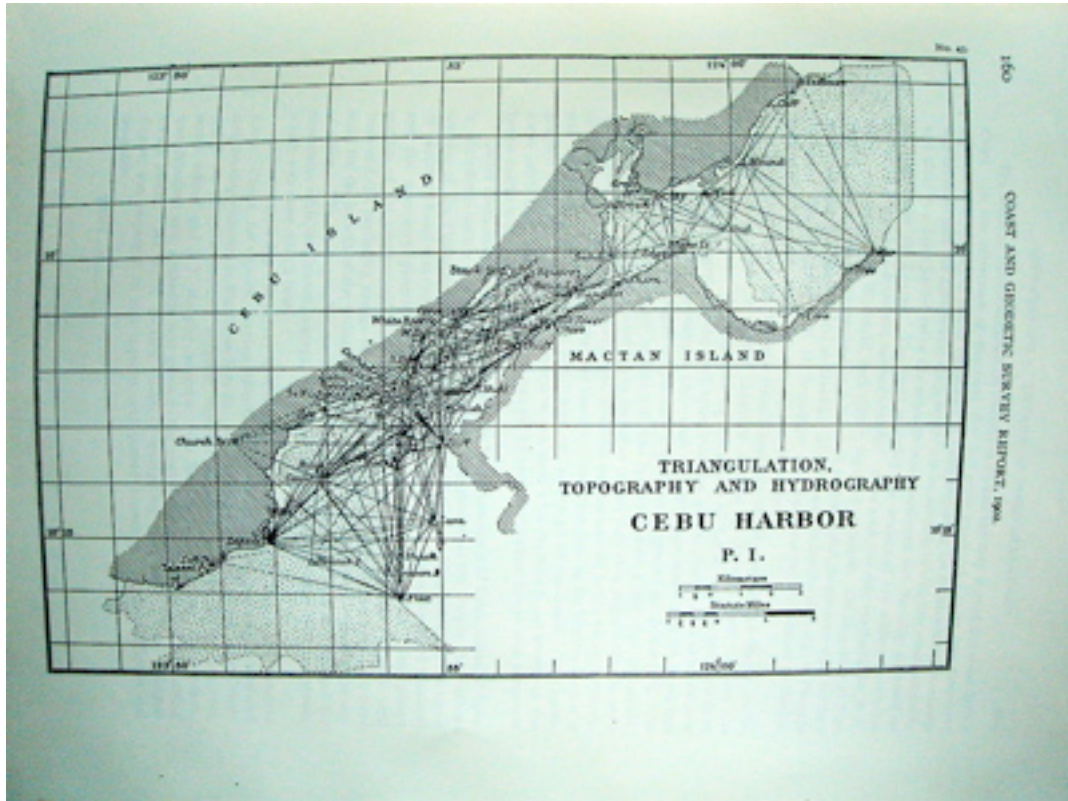


Figure 2.26: Triangulation, Topography and Hydrography Map, Cebu Harbor, 1903.
 Reproduced from *Report of the Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey
 Showing the Progress of the Work From July 1, 1901 to June 30, 1902*
 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903).

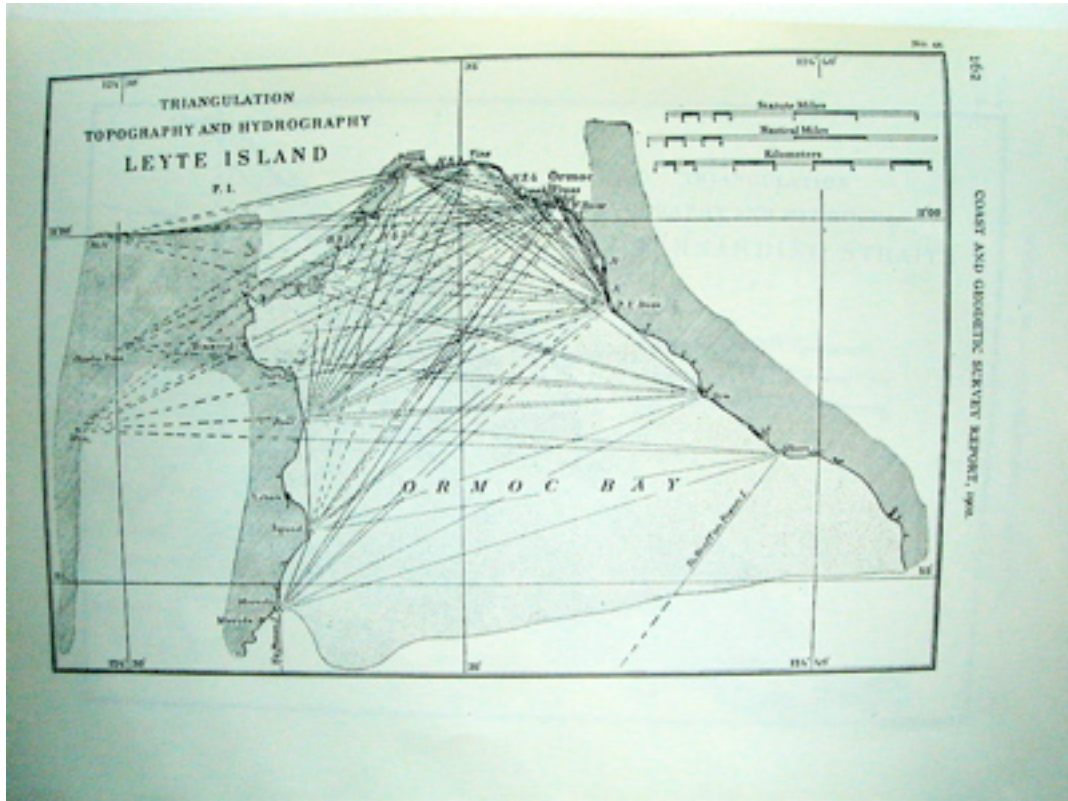


Figure 2.27: Triangulation, Topography and Hydrography Map, Leyte Island, 1903.
 Reproduced from *Report of the Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey Showing the Progress of the Work From July 1, 1901 to June 30, 1902* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903).

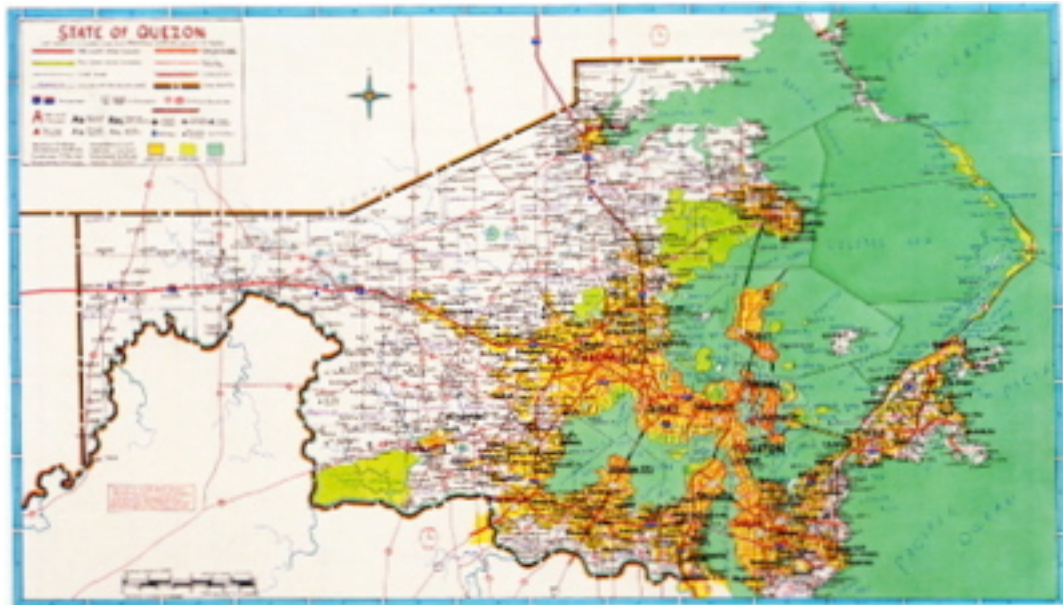
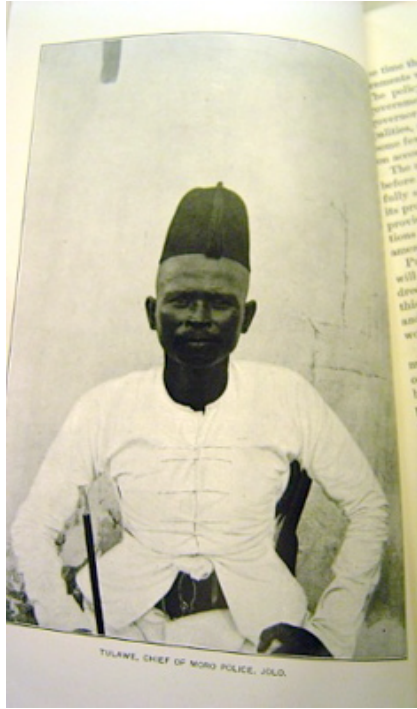


Figure 2.28: Lordy Rodriguez, *State of Quezon*, 1998, ink on paper, 22" x 30".
Reproduced from *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists*
(San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998).



Figures 2.29 - 2.30: "Tulawe, Chief of Moro Police, Jolo" (left) and "A Kalinga Woman" (right).
Photographs attributed to Dean C. Worcester.
Reproduced from *Report of the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War for the Period from December 1900 to October 15, 1901 Part 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901).



Figure 2.31: Dean C. Worcester, "Negrito man, type 3, and myself, Dolores, Pampanga, 1900," 18 x 12 cm, Albumen print, #3, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan © Regents of the University of Michigan



Figure 2.32: Dean C. Worcester, "Unmarried Negrito woman, Dolores, Pampanga, 1900,"
18 x 12 cm, Albumen print, #587, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan.
© Regents of the University of Michigan



Figure 2.33: Francis Galton, Composites, Comparison of Criminal and Normal Populations. Reproduced from Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters, and Labours of Francis Galton*, vol. 2, *Researches of Middle Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924).

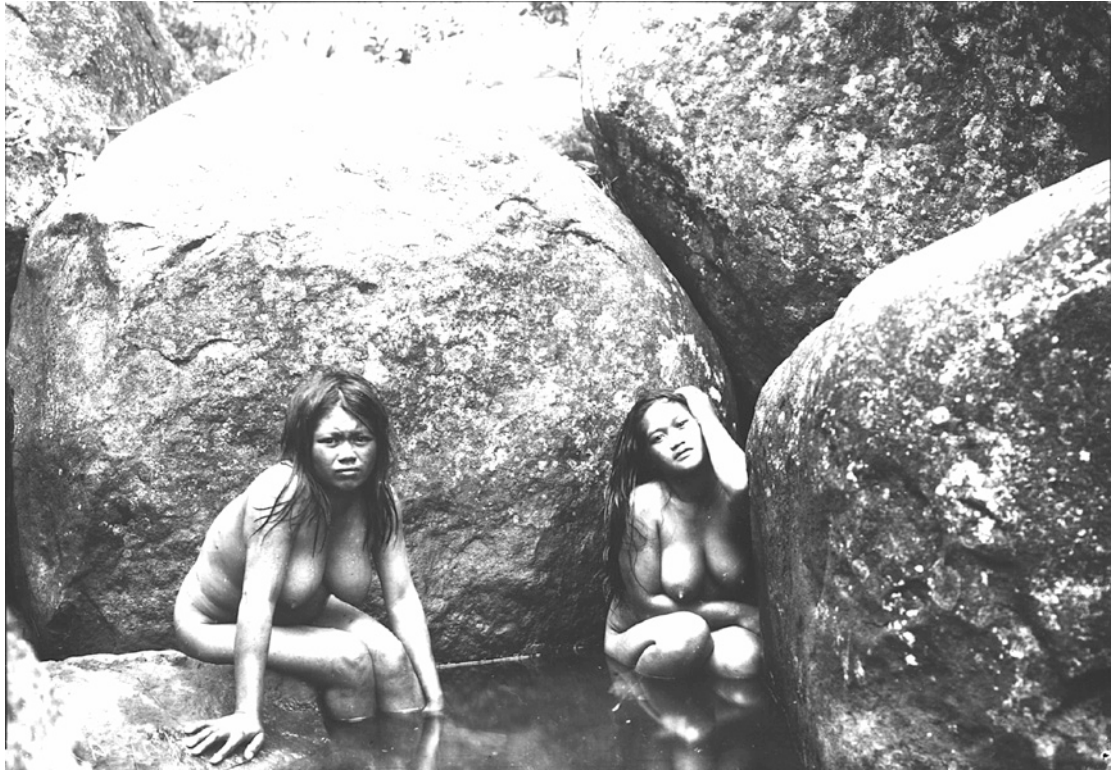


Figure 2.34: Dean C. Worcester, "Benguet Igorot women, types 18 and 19 in bath, nude,"
Baguio, Philippines, May 1904.

Reproduced from *Imperial Imaginings: The Dean C. Worcester Photographic Collection of the Philippines, 1890-1913*, eds. Carla Sinopoli et al. (Ann Arbor: Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1998). CD-ROM.

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Figure 2.35: Dean C. Worcester, "Benguet Igorot girl, type 19.
Full length front view, reclining near stream," Baguio, Philippines, May 1904.
Reproduced from *Imperial Imaginings: The Dean C. Worcester Photographic Collection of the Philippines, 1890-1913*, eds. Carla Sinopoli et al (Ann Arbor: Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1998). CD-ROM.
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CHAPTER 3

“BUT I AM A PHOTOGRAPHER!”: THE RESURFACING OF EFREN RAMIREZ’S FILIPINO AMERICAN GAY PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES

I have the power to photograph and make images. Yes, I would like to do a picture that can vouch for the meaning of that statement. I photograph because it gives meaning to my existence. It is a pursuit of my life.

– Efren Covento Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images*

PREFACE

The boldness of the 1976 June/July cover of the influential San Francisco-based gay magazine, *Vector*, would have been hard to miss at newsstands at the time of its publication.¹ Graphically, the magazine’s cover projects minimal aesthetic choices. And yet, it is precisely in its sparing composition that imbues the cover with its visually arresting cultural and political significance. The cover, alone, might have beckoned passersby with its bold pink magazine title matched by the heavy-weighted pink outline of a triangle. Indeed, by 1976, the reclamation of the pink triangle, once pinned on homosexuals by the Nazi regime, was taking on symbolic importance to the politics of

¹ *Vector* magazine was published by the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), among one of the early and influential homophile movement organization that emerged in the mid-1960s. By the end of the 1960s, “San Francisco’s most established homophile organization had survived the challenge of gay liberation, abandoned its reticence about public display, and emerged from the 1960s espousing a politics of gay rights and gay pride.” Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco 1950 – 1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 124. David Carter describes *Vector* as an “attractive magazine, which was sold on newsstands throughout the city.” David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2004), 105.

gay visibility within the gay identity movement.² To see the icon in public, whether on the cover of *Vector* or elsewhere, as a gay person in San Francisco was to recognize the political stakes that went along with gay in/visibility. Planted squarely within the center of the triangle, the provocative question “IS GAY LIBERATION DEAD?” might have, likewise, provoked pause among those who glanced at it (see Figure 3.1). The cover of *Vector* reflects competing ideas of gay political identities: taken together, the coupling of the pink triangle and the rhetorical thrust of the question convey a gay political movement in San Francisco in flux, finding its footing between the radical and coalitional politics of the New Left and an agenda based solely on the advancement of gay identity politics within the existing political landscape.³

² In explaining the choice of the pink triangle on the cover, the editors of *Vector* note: “In the last couple of years, Gays everywhere have begun to use the pink triangle as our symbol.” The editors of *Vector* also ran a reprint of a *New York Times* article from 1975, “The Yellow Star & Pink Triangle,” to provide their readers the historical basis for the iconography. “Editorial: The Yellow Star & The Pink Triangle,” *Vector*, 12.6 (June/July, 1976), 4. My use of the term “gay identity movement” is informed by Elizabeth Armstrong’s *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco 1950 – 1994*. Her work examines the transformational shifts and the trajectories in the political mobilization of lesbian and gays in San Francisco from the 1950s to the 1990s. During four decades of organizing, the shifting nature of the nomenclature of “the movement” – the homophile movement, gay liberation movement, and gay identity movement – reflect the shifting priorities and aims of leaders and their constituents: from consciousness raising projects through educational projects, activist projects based on radical coalitional politics, to mobilizing around projects based solely around gay identity (sexuality, the umbrella aligning people together despite racial, gendered, and class differences). The publication of this particular *Vector* magazine in 1976 arrived at the intersections of the growth of a gay identity movement and the waning of the radical politics of the gay liberation movement. Armstrong notes, “The movement coalesced around the simultaneous pursuit of gay rights, gay pride, and sexual expression ... the identity logic provided the cultural resources to defuse the threat posed by conflicting visions of the goals and strategies of gay organizing.” *Ibid.*, 97-98.

³ Armstrong describe Society for Individual Rights, as having “no ambivalence whatsoever about leaving behind the radical multi-issue, revolutionary politics of the New Left. Working within the established political-system was, as far as SIR was concerned, the way to improve life for homosexuals in the city.” The city Armstrong refers to is San Francisco. *Ibid.* 124-125. Interestingly, the editorial, “The State of the Movement,” in the June/July 1976 issue of *Vector*, conveys a contrarian’s perspective to Armstrong’s assessment. The editorial presents a conflicted, if not ambivalent, attitude about “the state of the gay movement,” projecting an aspiration of sorts for the radical political mobilizations of years past. The editors point out, “The activists who used to demonstrate at the drop of a slur are now deep into [their gay] lifestyles.” “Editorial: The State of the Movement,” *Vector*, 12.6 (June/July, 1976), 4. The magazine polled gay people to voice their opinion on the death of gay liberation, and many of the answers reflect a

In the issue, the editors of *Vector* convey an implicit desire to situate the gay movement and those within (however direct or tenuous their connection might be) through a provocative question posed to their readers in an editorial entitled “The State of the Movement”: “Where the hell ARE we going?”⁴ The question itself reflects an undercurrent within the gay community, a seismic movement of sorts with the potential of veering the community in divergent directions.⁵ It is as if the emphasis on the “ARE” (all capitalized) was somehow (deliberately) displaced from an emphasis on the “we” in the question. It is the “we” that is the obvious subject and rhetorical focus. The cover, alone, denotes the presence of a gay readership/audience, a group of gay people who might be considered part of the inclusive functions of the “we.” To be sure, it is to those gay readers that the editors direct the question. And yet, the un-emphasized and un-capitalized “we” seemingly connote an ambivalence on envisioning the pronoun’s antecedent as stable or even whole. The use of “we” signifies a tenuous grammatical space, and serves as a metaphor that aptly communicates the shifting boundaries of the political geographies of the gay community in San Francisco (and elsewhere).⁶ The editors’ question highlights a rupture of vision of a mythic unified gay movement during this period. It is not a singular direction to which those within the gay

wavering of opinion. Bill Berdemphl, publisher and key figure within the SIR, answered: No! It’s one of the stupidest questions I’ve ever been asked. Who in the world came up with that question? The question is an affront. If you were around fifteen years ago, you’d know that gay liberation isn’t dead. There is always a degree of apathy about everything.” Randy Seanor et al., “Whatever happened to the Movement? Is it dead?,” *Vector*, 12.6 (June/July 1976), 19.

Berdemphl’s response, a key figure within SIR, is certainly at odds with Armstrong’s evaluation.⁴ “Editorial: The State of the Movement,” *Vector*, 4.

⁵ The semiotics and iconography used on the cover *Vector* already prefigure the tensions present within the gay community by 1976.

⁶ According to Armstrong, *Vector* magazine was one of three popular gay-oriented publications in San Francisco published between 1964 and 1970. Armstrong, 220. Judging from the “Letter” section of the magazine, *Vector*’s reach surpassed the city’s borders into as far eastward as Virginia.

community are “going” in 1976 – much to the unease of the editors – but rather the community’s political destination takes on plural dimensions.

Immediately following the question, the editors offer their readers a seemingly benign and open-ended reaction. “We wish we had some good answers,” the editors point out, “All we have are questions.”⁷ Contrary to the editors’ opinion, the structure of their pithy editorial question, while perhaps not the answers they had in mind, does offer a basis from which to introspect. The question offers a window into the changing political landscape of the gay community. While the question imparts a palpable frustration among the editors, it also circumscribes the existence of differing strands of political thought within the community, especially with regard to the radical contours of “gay liberation” as a basis for movement. The frustration also points specifically to the challenges of political unity and cultural cohesion within an otherwise diverse gay setting of San Francisco. One needs only turn several pages later in the magazine to the “Clippings: News from All Over” section to find a reprint of then San Francisco Mayor George Moscone’s 1976 proclamation of “Gay Freedom Day” and “Gay Pride Week.” Moscone’s proclamation begins by extolling San Francisco as “being a city with diverse lifestyles...[with] a reputation for appreciating the contributions of many different cultures and lifestyles.”⁸ Indeed, the editors’ frustration over the seeming dissolution of political unity within the city might thus stem from the challenges posed by the very diversity celebrated by Moscone’s proclamation. The editors’ rhetorical question and their reaction provide a tacit corollary to 1976 Gay Freedom Day Parade slogan – “Our Diversity is Our Strength.”⁹

⁷ “Editorial: The State of the Movement,” *Vector*, 4.

⁸ “Clippings: Around the World,” *Vector*, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The 1976 June/July issue of *Vector* emerged at crossroads within the gay movement in San Francisco, certainly in terms of gay politics, culture, and identity. The magazine, with its forceful cover and emotional opinion editorials printed alongside the gay-themed articles, essays, and reviews (some of which are far from political, while others provide humor and general information and advocacy to the magazine's gay readership) stands as a space in which gay identities are not only being shaped and produced, but also contested.¹⁰ We see the often-contradictory processes of gay (political) identity formation evident in the sentiment of a San Francisco artist who was asked whether gay liberation was dead: "Fights and struggles of liberation on the individual level can never die. On the unified level they can die."¹¹ The artist's comment speaks to an inherent limitation of a political movement that cuts across multiple axes of subject formation; the artist regards "the individual" as the catalyst for change. When asked the same question, a student at San Francisco State University, remarked, "I hope it isn't dead. I feel that the more people exposed to differences the less of a threat those differences become."¹² The seemingly contradictory juxtapositions between the celebration of gay identity and the criticisms of the gay liberation movement are emblematic of the negotiations of diversity and the material stakes of a particular kind of (political) visibility and sensibility by those within gay community in the mid-1970s.



¹⁰ Robert Lee in *Orientalisms* describes "popular culture" as "always a contested terrain." It is within the terrain of popular culture that American national identity get contested and produced. *Vector*, as an important cultural artifact of the gay community, functions similarly as a space in which gay identity is forged but also challenged. Robert Lee, *Orientalisms: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 6.

¹¹ Seanor et al., 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19-21.

Found within the pages of *Vector* amid the freighted celebrations and contestations of gay politics and culture, is a collection of photographs that, at first glance, stand at odds with the weighty political thrust of the issue's cover and accompanying responses therein. The black-and-white images project an air of calm and pensiveness (see Figures 3.2 - 3.5). The photographer exploits the properties of light and dark within, for example, compositions of male nudes posed sensually and erotically in nature, to project a feeling of detachment, seemingly unruffled by the polemics occurring within and outside of the magazine's pages (see Figures 3.4. - 3.5). The photographs start a page immediately after the cover story: "Whatever happened to the Movement? Is it dead?" The images, however, are not just aberrations from the larger thematic strands found within the magazine. Together they offer a visual rejoinder to the questions posed by the cover and cover story; they portend, as well, to possible answers and directions that the editors' of the magazine seek out with their question: "Where the hell ARE we going?". What we find on the bottom-half of the first page of the photography collection is an image of a long-haired, bearded man of color in mid-motion wearing a dress, with a white bearded man crouching on the ground ahead of him (see Figure 3.2). The photograph captures the properties of perspective by framing the image using the pathway, wall, ceiling, and ionic columns that extend through to the background. In doing so, the movements of the man are accentuated; his hair and dress jerk back as he moves forward. As the man turns his faces back to the camera, his gaze shoots through the frenzied action of his hair towards the image's viewers, signaling to those behind him. With his left hand raised, he directs the viewers of the image to follow him. We might consider the framing of the scene in our contemplation of the

editors' question of where the collective "we" is going. Indeed, we might ask ourselves instead: "Where is *he* going?"

The photograph, *Untitled* (2V/18I), ca. 1976, is part of a six-image collection in *Vector* entitled "The Portfolio: The Eye of Efren Ramirez" (see Figure 3.2)¹³ Efren Ramirez, a Filipino American gay photographer, is the man frozen in media res beckoning his viewers.¹⁴ If the articles, essays, and stories in *Vector* provide a lens through which to glean the political possibilities and predicaments engendered by the gay community (the collective "we"), the photographic portfolio, and, in particular, *Untitled* (2V/18I), focuses on "the individual" and "the personal" in navigating the

¹³ The images included in the collection in *Vector* are not captioned, nor do they have titles. For the purposes of clarity, I have devised a systematic approach to labeling Ramirez's photographs in *Vector*. Each photograph is labeled as "Untitled" followed in parentheses by a number that corresponds to the location of the image in the magazine, starting from the top and working to the bottom of the page, and a "V" for *Vector*. Thus, the first image in *Vector* is: *Untitled* (1V). Furthermore, the images are not accompanied by any specifications, size, paper type, location and year produced. For the purposes of this chapter, I have attached "ca. 1976" alongside my titles of the image, as the sources of all the images I use to write this chapter all date to 1976. The image was part of Efren Ramirez's compilation of photographs published in the same year as *Vector*. The compilation, which I examine later in the chapter, is entitled *In Pursuit of Images*. Like the naming convention I devised for the photographs in *Vector*, images in *In Pursuit of Images* lack titles and other specifications. I have labeled each image with "Untitled" and in parentheses a number that corresponds to its position in the collection, followed by the letter "I," for *In Pursuit of Images*. Thus, the first image in the collection is *Untitled* (1I). For images that are used in both *Vector* and *In Pursuit of Images*, their designation, in parentheses, is separated by a solidus. *Untitled* (2V) is also in Ramirez's photography collection, so its correct designation in this chapter is *Untitled* (2V/18I). There is one image per page in *In Pursuit of Images*. There is one exception to the labeling convention: for the cover photograph of *In Pursuit of Images*, I use *Untitled* (Cover), ca. 1976.

¹⁴ In the compilation, *Untitled* (2V/18I) is also accompanied by a full-frontal shot of Efren and the same white bearded man kneeling between the columns: *Untitled* (17I) (see Figure 3.20). The features of Ramirez's face are more visible than in *Untitled* (2V/18I). In a dramatic narrative of his appearance, Ramirez writes in the "Preface" to *In Pursuit of Images*, in which he mentions his "slanted eyes," "flat face," and length of his hair. He surmises, "Without your mustache and beard, you look like a dyke." Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (San Francisco: Peace & Pieces, 1976), np. The same long-haired and bearded man of color in the two images also resembles the portrait on the cover of the compilation, *Untitled* (cover of *In Pursuit of Images*, ca. 1976) (see Figure 3.6) In 1978, the gay magazine *Alternate: What's Happening in Your World* reprinted *Self-portrait* (along with other images from *In Pursuit of Images*). The magazine captioned *Self-portrait* as "Efren Convento Ramirez." I have concluded that Efren Ramirez is pictured the three images describe above. See Efren Ramirez, "Exhibit: Images," *Alternate: What's Happening in Your World*, 1.4 (1978), 24-26.

political, cultural, and racial trajectories of gay identity during the formative aftermath of the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s in San Francisco. The photographs are microsites that visualize the aesthetic negotiations of Ramirez that concurrently produce macro commentaries of the politics of gay visibility that expands the vision of the collective “we.” Where differences and diversity embodied and emboldened the gay community, evidenced throughout the pages in *Vector*, the terms also call into question the very cohesion and unity that they rhetorically inspired. Ramirez’s small portfolio of images take notions of gay diversity and difference out of their rhetorical abstractions and ground them visually through the use of a differing array of gay bodies and geographies. The photographs, in effect, become commentaries concerned with the political stakes of spatial belonging in the United States produced by a Filipino American gay photographer.

While little attention has been given to Efren Ramirez and his photography since the 1976 publication of *Vector, Untitled* (2V/18I) jumps out of the pages of the magazine, instigated perhaps by the central figure in motion; frozen in time, his hand raised above his head, his gaze peering directly at us, the image embodies Ramirez’s “eye/I.”¹⁵ “The Portfolio” is appropriately modified by “The Eye of Efren Ramirez,” merging his photographic “eye” and the “I” of his subjectivity; the conflation of “eye/I” reveal the interplay between Ramirez’s photographic practices and formations of his identity, and importantly to his public and private mediations. Ramirez observes, “I photograph because it gives meaning to my existence. It is a pursuit of my life (*IPI*).”¹⁶ Much like his other photographs in the collection, *Untitled* (2V/18I) plays to the predominantly gay

¹⁵ To date, critical scholarship on Efren Ramirez’s photographs is non-existent.

¹⁶ Henceforth, quotations by Ramirez will be designated using parenthetical notations. Thus, quotations from *In Pursuit of Images* will be parenthetically noted as (*IPI*). Citations from *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*, which I discuss in more detail later in the chapter, will be parenthetically noted as (*ANFP*).

male sensibilities and erotic proclivities of the readership of *Vector*.¹⁷ Imbued within the photograph (along with the others in the portfolio) is an erotic and kinetic energy. The image becomes more than just mere documentary of an event in history, but rather Ramirez's aesthetic sensibilities and compositional choices work to compel and move the viewers.¹⁸ Roland Barthes demarcates an important difference between erotic photography and pornography – the latter, devoid of, what he calls, “blind field.”¹⁹ The blind field is a dynamic space of encounter between the viewer and the photography. For Barthes, erotic photography “takes the spectator outside of its frame.”²⁰ The erotic image becomes more than just the sum of what is pictured; the image itself becomes a sensory experience. The photograph, to use Barthes terms, “animates” the viewer into intellectual and affective terrains that exist outside of its frame.²¹

Propelling this chapter forward are questions inspired and animated by Ramirez's “eye/I.” The chapter explores the resurfacing of this Filipino American

¹⁷ Asides from establishing that *Vector* had a gay and politically responsive readership, little is known about demographic information broken down by race, class, and sex of its readership. Bog Ostertag, however, notes, “The readers of *Vector* were building a community; in a few urban pockets there was a political movement, and the 55,000 readers across the country were starting to look like a national constituency.” Osterag's observation of *Vector*'s readers looking like a “national constituency” suggests a readership of predominantly white gay men. Bob Ostertag, *People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 86.

¹⁸ According to Roland Barthes, the “historical interest” in photography of its viewers defines “the *studium*.” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill & Wang: New York, 1981), 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 59.

²⁰ Embedded within the erotic photograph, as Barthes notes, is a *punctum* that acts as “a kind of subtle *beyond*” (original emphasis). Unlike pornography – “a fetish,” as Barthes observes, the erotic photograph animates the viewer and is, itself, innately animated by its compositional properties. In his discussion of erotic photography and the *punctum*, Barthes examines Robert Mapplethorpe's *Self-Portrait*, 1975, which he has mislabeled *Robert Mapplethorpe: Young Man with Arm Extended*. The image captures Mapplethorpe's body cut off by the photograph's frame; he is shirtless, with his arm extended across the center of the frame; his index finger slightly extends past the opposite border. Much of his body resides outside of the photographic frame, so that viewers are denied the vision of Mapplethorpe's naked body (if, of course, he naked). For Barthes, the image is not a pornographic one, as “the pornographic body shows itself, it does not give itself, there is no generosity in it.” The composition of the image does not permit Barthes to see the man's body, though it animates Barthes to think about what might lie beyond the image's frame. Mapplethorpe's image inspires “the ‘light’ (good) desire of eroticism.” *Ibid.* 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

photographer and his photographic archives and the ways in which Ramirez' constructs a politics of vision and visibility driven by the transnational navigation of his identity across the physical and psychic, and public and private, geographies of the Philippines and the United States. Ramirez's visual work, indeed his very existence, has been relegated into the archives for over 30 years; the resurfacing of his photographs adds exciting dimensions to the configurations of gay identity and creations of gay spaces in San Francisco during the formative 1970s—a decade that saw the growth of social and political movements mobilized around race, class, gender, sexuality, as well as anti-Vietnam War sentiment and the support of Third World liberation. The 1970s saw the emergence and growth of the Asian American movement, a political space that mobilized Filipino Americans within its core constituency and where one would expect to locate Ramirez.²² Ramirez's images, however, communicates a focus outside of the boundaries of the Asian American movement; his interest, instead, is concentrated on predominately gay white male bodies and his place among them. Of what the situation was like for a gay man of color during the 1970s, Russell Leong declares, "his situation was problematic," given the dominance of gay white male culture.²³ And yet, Ramirez's photographs convey quite the opposite connection to the gay white male community; throughout his collection, a sense of serenity is palpable, a sign perhaps of Ramirez's good relations with his white gay subjects. We might consider Ramirez's detachment to the Asian American movement as response to the heteronormative cultural nationalist project of the movement.²⁴ What his photographs project is an intimate look at

²² See *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, ed. Steve Louie et al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001).

²³ Russell Leong, "Introduction: Home Bodies and the Body Politic," in *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russell Leong (New York: Routledge, 1996), 6.

²⁴ The promulgation of a heteronormative Asian American cultural nationalist project during the 1970s is evidenced in the preface of the 1974 *Aieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*,

formations of Ramirez's Filipino American gay identity during this defining period for gays and Asian Americans. His photographs add layers to the field of Filipino American studies, which continue to be constrained by the limits of the archives and historiography. With the discovery of the photographs in *Vector*, other important archival discoveries have followed suit. It is my goal that these discoveries will help to re-introduce Ramirez and his body of work to the fields of Filipino American visual and queer studies.

In 1973 Efren Ramirez published an autobiography entitled *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*. The short autobiography details Ramirez's troubled relationship with his mother in the Philippines as a teenager, capturing in detail the tenuous and interrelated boundaries "family," "body," and "home." In the autobiography, Ramirez envisions liberation from his mother, and ultimately his place of birth, the Philippines, and life anew in the United States. While his autobiography mentions not a word about his gay identity, it nevertheless illuminates his photographic practices of gay spaces and bodies in San Francisco, instilling an affective and autobiographical depth to images.

In the same year of the publication of *Vector*, 1976, Ramirez's published a remarkable volume of photographs, *In Pursuit of Images*, that range from quotidian shots of gay urban spaces and the diversity of gay men of San Francisco to the delicately staged portraits of gay men amid the backdrop of nature; interspersed with the images are poetry by Ramirez that reflect the intimate connections between text and image. *In Pursuit of Images* is held together by an ethos of gay visibility and, what I argue, an

written by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong. According to the editors, as David Eng points out, the "legitimate Asian American racial subject should ideally be: male, heterosexual, working class, American born, and English speaking." David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 209.

archival imperative premised on permanence. It is, as Ramirez observes, a desire “to document a life around me which is also a part of me. This is gay life (*IPI*).” The photographs and poetry capture Ramirez’s sensual and sexual confrontations with geography, specifically the American gay spaces in which he lives and works. In resurfacing his photographs, the chapter will explore the weighty issues of “family,” “body,” and “home” within his autobiographical work as well as a selection of his photography from *Vectors* and *In Pursuit of Images*. Turning back to the photograph *Untitled* (2V/18I), Ramirez success in picturing spatial perspective becomes an allegory of Ramirez’s Filipino American gay “eye/I.” It is his own Filipino American gay horizon to which he motions his viewer and to which his movements are directed.²⁵

VISIONARY EYE/I

Efren Ramirez begins his “Preface” of *In Pursuit of Images*, by noting “I started out with my camera to make my own visual documents of fantasies and dreams (*IPI*).” The succinct statement directs our attention to two interlocking concepts that resound powerfully in his photography: self-representational practices and archival imperative. The practice of self-representation is a process that affords Ramirez the opportunity to see and define himself on his own terms. Ramirez is aware of the visual constraints that have governed representational practices of the Filipino body. But rather than impede his photographic output, these forces have generated a photographic vision premised on a privileged *and* intimate relationship between photographer and subject, embracing the subjectivities of both. In short, his turn to photography has facilitated the creation of a

²⁵ Where in *Untitled* (2V/18I), Ramirez’s framing of perspective assumes an invisible horizon that extends the length of the background, in *Untitled* (8I), Ramirez photographs the San Francisco city atop the roof of a building. The gay horizon is visibly situated atop the clouds, above the city (see Figure 3.11)

visionary eye/I that is driven by a respect for the transformational power of photography and its archival potential.

The camera, for Ramirez, is the vehicle that permits him to break free from the constraints of representations and the visual archives, both of which are sustained and exploited by the West.²⁶ In the "Note About the Author" (the preface to Ramirez's *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*), the editor of the publication goes so far as to call Ramirez's written work "a reflective catharsis;" it is also a fitting description of the role the camera plays in Ramirez's life.²⁷ It is a catharsis that Ramirez, even at the date of the publication of his autobiography, seeks out certainly because of the continued misrepresentations cast about Filipinos and the Philippines in his new country of residence. Ramirez is from, as his editor notes, "a war-torn country where many had to resort to eating grass to stay alive."²⁸ The choice to use the ghastly details to describe Filipinos capture the editor's own representational assault; in his appeal to the sympathies of the readers and set the historical context of Ramirez's emergence, the editor generates a picture of Filipinos and the Philippines as devastated, victimized, and in need of being rescued. It is within the context of World War II that the editor situates Ramirez's emergence, a war not only of military incursions, but also as John Dower notes, a race war that "exposed raw prejudices, and was fueled by racial pride, arrogance, and rage on many sides."²⁹ Indeed, the war becomes symbolic of battles fought along the intertwined visual fronts of race and representation. The camera allows Ramirez to counter these images and to move beyond the militaristic, and hence

²⁶ See Chapter 1, "Surface-Depth Tactics: Marlon Fuentes' *Bontoc Eulogy* and the Reconfiguration of the Archives," and Chapter 2, "Improbable Topographies: Marlon Fuentes and the Kinetic Landscapes of the *Face Fusion Series*."

²⁷ Todd Lawson, "Note About the Author," in *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer* by Efren Ramirez (San Francisco: Peace & Pieces, 1973), np.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ John Dower, *War Without Mercy* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 4.

masculine and heteronormative, visual frameworks fueled by the demands of war and imperialism.

The camera affords Ramirez an oppositional visual perspective, a view-point suffuse with his ideas about photographic intimacy and the imaged body. Ramirez is astutely aware of the power and privilege associated with the camera, along with the consequences of abusing the technology. His reverence to the medium is palpable when he writes:

Can you imagine someone intruding into your attic, learning its secret doors and then divulging the treasures he finds there in public? No. You just don't do that because one's privacy is a fundamental right which must be protected, honored. The photographer becomes the *guardian* of those secrets. To make intimate pictures is to be given a privilege by the person who will be in front of your lens (IPI)³⁰

Ramirez associates photography ironically to a "special relationship" between the photographer and those being photographed. Ramirez observes, "You are given a special privilege; a liaison of trust and understanding, a mutual sanction (IPI)."

Ramirez's remarks indicate recognition of the history of American visual projects in the islands and the inequities that these projects have engendered; his thoughts also convey a conscious move away from these oppressive frameworks. The camera acts not as a weapon but rather as a technology that preserves, safeguards, and archives the "treasures."

Ramirez becomes the "guardian" to the camera's visual capabilities. By turning to photography, Ramirez wrests a certain degree of power from those who have controlled visual technologies and visual distributions channels within the geographic spaces that he has lived. Western photographic modernity in the Philippines and the United States has created a controlling system of visibility, guided in large part by the

³⁰ Original emphasis.

convergence of scientific notions of race and rarefied visions of (non)reproductive (non)citizen bodies. Certainly then the practice of self-portraiture has afforded Ramirez the freedom to control the compositional surfaces and conceptual depths of his own photographs. Access to the camera has empowered Ramirez to envision himself as a photographer. As if addressing the historical constraints that have denied Filipinos the right to self-represent, Ramirez proclaims, “But I *am* photographer! I have the power to photograph and make images (*IPI*).”³¹ The practice of self-portraiture serves dual functions for Ramirez. On one level, the practice is an actualization and celebration of Ramirez’s identity. The act of creating a self-portrait would be, as he observes, “Something I could treasure, love and be proud of. I know I couldn’t just stand in front of the camera looking like an idiot. I wanted it to be a celebration (*IPI*).” In one such moment of producing a self-portrait, he notes, “I had been conditioned to be behind the viewfinder, but this time I was in *front* of it, enjoying what nature had given me (*IPI*).” Ramirez reaction to the process is a combination of unease followed by an unrestrained sense of photographic fulfillment and love of his body. The production of self-portraits, on another level, is an act of defiance to the constraints that have stood in the way of Ramirez’s visual output. Ramirez’s photographic self-portraits have immortalized his face and gaze to the world, in ways that challenge the very photographic conventions that have been enacted onto his body by others.

In *Untitled (Cover)*, ca. 1976, for instance, Ramirez’s captures compositionally the kinetic consequences of “the celebration” of his body and his identity as a photographer (see Figure 3.6). Ramirez observes, “The experience [of self-portraiture] was something like total absorption into the Self (*IPI*).” Ramirez is caught in mid-motion, the black-and-

³¹ Original emphasis.

white image blurred perhaps by a long shutter speed and the movement of his body at the time of film exposure. But even in the blurred context, the image conveys a sharpness of emotion. The surface details of the portrait guide us into its sensory depth. Indeed, the figure is alive, both physically and emotionally.³² His figuration in the portrait signals perhaps to a state of euphoria, or perhaps he is imaged heaving sighs of relief for finally being able to expose himself on his own terms. If the latter, we might consider the action of his hand that is clearly accentuated by light. The image captures his hands lifting his long hair away from his face; in doing so, we are stopped by his facial features that appear from underneath. The lighting bears on Ramirez's forehead, nose, and cheeks, bringing attention to what would be his otherwise hidden face. The darkness of his hair bleeds into the rest of his body and visually frames the emergence of his face. The action of his hand lifting his hair away from his face stands a pertinent sign for Ramirez's command of his body and camera; it also stands an apt metaphor for his visual emergence.

We might consider the notion of emergence—his face and identity in *Untitled* (Cover)—as symbolic of the ways Ramirez considers the temporal functions of photography. Exposure to light onto the film's surface tinges photographic production with a sense of immediacy; visibility emerges on photographic paper immediately after its exposure to chemical solutions. Arising after continued photographic development, to use Ramirez's terms, are "visual documents" that together produce his photographic archive. Through his use of "visual documents" instead of "photographs," Ramirez's

³² The idea that *Untitled* (Cover), ca. 1976 possesses an interiority or depth is a departure from the ways American ethnographers and anthropologists—as well as the American viewing public—during the American colonial period in the Philippines pictured Filipino bodies. As objects of fascination, specimens to be collected, or bodies to be managed and disciplined, American photographic portraiture practices of Filipinos held them within the static and lifeless confines of the photographic frame. See especially Chapter 2, "Improbable Topographies: Marlon Fuentes and the Kinetic Landscapes of the *Face Fusion* Series."

brings attention to photography's ability to document and record, pointing to its archival potential and epistemological importance, not only within the immediate present of photographic development but also for its future potential. Ramirez's conceptualization of his own photographic production is not limited to the artistic functions of the medium. Its ability to "operate on many levels to engage both the mind and eye (*IPI*)" reflects Ramirez's vision of photography as a repository, an archive that engages viewers' intellect as much as their aesthetics. He is, as one critic observed, "an artist; a chronicler of history."³³ Photography thus emerges as means to record "the vitality of our experience" that might allow viewers – in the present and future context – to, as Ramirez observes, "acquaint ourselves with something we have not known before (*IPI*)."

DEPARTURES: MOTHER & SON

There exists within Efren Ramirez's photography an undeniable and triangulated sense of intimacy between the viewers, the photography, and the photographer, placing it at the core of his work. In *Untitled* (5V), ca. 1976, and *Untitled* (6V), ca. 1976 (both published in *Vector*), for example, the natural lighting in both scenes directs viewers attention to the gay male body at the center of the images; in both images viewers are implicated in the very confined space, indoors and outdoors, that the man inhabits (see Figure 3.4 and 3.5). Ramirez frames male nudity and exhibitionism in both photographs as shared intimate acts between the viewer and the viewed. Although it is not just exhibitionism that the photographer demands us to see, it is also the private act of masturbation that is shared in *Untitled* (15I), ca. 1976 (see Figure 3.19).³⁴ Ramirez

³³ Ramirez, "Exhibit: Images," 25.

³⁴ The same man is photographed in *Untitled* (15I), *Untitled* (5V), and *Untitled* (6V).

observes, “To make intimate pictures means to delve in the private world of other people (*IPI*).” Ramirez composes the gay male nudes not as abject objects deserving of derision. Rather, the framing of the body in each of the images is as delicate as the light hitting the male body. We, as viewers, have encroached onto the space of the male figure in the three images; our proximity to him is made even more tangible by the physical borders of the image. The man’s response is not of shame or indignation, but of calm, sensuality, and welcome. Our encroachment of his physical space is not limited to the dimensions of the photographic frames, but also reaches into the man’s private gay world.

Though it is not only the presence of the male figure in the images nor only his world to which we are privy. Also within the scenes, the photographer implicates his own private and personal memories and experiences. These repositories of thoughts and emotions inform the aesthetic choices in the male nudes and certainly in his larger photographic oeuvre. Ramirez’s sense of “the intimate” in his photographs is tied to his conceptions of space and belonging – specifically his ideas of “home” – during his experiences in the Philippines prior to his relocation to the United States in 1960.³⁵ His turbulent experiences as a teenager in the Philippines and his navigation through family turmoil are detailed in a short autobiography entitled *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*, published in 1973.³⁶ The title of the short work establishes right away the

³⁵ Ramirez discusses a letter he had received in 1975 informing him about his mother’s death in the Philippines. By then it had been 15, he notes, since he left the Philippines. Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images*, np.

³⁶ *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer* consists of 12 pages of autobiographical text, one page devoted to the preface by the editor, and a page at the very end for an announcement for two collection of poetry by Peace & Pieces Press. By 1976, Peace & Pieces Press becomes Peace & Pieces Foundation, the publisher of Ramirez’s *In Pursuit of Images*, with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, Literature Program and the California Arts Council. While the demographics of the readership of Peace & Pieces Press/Foundation publication remains unclear, the advertisement for the collection of poetry on the last page of *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino*

link between his photographic practice and his past experiences. He does not title the work with his proper name, “Efren Ramirez,” but rather his attribution of “the notes” to his identity as a “Filipino photographer” signals their significance to his photographic output. In the “Note About the Author,” the preface to *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer*, the editor of the publication observes, “Ramirez maintains an optimistic and resourceful eye on the future.”³⁷ We might, however, consider Ramirez’s appreciation of his past—even if it is a past fraught with physical and psychic trauma—in facilitating the emergence of his photographic vision.



Published in 1973, *Autobiographical Notes of a Filipino Photographer* offers a rare window into the life of Efren Ramirez as he shuffles across various Philippine spaces, homes, and temporal moments during his childhood years. It is a period fraught with familial drama and turmoil, and acts of fortitude and self-perseverance. Throughout the piece, Ramirez struggles to gain acceptance from his biological mother, who, as Ramirez describes, “was a vision of fear,” even if at times his actions seem futile. His writing reflects an innate sense of introspection of his mother’s actions towards him, as well as a constant attempt to understand why, as he writes, “I made her mad no matter what I did or said or thought (ANFP).” His mother’s actions towards him only fuel his desire to

Photographer yields a few clues. The collection advertised is entitled *Patriotic Poems of Amerikkka*, edited by the same editor, Todd Lawson, as Ramirez’s autobiography, described as “Serious, heavy poems bumping next to great satire.” (Lawson also contributes the “Introduction” to *In Pursuit of Images*). The title and description of the collection imparts the left-wing leanings of the press. Moreover, the second poetry collection advertised, *Peace & Pieces Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, showcases poetry by “greats, unknowns, minority poets, etc. every accumulated.” Interestingly, Filipino American author and poet Jessica Hagedorn is among the poets featured in the 1973 collection. From these two advertised works, along with the Ramirez’s autobiography, we might surmise that the political and cultural leanings of Peace & Pieces Press reside on the liberal and perhaps progressive side of the spectrum, devoted to highlighting minority writers as well as publishing works that function as critiques of the political and cultural landscapes of the United States.

³⁷ Lawson, np.

leave the Philippines and to join his biological father in the United States. The first-half of the work documents Ramirez's navigation of the freighted landscapes of his "family" and "home," brought into candid relief by the often-abusive verbal and physical interactions between Ramirez and his mother. Given the vividness and sometimes shocking descriptions of the relationship with his mother, the editor of the work describes this period of Ramirez's life as "a dismembered childhood."³⁸ Insofar as the narrative paints an antagonistic relationship between Ramirez and his mother, he nonetheless devotes the latter half the work to her. It is an abrupt and curious transition in the narrative for its shift in tone and reverence towards his mother, from momentarily confiding, "I sometimes believed that she was on the verge of insanity," to conveying immediately afterwards, "By all means she was far from being dumb though (*ANFP*)."³⁸ In the latter portion of the writing, Ramirez's deference to his mother – virtually nonexistent before – comes through in laudatory descriptions of her rise to economic self-sufficiency ("a shrewd woman, especially in business (*ANFP*)") during the Japanese occupation of the islands and the years after. While his aspirations to leave the islands for the United States is fulfilled years before the publication of his autobiography, a complete detachment from his mother, symbolic perhaps of the Philippines as the "motherland," is undermined by the latter-half of his work. It is as if his experiences in the Philippines, however challenging, have left an indelible impression on his psyche and ultimately on his photographic production in the years after his departure from the islands.

The short work, a mere twelve pages, while neither a complete nor linear autobiography, captures a fragment of his childhood, revealing the kernels that would

³⁸ Ibid.

become the foundations to his photographic ethos years later. Ramirez's writing begins in media res, a strategy that he also employs in his photographic process (*Untitled* (2V/18I), for example). With the snap of the shutter subjects and objects that are caught in front of the camera become frozen in media res on photographic paper, their real-time narratives become truncated and frozen to fit within the photographic frames; and yet the narratives do not entirely disappear, as elements caught within the frames interact together to bring them and others into focus. That is, even though his life story is deliberately cut short by the limited number of pages in his autobiography, it is precisely the work's brevity that allows the emergence of the intertwined notions of "space/home" and "belonging" to rise from the text; their impact on Ramirez's childhood and the subsequent development of his photographic eye/I becomes evermore apparent within the limited number of pages of the text. Ramirez conceptualizes the key terms in a generative manner, not solely limited to the Philippine spaces that he inhabits or the elusive American ones he mentions in the writing. In her exploration of the genre of Asian North American autobiographies that explore childhood, Rocio Davis argues, "[they] are challenging the construction and performative potential of the national experience."³⁹ The writing of his childhood certainly imparts a conscientious intent to address the limits of space/home to Ramirez's feelings of belonging; his cannot be pinned to oft-cited narratives of Filipino migration and settlement in the United States, encompassing the failures and successes of the Filipino migrant body solely within the American borders. Rather, formations of his identity as a "Filipino gay photographer" in the United States rely on a transnational framework that centers his experiences in the homeland spaces of the Philippines, as

³⁹ Rocio G. Davis, *Begin Here: Reading Asian North American Autobiographies of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 1.

convincingly presented by his autobiography. Indeed, the manner in which Ramirez represents his body in the text is emblematic of the challenges posed by his gay identity to heteronormative performances of national identity, whether Filipino or American. Ramirez grounds his ideas of belonging (and alienation) to the domestic/familial in the Philippines to facilitate the construction of his desire for “an exciting voyage” to “a big place” called the United States (*ANFP*). What we find in the conflict-ridden domestic/familial spaces in the Philippines are critical insights into the ways Ramirez’s produces idealized spaces in his later collection of photographs in which he can fulfill a sense of belonging.

Ramirez begins his autobiography in 1958, as a 17 years old college student in Manila. In a description of his housing situation during the first year of college (written in the first paragraph of the piece), Ramirez immediately projects a sense of spatial dislocation – a feeling that will resonate throughout the text. He writes, “I really didn’t have a home in the usual sense of a home; I lived in a rooming house near my school (*ANFP*).” His situation, “in a rooming house,” imparts a feeling of displacement from whatever the ideal or “usual sense” of a home is. Insofar as his mother and his sister provide Ramirez the opportunity to momentarily locate himself within their respective homes in and around Manila – spaces that might fall under the conventional or “usual sense” – the feeling of belonging is undercut by the peripatetic nature of his spatial relationship to his family. Ramirez observes, “I vacillated to and fro like that, between the two houses, as if I belonged to neither one, though very much a part of both (*ANFP*).”⁴⁰ If blood binds Ramirez to his mother and sister as “family,” any stable interaction with them, especially his mother, is far from contingent on it. Quite the

⁴⁰ The vantage point of Filipino interstitiality vis-à-vis visual production is discussed at length in the following chapter, “Here and There | *Dito at Doon*: Stephanie Syjuco Blows-Up the *Black Markets*.”

contrary, the image of Ramirez's shuttling back and forth so early in the text evokes a transitional state that Ramirez inhabits. A transitional state implies a movement between one state to another; for Ramirez it is a self-directed movement away from his family, specifically his mother. His less than ideal relationship with mother facilitates a movement towards something better. His eye is fixated on visions to reach idealized geographies in the United States to be with his biological father. Ramirez describes his voluntarily departure from his mother's house at 15, "since the last family squabble," and from then on, he writes, "my visits [with her] became more and more infrequent and less and less comfortable" (*ANFP*). As if to acknowledge his readers' incredulity with what he calls "my permanent break with my own mother," Ramirez simply responds, "I had to (*ANFP*)."

Ramirez's break from his mother's domain – a house composed of her second husband and their three children – calls into question the stability and limits of "home." His movement out of his mother's house is as much an affront as it is a symbolic departure from the heterosexual structures that govern domestic spaces and underscore the production of national consciousness. The domestic boundaries of his mother's house, riddled with familial conflict, illuminate Ramirez's liminal status.⁴¹ This position within his mother's household does not go unnoticed by Ramirez, as he confides, "Through all my childhood I had grown conscious of this fact: I was an outsider in my own family (*ANFP*)." Even though he "grew up in the same house and shared with them all the material things in that house (*ANFP*)," Ramirez is not recognized as a stabilizing component of the household, but rather the opposite. There is something

⁴¹ It is not only his mother that Ramirez fights with, but also his second husband and their three kids. Though it is his mother who fights with him the most intensely: "But the fights I used to have with her three sons and their father were nothing in comparison to my confrontations with her (*ANFP*)."

about his body that exceeds the expectations of heterosexual domesticity of his mother's second marriage, which is met by his mother's wrath. He writes:

And even when I made a simple mistake in following her directions to do a certain assigned task. In cooking – never burn the rise. Washing the family laundry – rub the clothes between closed hands, rinse with water three times – and so on. I never did them perfect! (*ANFP*)

His grammar in his reflection conveys a sense of confusion. Sentence fragmentations and dangling clauses separated by dashes are coupled with the imaginary dialogue between Ramirez and his mother to convey the degree to which Ramirez's "outsider" status has taken hold of his psychology. His description is punctuated by an exclamation point, at once affirming the magnitude of his familial (dis)location, but also revealing Ramirez's capacity to critique through his play on form. He ends the declarative sentence with an exclamation point to punctuate his constant interrogations of his relationship to his mother. He later confesses, "In fact, I couldn't think of any time in the past in which I had complete rapport with her (*ANFP*)."

Throughout the autobiography Ramirez's body is depicted as catalyst for transformation. His is a body that harbors visions of domesticity that stand counter to those within his family; they are alternative formations that prompt him to politely call his step-father "sir." For as he discerns, "how could you call 'father' someone you knew wasn't your own? [...] I could never bring myself to address him as 'father' (*ANFP*)," despite his mother's protestations. Ramirez's alternative moniker for his stepfather reflects a capacity to follow his intuition without reservations, despite the ramifications of doing so. As he claims, the forced recognition of his stepfather as "father" would become "the basis of my break with her (*ANFP*)" at 15. Indeed, his is a body that threatened the stability of his mother's house, as well as the domestic order within which his mother served as the head of the household and certainly acted as its

gatekeeper.⁴² He writes, “I had violated her rules all the time ... I knew too much (ANFP).” The ellipses that he uses reinforce the causal relationship between the transgressions of his mother’s rules and his body as a source of knowledge. The ellipses deictic functions lead readers to the significance of his body as an oppositional source of knowledge, “always a source of trouble (ANFP)” according to his mother. Ramirez’s writes his body as a site of epistemological production; it is a vessel that houses the rules that he has defined on his own terms and that he executes for his emotional and physical survival. His mother’s response to his body was one of vehement hostility, for as he describes, “I talked too much. I was too much for her (ANFP).”

Of the family conflicts written in the text, one in particular is flagged by Ramirez as the most formative and relevant to his childhood development, worthy of the first half of his autobiography. The conflict with his stepfather segues into an extended retelling of the story about his biological father who had migrated to the United States after World War II.⁴³ Much like Ramirez, his mother views his father’s body suspiciously, as if he too might undermine her authority inside her home despite being an ocean away. His father had served with the American forces during World War II, “decorated for gallantry among the American heroes,” and yet his mother “would have no part of him” nor “even allow him to come into the house (ANFP)” when, in 1946, he had returned to what she had transformed into her home. The occasion of his father’s return provided a small window for the young Ramirez to be reacquainted with his father, as he describes, “That was the first time I really saw my own father (ANFP).” It would also be the last time he would see him before Ramirez’s own departure from the Philippines. His father’s arrival was met with the same vehemence and anger that his

⁴² Ramirez describes her in the latter of his autobiography as “actually more a man than a woman, when it came to work (ANFP).”

⁴³ Henceforth I will use “father” when referring to Ramirez’s “biological father.”

mother would inflict onto him years later; the antagonistic reactions from the mother would invariably forge a link between the absent father and son.⁴⁴ But unlike the young Ramirez, the elder had the resources to leave the islands for the United States and divorce himself legally and spatially from his wife.

Ramirez's kindred bond with his father is noteworthy for what the elder Ramirez represents to his son. Even after years of separation between the two, Ramirez's regard for his father falters little; it only grows stronger. It is the distance between them that keeps Ramirez envisioning the possibilities that might be afforded to him in America. After his brief encounter with his father at the age of five, Ramirez documents several milestone years that capture his progression of thoughts that remark on his father's absence; each of the years conveys the burgeoning of Ramirez's aspirations, indeed his eye, towards what is possible outside of his mother's home and away from the Philippines, as his father has proven. Ramirez describes, "At age eight I knew that he was far away in another land (from his letters to my sister), and at twelve, I knew that he may not come back and at fifteen I realized my father was in his own world, with a family of his own in America (*ANFP*)."⁴⁴ What surfaces from Ramirez's description is a noteworthy shift of perception. While Ramirez is unable to fully comprehend where his father has gone, at age eight, or whether they might see each other again, at age twelve, by age fifteen Ramirez is capable of naming the proper destination of his father in ways that point to a growing desire to follow. Over time the distant land would transform into his father's "own world" — a space where the elder Ramirez had started a new life and "a family of his own." Ramirez latches onto the adjective/pronoun "own" to signal

⁴⁴ Of his father's arrival to his mother's home in 1946, Ramirez describes the confrontation as follows: "It was apparent to me, however, that she was very angry. She was at the door gesticulating madly with both hands. Her voice, hoarse from shouting, reached my father as he stood there by the gate unable to approach this loud woman (*ANFP*)."

both the magnitude of his father's separation from the Philippines and his mother's home and the possessive possibilities afforded to him in his new world. To be in America symbolized the power to lay claim, as his father had done, to one's "own world," one that was larger than what was possible in the islands. It also meant, importantly, having the freedom to possess and to have possessions – the opportunity to own one's world without the constraints of his mother and ultimately without the strictures of heteronormative sexuality that underlie her domestic order.

If the father symbolized all that was attainable outside of the confines of his mother's house, the text captures Ramirez determination to leave at whatever the cost to his body. Ramirez attempts to escape his mother's hold as early as 1946 amid his father's arrival from the war. Ramirez, five at the time, and his older sister, eleven years his senior, devise a plan to leave with their father to America, only to be caught in the act by their mother. His mother deems their actions as acts of betrayal against her, and as Ramirez describes, "It was a terrible mistake to be caught red-handed. The two of us paid dearly in pain. It was also the first time I experienced my mother's heavy hand (*ANFP*)." This important moment in the text conveys the coeval beginning of his mother's abuse of Ramirez's body and the emergence of Ramirez's body as a threat to her and her order--his sister's body, "the architect of the luckless attempt [to follow their father], likewise, paid the price with her body "as if she was pawned to a perverse, mad lion (*ANFP*)," for her filial transgression. Ramirez describes the interior of his mother's home, specifically the room in which both bodies were beaten, as enervating, without any promise of sustaining life: "that little room of violence was filled heavy with [a] stifling kind of air (*ANFP*)." Her mother's house takes on the qualities of a torture

chamber, with acts of disobedience met with a violent fate; it comes as no surprise then that Ramirez's eye would be fixed to distances across the ocean.

Only ten years later, with visions of his father's "own world" becoming clearer and more defined, Ramirez would tempt his fate by again overstepping the filial duties set by his mother. At fifteen Ramirez happens upon information from his "good grandmother" that would challenge the hierarchies of power in his family, declaring, "I knew the real story (*ANFP*)."

In attaining this knowledge, Ramirez reinforces the notion that his is a body that threatened his mother for its ability to attract and divulge truth that could potentially undermine her authority. The knowledge that his father had left money in a Manila bank, collecting interest since 1946, was "the real story" that Ramirez carried with him; he used the information about money as a way to reunite with his father, as his father's official acknowledgment of the money was the only means that would grant Ramirez permission to collect it. Reuniting involved figuring out a way to contact his father's in the United States. Ramirez fails to find his father's contact information among his mother's things, yet instead he discovers the contact information of his father's divorce lawyer in "my mother's home chest (*ANFP*)," greatly upsetting Ramirez. The hidden information speaks to the lengths that his mother had gone to suppress contact with his father; though it is Ramirez who eventually foils her attempts of erasing his father's presence by succeeding in his efforts to contact him in America. By doing so, Ramirez begins to reap the promises of his father's new home through the option of American citizenship, an option that he welcomes. Even though he had received all of his father's money, his mother eventually "collected every cent of my protestations (*ANFP*)."

His mother exerts the domestic order, one that Ramirez challenges by succeeding in his efforts to collect his father's money. She believed, "A

good son's duty to his mother is to give her support in old age (*ANFP*)" To her, her son's body had overstepped the family hierarchy and her dominance, and as Ramirez writes, "And I, desiring the money for myself, was a bad sheep, a no-good son, an ingrate (*ANFP*)!"

The confiscation of his father's money is followed by a retaliatory act by her mother so disturbing that it rises from the other moments of discipline inflicted onto his body. Ramirez point outs, "My most vivid recollection of her is the image with a baseball bat (*ANFP*)."

The moment reflects, for Ramirez, the nadir of his mother's failed attempts to exert control over his body despite the severity of her abusive behavior over him. If Ramirez's body is a catalyst for transformation, his body during the confrontation inspires a rage in his mother so flagrant to her son that the bloody memory of it is forever imprinted in his autobiography. He writes,

In my mother's rage, she grabbed a baseball bat and began to batter me with it. WHAMM! I got it in the arms while trying to block the blow. Crying now, asking for mercy, pleading for her to understand me, I stood there. WHAMM! I got it in my legs and I fell to the floor. I received it again and again until I couldn't feel anymore. I couldn't even cry anymore. My body succumbed to the numbing pain and I laid there with all the tears and the saliva and the blood. I was down like a heap of vegetable; useless pulp of flesh. I was left in the room for a while, and then later I crawled out into the kitchen. I didn't quite know what I was doing, but I crawled, crawled out the back door (*ANFP*).

Indeed, his mother is transformed by her rage into a predatory animal; her son, reduced to the prey. Every swing of the baseball bat to subdue and control Ramirez's body captures the dissolution of his mother's control and epitomizes her metamorphosis into a rabid beast. She is no longer his mother, in the conventional sense of the word, but rather an animal on the loose, hungry for power and authority and deafened by each "WHAMM" of his body. Ramirez's pleas, his efforts to share his knowledge with his mother, are met by blow after blow of the bat; her refusal to listen is a sign that his body, his knowledge, threatens her. The room in which the beating takes place, furthermore,

implicates the larger spaces of the home as spaces of violence that facilitates the rejection of Ramirez's body. These spaces incite the abuses inflicted on Ramirez's body; together they prevent him to "feel anymore [...] to cry anymore (*ANFP*)."⁴⁵ His mother's home is built upon the promise of heteronormative sexuality only to be undermined by its own limitations. The constant beatings of Ramirez's body inevitably signals the collapse of her home and the domestic order. It is after this pivotal moment that Ramirez observes, "Our family had completely disintegrated (*ANFP*)."

In many ways, the scene of the Ramirez's baseball beating by his mother could be construed as a "gay bashing." The application of the notion of a gay bashing to the text proves challenging, however, given the absence of any claim to a gay identity throughout the work. Nevertheless, we might consider the vantage point of when and where the text was written to establish the text's underlying gay link – the 1970s and San Francisco. While Ramirez leaves out any direct claim to a gay identity in the writing, the language deployed throughout conveys a gay undercurrent, a gay sensibility rooted in a particular time and space years after the recollections that are captured in the piece. Indeed, outsider status, familial conflict, physical abuse, and a threatened heteronormative domestic order may all easily encompass the travails of gay people navigating spaces dominated by heteronormative sexuality.

Ramirez's autobiography, moreover, could very well be a fragment of a larger "coming-out" story of its own calibration that relies on the political importance of American versions, especially within his San Francisco milieu, yet also exceeds its cultural framework.⁴⁵ His is a "coming-out" framework tied to a transnational

⁴⁵ While the dominant contemporary version of "coming-out" is frequently associated with "the closet," during the prewar years, as George Chauncey writes, "coming out" was akin to an official introduction to the gay community as "gay." George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of a Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 7-8.

framework that flags the formative experiences in the Philippine homeland spaces as paramount to configurations of a Filipino American gay identity in the United States. If this is the case, the autobiography highlights formations of Ramirez's gay identity through his relationship with his mother and the spaces that she controlled in the islands and his eventual departure. "Coming out" in the text mirrors in many ways the process of "coming to" America. That is, Ramirez's "coming out" in the text is not one

By the late 1960s, "coming out" took on importance as a public act that went beyond solely the gay community boundaries, but also signified a public political act and an affront to governing political systems. Gay liberation activists equated "coming out" to a visibility driven by a will to change oppressive political regimes in the United States – the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion being a formative moment that politically mobilized of gays and helped to start the gay liberation movement. Armstrong, 68. In Martin Manalansan's ethnographic study of Filipino diasporic gays in New York City his informant, Mama Rene, experienced the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969; though unlike his white male counterparts, Mama Rene viewed his experiences not with political fervor as the other white gay men, but with indifference. For Mama Rene, "coming out" politically stood at ends to the way he saw himself, as "a quiet man, just like how my mom raised me in the Philippines." Mama Rene's negotiation of his (a)political identity as a gay Filipino in the U.S. is contingent on his upbringing and Filipino culture. While Mama Rene's transnational negotiation is very similar to Efren Ramirez's own, conveyed by his autobiography, Ramirez's investment in documenting the gay spaces of San Francisco and his choices of subjects and subject matter, such as the "dykes on bikes" in *Untitled* (241) at what appears to be a gay pride parade, projects Ramirez's active participation in gay political and cultural projects in 1976 (see Figure 3.21) In 1980, Ramirez registered a portfolio of photographs, 8 total, for copyright protection with the U.S. Copyright Office. Ramirez titles the portfolio "Political Life in San Francisco: folio II." Ramirez includes the following description within the copyright record: "Rally scene & ports. of George Moscone, Harvey Milk & others." The rally shots and the portraits of key figures within the San Francisco political scene, like the gay pride photograph, reflect Ramirez's interest, if not involvement, in the political scene in San Francisco. George Moscone was a Democratic Mayor of San Francisco and a proponent of gay rights; in 1976 declared, through a proclamation, "Gay Freedom Day" and "Gay Pride Week." Harvey Milk served as San Francisco's first openly gay city supervisor. Both Moscone and Mile were assassinated in 1977 by Dan White. The registration of copyright protection of Ramirez's portfolio reflects a recognition of the importance of the images and their attribution to Ramirez himself. "Coming out" in the U.S. for Ramirez is tied to his photographic practices, specifically to the notion of "exposure." Unlike Mama Rene, who "had nothing to say to the public nor was he particularly interested in speaking to them," Ramirez photographs speak to an active participation within the gay community and a vision of their political and cultural significance. In terms of Ramirez's inspiring an alternative "coming out" narrative, Martin Manalansan makes a similar observation within his ethnography of diasporic Filipino gay community. Many of Manalansan's informants associated the act of "coming out" as an American gay phenomenon, as the term, itself, excludes particularities of their own migrant experiences such as economic sufficiency and the juridical rights to remain in the United States. While Ramirez's immigration to the United States occurred decades earlier than migration of Manalansan's informants, the limitations of the conventional American "coming out" narrative when read against Filipino gay lives become readily apparent, especially given their transnational ties to the Philippines. Martin Manalansan, IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 27-35.

solely based on a proclamation of homosexuality by stepping out of “the closet” as conventional “coming-out” narratives dictates, but rather it is an act of literally premised on a movement away from one space to another. In the autobiography, the movement of Ramirez’s body takes on the contours of a migration – a “coming out” tantamount to leaving the domestic spaces in which Ramirez’s humanity is stifled, if not abused nearly to death. Coming out is an attempt by Ramirez at controlling one’s presence within desired and self-claimed spaces; it is an act rooted in visibility and agency, and importantly, migration. For Ramirez, it is grounded in the very act of his departure from his home and the Philippines. Less we forget the ending of the beating scene, Ramirez writes, “but I crawled, crawled out the back door.” Here is Ramirez’s “coming-out” moment in the text. Even if he has to crawl out of the house battered and bruised, Ramirez determination to leave his mother abuse-ridden home is a success. While Ramirez never mentions where he goes immediately after the abuse, we know by the mere publication of his work that he has succeeded in efforts to “come out” by “coming to” America. His mother, on the other hand, is not as lucky. At the end of the work, Ramirez looks back at her and domestic demise, as if looking back at the constraints that have held him hostage in the islands, and notes, “they had moved from place to place quite a bit, and each time they moved to a place smaller and cheaper than the last (*ANFP*).” The “shrewd woman,” once a towering and authoritative figure, is reduced to living transiently within small, cheap homes that speak volumes to her diminished status and the failure of her domestic order.

BUS RIDES

After crawling out of his mother's house, Ramirez finds himself bleeding, bruised, sore, and numb on a nondescript bus; he is the stirring picture of the aftereffects of his mother's abuse. He writes, "I was all swollen and bleeding when I crawled into the bus. My clothes were torn and soiled with my own blood. My ears bled but I didn't even feel it (*ANFP*)."

The presence of the bus takes on symbolic importance, as it becomes the vehicle that will carry him away from his mother for the final time to an unwritten destination. The bus ties together a past ravaged by abuse and discipline to a future driven by aspirations to create oneself anew, to possess one's own world as his father had done in America. We find the symbol of the bus again within his collection of photographs and poetry, *In Pursuit of Images*, published in 1976. Found amid the pages of photographs is a two part poem that he has aptly entitled "Bus Ride." The poem, like the bus for which it is named, navigates the new American geographies across which Ramirez traverses:

Bus Ride

Riding in the bus fills me with melancholy:
Memories of years ago come back as fresh as yesterday.

In the night
the houselights flickered on a hill along the road
Beyond another hill the rows of light reflected on the window
glass, repeats itself superimposed on the black sky
Zooming back as we zoom ahead.

And the bus, self-contained with sounds:
The sound of the engine humming,
Voices in muffled talk buzzing,
Broken by intervals of changing gears, bahrum-baroom, 2nd to 3rd.
And the smells ... impersonal and otherwise.

Crossing the sky on the bridge
Recalls the afternoon it was covered with fog.
The wet silver steel, the dark clouds
In the glittering night, at 60 MPH the winds stroke your face
Like invisible hair of a god.

It was a long ride in the night, miles on miles best not to count
the string of towns, thirty to an hour to the next
begets anticipation ... and then relief. And soon
the driver's voice announce our where-with-all
in low electric tone

(In Pursuit of Images)

The first stanza immediately establishes the link to Ramirez past, pointing to certain bygone moments that have left an indelible impression on his present state. While it remains unclear that the bus Ramirez references is the same bus that he crawls on after his mother's abuse, we might nonetheless consider the importance of the bus's symbolic linkage between the two texts – indeed, between his past and his present. That is, when paired together, the buses in the two texts become spaces of reflection; the bus in the poem is a space where Ramirez works through his past through his memories to navigate through the new terrains of his present. As memories go, the image of his bruised body and bloody face of years passed is, as he writes, “as fresh as yesterday.” The “melancholy” that fills Ramirez when riding the bus becomes that which he sorts through within its very spaces, evident in the abrupt transition between the first and second stanza. If Ramirez is overcome with melancholy at the start of the poem, it is the poetic description of the actual ride that begins in the second stanza that reflects the mitigating effects of the bus. Indeed, the bus's function of moving people from one geographic destination to another is enlarged in the poem; it is a transport that is inclusive of his own psychic journeys engendered by his past and carried with him from across the ocean. “Zooming back,” Ramirez writes, “as we zoom ahead.”

For Ramirez, the first part of “Bus Ride” depicts the bus as a space that facilitates the refinement of the senses, dulled perhaps by years of discipline of his body; the bus also grounds him to his new home. However conspicuous Ramirez's battered body was

on the bus in the Philippines, Ramirez's body on the bus in the poem becomes the inconspicuous observer who soaks in the sights and sounds around him. Readers are privy to the noises of both passengers and the machine – the “humming” and the “buzzing” – and the smells – “impersonal and otherwise” – all of which interacting to influence Ramirez's sense of vision and sense of self amid a poetic landscape. The bus itself becomes the embodiment of American modernity that facilitates Ramirez's sensory descriptions that limns the contours of his new urban reality. He writes of the anonymous passengers traveling alongside him that he overhears, only to relegate them to mere “Voices in muffled talk buzzing.” The speed of travel facilitates the views of transformed geographies from the bus windows: “Beyond another hill the rows of light reflected on the window/glass, repeats itself super-imposed on the black sky.” The juxtaposition of man-made structures and natural ones (“The wet silver steel, the dark clouds”) amid the multitude are constant images drawn into focus by the bus ride, itself a field of vision for Ramirez. The bus ride is a quotidian experience in the modern American landscape that has taken on poetic relevance.

By the last stanza, Ramirez's ride speeds through “the string of towns, thirty to an hour to the next,” capturing the culmination of “anticipation...and then relief.” The last stanza emerges as the poem's denouement, depicting the literal end of passengers' bus journeys to their unwritten destinations, as much as it captures the finale of Ramirez's emotional journey of melancholy, anticipation, and then relief after “miles on miles best not to count.” Here we also find the inclusion of the term “where-with-all,” a play on the word “wherewithal.” With destinations and stops encroaching, “the driver's voice announce our where-with-all.” It is the “where” that signifies the myriad unnamed destinations to which the driver announces “with all.” Though Ramirez's

concatenation of the three words with hyphens directs our attention to the singular word “wherewithal,” defined as the means or resources to accomplish an objective. With “wherewithal,” it is not the particular destinations that the driver announces, but rather the driver voices each of the passengers means to get to their end goal; the bus ride has facilitated their wherewithal. For Ramirez, the announcement of his “wherewithal” points to the psychic journey inspired by the bus ride – the mediation of his past to move forward in the present – and his wherewithal to successfully arrive at physical and psychic destinations within his new home.

In the second part of the “Bus Ride” (in its entirety below), Ramirez turns his attention solely on the sounds of the machinery of the bus working in concert.

II

Listen to the sounds in the bus:
The engine hums and moans to stop, in a long level muffle,
into a falsetto end
The wind slap the windows purr and
glass tap
Tic toc tic toc tic toc, the turn signal is on.
Here the squeak of the steering wheel,
the forward grind of wheels in rear
Rattle of foot and thump of feet and clonk of door
The roof rattle prrr
Gas pedal clank.
Hissing stop, the breaks exhale
The engine’s throaty throttle:
Huf-wh-huffwha whirr, hoom hoom whaaa
Ignition burr whiz whoa ...

As if all the parts were in conference

(In Pursuit of Images)

The bus, as Ramirez writes in the first part, is “self-contained with sounds.” It is Ramirez devotion to its sounds in the second part that transforms the bus into a living being, replete with animal-like sounds and behaviors. Ramirez deploys anthropomorphic traits to the bus – the engine’s “hums and moans” and its “falsetto

ends” – sexualizing the already masculine and phallic machine. Indeed, the bus is alive, caught within the metaphoric throes of sex. If Ramirez identifies with the bus in the first part as an essential transport that inherently crosses the temporal and spatial dimensions of his existence, Ramirez’s sexualization of the bus in the second half directs our attention to the way the bus transports Ramirez and his readers to his gay identity and the gay sensibilities that underlie his aural explorations of the bus, as well as the geographies that it and Ramirez traverse. The slap of the windows by the wind brings about a “purr[ing],” progressing into the acts of “signal[ing],” “grind[ing] of wheels in the rear,” “thump[ing],” and “rattl[ing]” to a “prrr.” The crescendo of motion and sounds leads to a momentary respite, a catching on its breath: “Hissing stop, the breaks exhale.” And finally, the bus’s sexual act comes to a head; Ramirez deploys a flurry of onomatopoeic words to capture the climax of the bus: “Huf-wh-huffwha whirr, hoom hoom whaa/Ignition burr whiz whoa ...”

While the destinations in the first part of the poem capture the shifting urban spaces affected by modernity, these landscapes are sexualized in the second half by the very transport that Ramirez rides, an affirmation of the distances that Ramirez has traveled to claim a home of his own that celebrates his sexuality. The last line of the poem captures a vision that embraces as much the totality of sounds of the bus as the wholeness of his being, his gay identity in America: “As if all the parts were in conference.”

HOMES AND HOMOS

If the bus ride transports Efren Ramirez between destinations across the urban landscapes of San Francisco, we might consider the roads and the streets on which the

bus travels and the sidewalks and alleys along which it passes as filling an equally important role in the emergence of Ramirez's Filipino American gay photographic eye/I. Ramirez is compelled by the everyday actions of those around him in San Francisco, much of which takes place on public spaces of travel, on the roads, streets, sidewalks, and alleys that crisscross each other aid, defining gay spaces and promoting the emergence of gay establishments.⁴⁶ These gay public spaces of travel also facilitate travel to gay bars, clubs, movie theaters, bathhouses, and other people's homes within the city; the enclosed spaces, like the spaces of travel, facilitate curious and desirous observers and participants alike. In the opening poem, Ramirez describes the energy of the streets; it, like the bus, is alive, its pulse contingent on the actors and actions that inhabit its spaces, that energize the city. Ramirez writes,

People who are familiar and intimate, caught by the camera on a casual walk or mini tour of the street corner. The spirit is free-flowing and cool, except on Saturday night when every nerve center in the city at its peak action—swelling since Thursday. People are a-buzz. You catch your breath on Tuesday and Wednesdays. Such is the ordinary life on gay Castro, Polk or Folsom Streets.

(In Pursuit of Images)

It is the presence of gay bodies on and around the streets that construct the spatial parameters of what Ramirez calls "ordinary life of on gay Castro, Polk or Folsom

⁴⁶ I am taken by Jean-Ulrick Desért's deployment of "queer space." To define the term, Desért deconstructs each of the words separately. "Queer," according to Desért, has the potential to inhabit "sensibilities other than the normative with the propensity toward, but not exclusive of, the homoerotic. Desért thinks of "space" broadly, "defined as a delineated or loosely bounded area occupied cognitively or physically." "Queer space" is premised on the utilization and/or creation of space by/for those who relate or identify with anti-heteronormative sensibilities and, certainly, sexualities. "Queer space," according to Desért, "crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations, all of which is articulated in the realm of the public/private, the built/unbuilt environments, including decorations." Efrén Ramirez's world in San Francisco in the 1970s was certainly one dominated by gay men that influenced the language of identity and an accompanying political movement that espoused the term "gay." While my use of "gay space" is influenced much by Desért's assessment of "queer space," I am inclined to use the former within the context of Ramirez's photography. Jean-Ulrick Desért, "Queer Space," *Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram et al. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 19-20.

Streets” and helps configure the activities of those therein. Ramirez’s interest in the quotidian spaces of gay life in the city documents, as one critic notes, “the unfolding of a San Francisco lifestyle,” but is also establishes Ramirez’s presence within the spaces he pictures; together the pictures become “the diary of an artist.”⁴⁷

The everyday spaces in which gay people occupy and engage each other are conducive to, what Jean-Ulrick Desert calls, “fortuitous encounters and juxtapositions” for men like Ramirez.⁴⁸ They are spaces that inspire a competition of gazes that exemplify the quotidian experience in gay lives that connects bodies to other bodies, gay or otherwise, and those bodies to the spaces they inhabit.⁴⁹ The dynamic sidewalk spaces of the city are captured in *Untitled (4I)* and *Untitled (5I)*, both ca. 1976 (see Figure 3.9 – 3.10). The sidewalks in both images are lined with an assortment of men, many caught in various degrees of gazing. Ramirez is not an innocent bystander in these images, but rather he, too, is gazed upon by a man in sunglasses in *Untitled (5I)*. The deployment of gazes in the images establishes the sidewalk spaces as sites of gay identity formation, the photographer included. The collection of gazes must be translated by the observer and observed – the act of translation, itself, helps to build a codified system that gays can access and use to negotiate their identities. Ramirez negotiates the gay spaces as an observer with camera in tow, in his attempts to capture, what he calls, “the vitality of our experience (*IPI*).” Indeed, Ramirez is caught amid the competition of gazes in the two images, as if to signal his acquiescence of being caught in its web as much a way to root himself to his new home and claim the men gazing

⁴⁷ Jerry Burchard, “Forward,” in *In Pursuit of Images* by Efren Ramirez (San Francisco, Peace and Pieces Foundation, 1976), np.

⁴⁸ Desért, 22.

⁴⁹ While I argue that gazing is a central part of gay identity in San Francisco, the competition of gazes might also be from those who might otherwise not identify as gay. The act of gazing, however, has the power to activate same-sex desire from, as Desért explains, “merely implicit to explicit.” *Ibid.*, 22.

upon each other as his members of his American gay family. The camera (like the bus) grounds Ramirez to the pulse of the gay spaces in the city; it, likewise, facilitates Ramirez's conceptualization of his inclusion within the collective ownership of the gay spaces and the myriad quotidian activities therein – calling it “our experience.” His photography pictures the gay spaces as home and the men as family – establishing what he could not fully have in the Philippines.

The first black-and-white photograph, *Untitled (1I)*, ca. 1976, in *In Pursuit of Images* embodies the on-the-ground photographic strategy of Ramirez (see Figure 3.7). Depicted inside the frame is a cropped shot of an apartment building with open windows. A bare-chested man stands behind the open window at the center, with his arms raised above his head and resting on the window panel as if posing – clearly he and his actions are the focus of the image. The man directs his gaze at the direction of Ramirez, though missing the viewfinder of Ramirez's camera ever so slightly. There is something or someone more intriguing that captures the man's attention on the street level next to Ramirez – another man (or men) on the street, perhaps, gazing up at him too. Like the sounds of the bus that all work in concert in his poem “Bus Ride,” the elements in the image are framed by Ramirez to work in harmony to define the parameters of gay space in the city. The spatial configurations in the image facilitate the triangulation of the gazes between photographer, bare-chested man, and the unknown stimulus (or stimuli) that attracts the man's gaze. The triangulation reinforces the centrality of the spaces that each inhabits: the street and the apartment building. Ramirez's street-level position, next to whatever or whomever is attracting the gazing man in the apartment, literally grounds him in the very spaces that inspire the actors and their actions. He, too, has become an actor within the gay city, gazing up at the man

with his camera. The image configures the intersection of the public (the street) and the private (the apartment) and the act of gazing as integral components of the quotidian gay experience in the city.

For Ramirez the notion of “the home” is at the core of his photographic ethos. Given the fractured home life he experienced in the Philippines, it comes as no surprise then that the first image of his collection is one that frames the paradigmatic gay space in the city: one’s apartment, one’s home. The inclusion of the apartment building and the man inside is an act that reconfigures the domestic order that had cast him as an outsider in the islands. The triangulation of gazes in the image implicates Ramirez within in the gay scene; he is no longer an outsider, but rather intimately included. This inclusion is aptly captured in the second image of the collection: *Untitled (2I)*, ca. 1976. No longer on the street looking up at the man, Ramirez is fixed inside a minimally decorated bedroom of, perhaps, the man from the preceding image or another man whose reflection appears on the mirror in the room. The room that he finds himself in is a far departure from the “little room of violence” of his youth.

The nondescript space captured in *Untitled (2I)*, could be any generic bedroom in the city, though it is the posed man reflected in the mirror gazing out the window that transforms the image into a gay scene (see Figure 3.8). The bed in the room is conspicuously made, with only the scattered creases made by a body on its sheets that depict its recent use. Ramirez again pictures a triangulation between the elements found in the image; together they project an emergent desire, though not by a competition of gazes as seen in the preceding image, but by the spatial configurations of the scene. The adjoining walls in the background bisect the scene, creating a line that centers the image and directs our attention to the bed. The mirror, likewise, produces a line that draws

focus on the space in which the posed man stands beyond the foreground of the image; it is that line that likewise passes the bed. If the bed is the focus of the image, it cannot be separated from the actions of the man in the mirror. We might consider his actions as intimately tied to the present and future configurations of the bed. That is, his act of gazing out of the window might very well produce the future conditions that will put the bed into use.

Apart from the public sidewalk spaces or the intimate confines of the bedroom, Ramirez pursues other indoor everyday recreational spaces in San Francisco in his photography – these places “swelling since Thursday,” as Ramirez observes. Ramirez offers viewers a glimpse of the frenetic gay nightlife of San Francisco in five images taken inside a nightclub; it is a space that, like the bedroom, embodies the qualities that compose a gay space and gay home. The nightclub scene provides an ample array of characters from all walks of life and persuasions and sensibilities for Ramirez to picture, as well as to connect to. The delimited boundaries of the club inspire a closeness of bodies to other bodies, an opportunity to connect with each other not only through the act of gazing but through the tactile properties of proximity – of being close to one another. Indeed, the multitude is pictured in *Untitled* (11I), ca. 1976 – it is a multitude that invariably becomes Ramirez's surrogate family (see Figure 3.15). The nightclub space takes on symbolic importance to Ramirez, as the images picture an unrestrained celebration, a stark contrast to Ramirez's childhood. The snapshot quality of *Untitled* (11I) and *Untitled* (12I), ca. 1976, draw connections to everyday family snapshots (see Figure 3.16). Like pictures held within family albums, Ramirez's photographs take on family-like importance to Ramirez. They picture the ordinary events like dancing at the

club or drag queens drinking at the bar as extraordinary experiences worthy of photographic memorialization – each image loaded with familial sentiment.

Ramirez remarks, “I want to photograph people--to reveal their humanity, their life, the raw movie that goes on unfolding its pathos and humor unrehearsed and spontaneous and free (*IPI*).” The images in the nightclub visualize the spontaneity of gay life in the nightclub. In *Untitled* (9I), ca. 1976, Ramirez deploys a slow-shutter speed to control the light to create a sense of the flamboyant pulse of the stage within the nightclub. Even though the dancers are frozen in their spots, the movement of their bodies are accentuated by the auras of light that envelope them and their background (see Figure 3.13). The flash from Ramirez’s camera reflects off the white outfit of the dancer facing the camera and creates an adjacent aura that highlights his movements. Ramirez deploys a similar technique in *Untitled* (13I), ca. 1976. The auras of light creates a halo-like effect above the drag queen, as if to suggest her high-ranking within the gay domestic order in the nightclub – the photograph becomes a portrait of gay royalty (see Figure 3.17). Ramirez does away with photographic realism by using the camera to paint the nightclub space as abstraction in *Untitled* (10I), ca. 1976, utilizing only the light in the space, a slow-shutter speed, and the jarring movements of his camera (see Figure 3.14). The image captures a dizzying whirl of swaths of light. Its free and kinetic figurations evokes a transgression of photographic conventions; the abstraction situates the nightclub as a place of escape from, perhaps, the constraints of a heteronormative American culture found outside the nightclub’s doors.

★ ★ ★

Efren Ramirez devotes the latter portion of his collection, *In Pursuit of Images*, by taking an abrupt turn away from gay spaces in the city to picturing male bodies in various stages of undress and interaction against arboreal backdrops and spaces. The

turn to natural backdrops, or backdrops far from the reaches of urbanization (as he pictured in “Bus Ride” and the nightclub images), capture Ramirez’s ongoing interest in expanding the definitions of gay spaces within the modern American landscape. Ramirez’s images seem to reach into the archives of American photographic modernity, specifically to photographers who imaged the expanding American domestic and international landscapes during the 19th and early 20th century, these archived images a testament to the power of American modernity and visual technologies that shaped the production and naturalization of American national identity.⁵⁰ Images of landscapes and natural scenes taken during the American colonial period in the Philippines, for example, facilitated the management and systematic cataloging of newly colonized land; these images inevitably constructed a masculinist and paternalistic (heteronormative) visual regime and anointed the camera as a weapon of colonialism. Ramirez’s photographs certainly confront the underlying masculine and heteronormative sensibilities of visual regimes of American empire by promoting a gay visual optic that literally and figuratively root gay male bodies in American soil. The metaphor of “being rooted” guides Ramirez in navigating and claiming natural backdrops as gay spaces and gay bodies as organic outcomes of nature. It is as much a tactic that informs Ramirez’s own navigation of spaces in the United States as it is a visionary endeavor premised on a politics of visibility, sexuality, and national belonging within an exclusionary, heteronormative landscape.

The notion of “being rooted” is visually manifested in the first image that begins the nature portion of his collection. In *Untitled* (271), ca. 1976, Ramirez frames a series of trees and their sinuous and sensual exposed roots in the photograph, without a person

⁵⁰ Fill in examples.

to be found anywhere in the scene (see Figure 3.22). The image exposes the obstacles of fully belonging, of being completely rooted to the earth, through the exposed root system of the trees that are centrally framed. The exposed roots become figurative networks of support, each root working with other to ensure the trees' survival; and yet even with a solid foundation, complete penetration, as depicted by the exposed roots, requires constant work and perseverance. The photograph becomes an apt allegory for Ramirez's own struggle and efforts to ground himself in American soil. If his childhood experiences have fractured his familial networks, the trees direct Ramirez's attention to the presence of gay bodies in nature to compensate for his loss.

In addition to the exposed roots, Ramirez captures the allegorical possibilities of tree branches in his attempts to naturalize the joining of the land to gay bodies in *Untitled* (28I), ca. 1976 (see Figure 3.23) The image captures two men frozen in mid-embrace and kiss. Below the men are a bed of branches serendipitously arranged so that they emerge from a singular point nearest the photographer within the frame; their ends all point, like countless fingers, to the gay couple. The image explores the inherent sensuality and sexuality of nature in the figuration of the tree branches, heightened further by the men lying on the ground. The embracing bodies, with their legs intertwined together, resemble the intertwined branches that lay below them; branches and bodies are caught in a sensual and sexual embrace, as if Ramirez envisions no difference between the two. Indeed, by the following photograph, *Untitled* (29I), ca. 1976, Ramirez has transformed the embracing men in *Untitled* (28I) into the limbs of the trees (see Figure 3.24) The tonality of the black-and-white image has caused the skin tones of the men to match the tree limbs on which they stand – the men's nudity on the limbs becomes an iconic symbol for being one with nature. Ramirez envisions a process

of becoming rooted in the land as a natural progression, as seen in the sequence of images with trees. What *Untitled* (29I) captures is the ideal vision: natural setting and gay bodies meld into a seamless union, with each becoming interchangeable elements in the photographs. For Ramirez, this marriage between nature and bodies becomes the guiding principle that drives his pursuit of images and certainly his pursuit of the American dream.

POSTSCRIPT

In the last untitled poem in *In Pursuit of Images*, Efren Ramirez sums up the essence of why he is a photographer. He writes,

Look around you, look at yourself, look within you, and then
look at the world; you may see a picture newly revealed.

The photograph lets you see the world over again, each time afresh.
The Universe may go on in continual flux, but the mere snapshot,
seizing a moment, becomes a relic of the past, made permanent.
It rescues for us what is irretrievably lost, in all its completeness.
It distills our hearts, arouses passion. It informs. Through it we
contemplate ourselves

(*In Pursuit of Images*)

Photography for Ramirez is intimately tied to notions of interiority – for Ramirez, it is a depth that both he and those he photographs inherently possess. Our perceptions of the world around us, as Ramirez observes, is readily shaped by an inward vision: “look within you, and then/look at the world.” It is this continuous process that brings rise to photography’s potential to nuance the surface-details of our existence so that, as upbringing within a homeland ravaged by multiple colonialisms and war, and where colonial regimes have historically controlled visual representations of Filipino bodies and landscapes. The constraints imposed on representation are further heightened by Ramirez’s fractured relationship to his family. His mother, in particular, perceived

Ramirez's interior self as inherently threatening to her domestic order; what followed is the destructive beating of the exterior of his body by his mother, which ironically produces an interiority premised upon an aspirational vision. What we find then in Ramirez's photographic practices is his conscious efforts to believe in the medium's potential to alter the ways in which we see the new and the remarkable in the most banal of human activities or commonplace things; his belief in photography's potential, likewise, embodies the medium with the potential to liberate his viewers, his subjects, and himself. Certainly his navigation through the hostile terrains of his mother's house and his eventual relocation to the United States and settlement in the gay spaces of San Francisco has forged a belief in photography's power to challenge and confront through the medium's inherent function of visibility, whether through everyday snap shots, staged portraiture, or even photographic abstractions (all of these types of images are found in *In Pursuit of Images*).

The poem also reflects on the archival imperative underscores Ramirez's photographic practices. Indeed, "the mere snapshot" does not just add to the "continual flux" of the Universe, but rather it houses the potential to maintain an enduring presence after its creation. His vision for photography is one premised on its future potential established at the click of the shutter and sustained decades if not centuries later. The archival imperative of Ramirez's photographs is thus based on the idea of its permanence. It is an alluring premise of photography for Ramirez, as it establishes photography as a dynamic medium, with the capacity to perform cultural work that speaks to the politics of gay visibility at unknown moments and geographies beyond the images' initial creation. If photography becomes "relics of the past," as Ramirez writes, they must be viewed as artifacts whose inherent function is to continue to engage their

viewers affectively and epistemologically at points in time that exceed the images' frames. Photography "arouses passion. It informs." His images captures Ramirez's navigation through the gay spaces of San Francisco armed with a camera, each shot taken an act of resistance to the notion of gay invisibility as well as improbability. "This is gay life," Ramirez pointedly states as the central ethos of his photography collection. Together the photographs become an archive of Ramirez's gay world in America--one that he inhabits with a gay multitude of men and women who have, since his arrival to the United States, become his surrogate family members. Ramirez's "pursuit of images" is likewise his own pursuit of his identity in America. "Through it," as Ramirez writes, "we are able to contemplate ourselves.

FIGURES

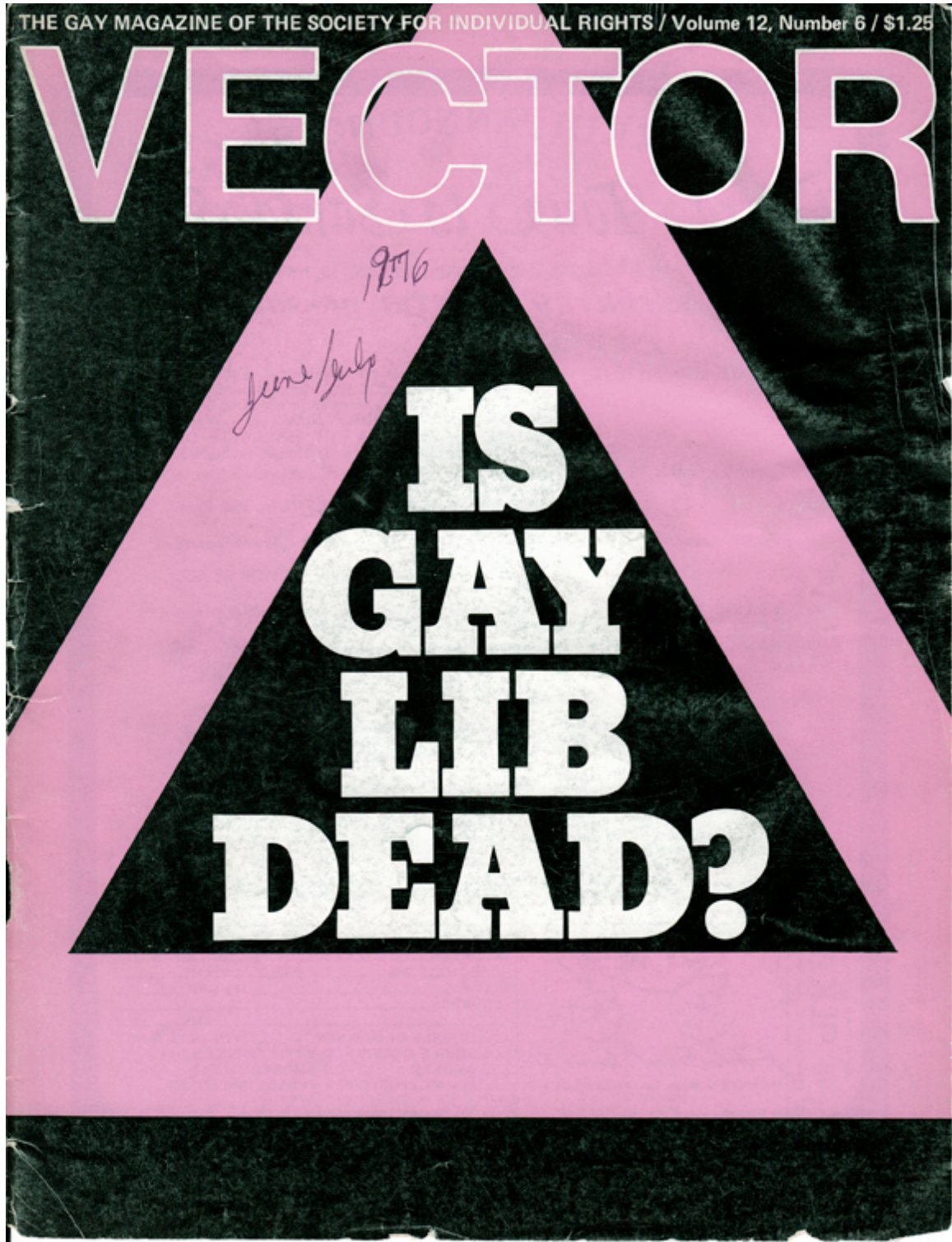


Figure 3.1: Cover of *Vector*, June/July 1976

**Portfolio:
THE EYE OF
EFREN
RAMIREZ**



24/VECTOR

Figure 3.2: Efren Ramirez, "Portfolio: The Eye of Efren Ramirez," *Vector* (June/July 1976).

Untitled (1V), ca. 1976 (top).

Untitled (2V/18I), ca. 1976 (bottom).

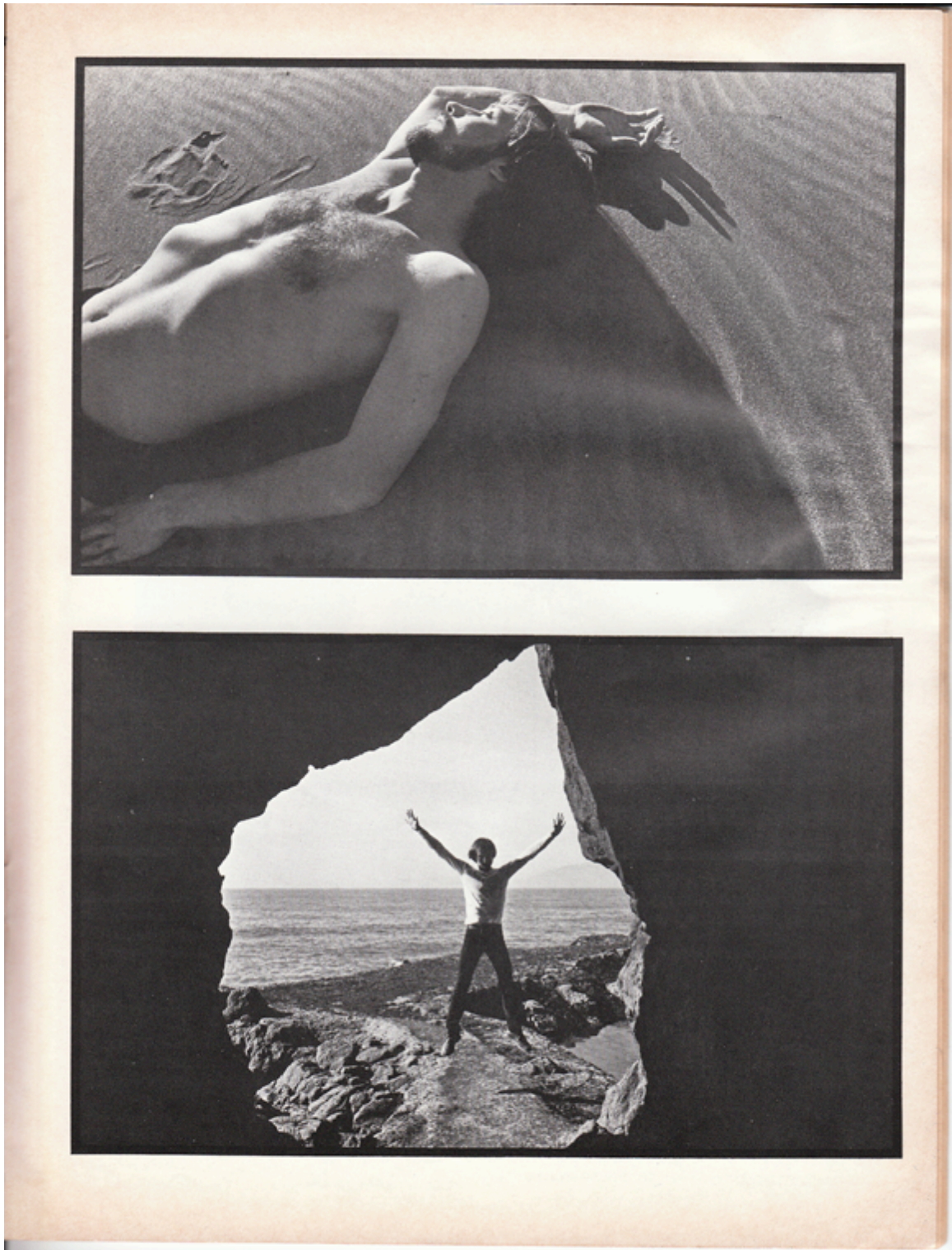


Figure 3.3: Efred Ramirez, "Portfolio: The Eye of Efred Ramirez," *Vector* (June/July 1976).
Untitled (3V), ca. 1976 (top).
Untitled (4V), ca. 1976 (bottom).



Figure 3.4: Efren Ramirez, "Portfolio: The Eye of Efren Ramirez," *Vector* (June/July 1976).
Untitled (5V), ca. 1976



Figure 3.5: Efren Ramirez, "Portfolio: The Eye of Efren Ramirez," *Vector* (June/July 1976).
Untitled (6V), ca. 1976



Figure 3.6: Efred Ramirez, *Untitled* (Cover), ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efred Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.7: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (11)*, ca. 1976.
From Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.8: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (21)*, ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.9: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled* (51), ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.10: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (6I)*, ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.11: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (71)*, ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.12: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled* (8I), ca. 1976.
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976).



Figure 3.13: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (91)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.14: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (10I)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.15: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (11)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.16: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (121)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.17: Efred Ramirez, *Untitled (131)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efred Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images (Peace & Pieces, 1976)*



Figure 3.18: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled* (141), ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)

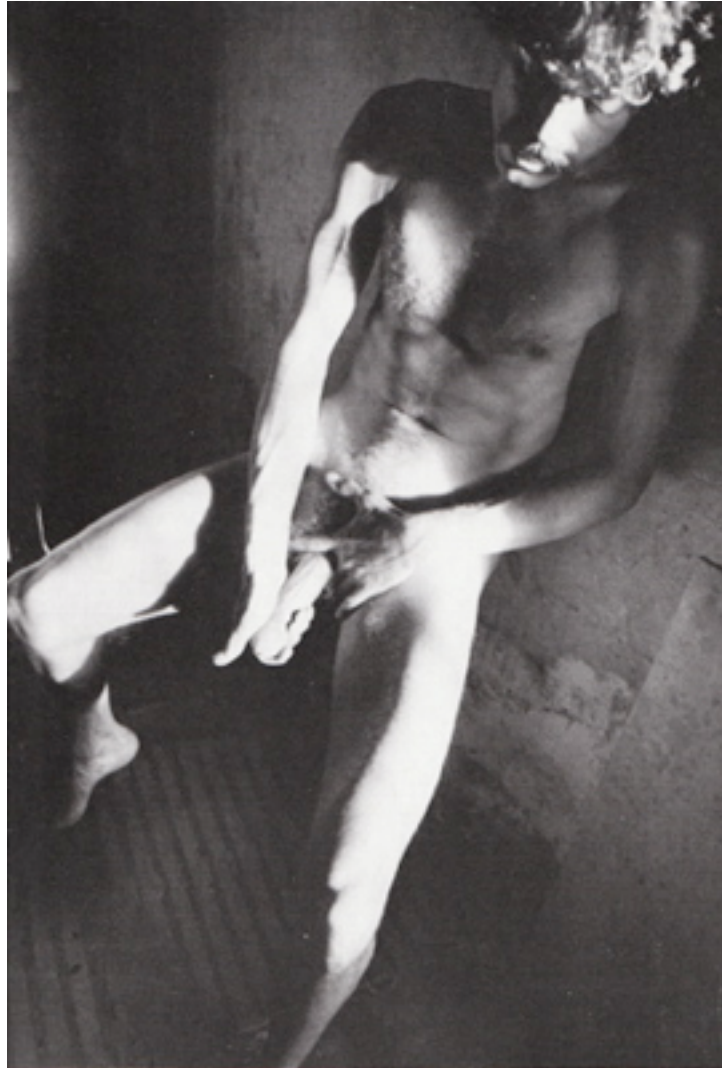


Figure 3.19: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (151)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.20: Efrén Ramírez, *Untitled* (171), ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efrén Ramírez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.21: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (24I)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.22: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled (271)*, ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.23: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled* (281), ca. 1976
Reproduced from Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)



Figure 3.24: Efren Ramirez, *Untitled* (30I), ca. 1976
From Efren Ramirez, *In Pursuit of Images* (Peace & Pieces, 1976)

CHAPTER 4

HERE AND THERE | *DITO AT DOON*: STEPHANIE SYJUCO BLOWS-UP THE *BLACK MARKETS*

I have always been skeptical about the West's coverage of the Third World, not so much because of bias – expecting bias-free coverage would be naïve – because what's written *here* about what goes on *there* invariably lacks context.
-Luis Francia, "Let Them Drink Coke"

The cultural state of being neither *here* nor *there*, of belonging to no distinct, delineated, or defined cultural identity, is a ripe departure for my work.
-Stephanie Syjuco, *Bay Area Art Now*

A palpable and yet productive tension emerges in the epigraphs by Stephanie Syjuco and Luis Francia that begin this chapter, a tension further heightened when paired next to each other. The tension arises from the use of "here" and "there" in both their statements. Left as they are in Stephanie Syjuco's statement, the adverbs provide little clarity or even the possibility to fulfill their deictic and directional potential. Syjuco gestures at the abstract locations; their unknown proximal and distal loci left only to speculation. Their abstraction, however, only exacerbate the grounding of a "distinct, delineated, or defined cultural identity."¹ Where exactly are Syjuco's "here" and "there"? Equally disquieting is Luis Francia's use of "here" and "there." They, too, are veiled with ambiguity despite possessing antecedents. If Syjuco's statement provokes an unease stemming from the vagueness of location, it is precisely the demarcation of geographies, in their generality, that arouses tension in Francia's statement. Following a Saidian telos, Francia's "here" and "there" exist as oppositional locales, the West and the

¹ Mark Johnstone et al., "Stephanie Syjuco," *Epicenter: Bay Area Art Now* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 246.

Third World; and together they project, as Said has convincingly argued, “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”² Indeed, Francia’s statement conveys not just geographic dichotomies of the monolithic West and the Third World, he directs our attention to something noticeably amiss between the two locations. Francia establishes the predicament of representation *by* the West *of* the Third World, a clear example of “a complex hegemony” that exists between the “here” and the “there.”

Francia's statement is taken from his critique of the 1989 PBS documentary *The U.S. and the Philippines: In Our Own Image* by Stanley Karnow. And while generally favoring the attempts of the film to “demystify” the public's understanding of Philippine-United States relations from 1898 onward through the film’s revisionist, liberal agenda, Francia ultimately pinpoints its limitations.³ Even the best efforts of the West (“here”/the United States/Americans) to represent the Third World (“there”/the Philippines/Filipinos), Francia astutely observes, “invariably lacks context.”⁴ The lack that Francia suggests is motivated by a media-driven contemporary moment – a period marked by what he calls a “neocolonial worldview” – from which the film emerges.⁵ It is a moment of globalization, characterized by an expediency of image-making across a diversity of media-platforms – film, television, new media and Internet technologies – resulting in the distribution of images that traverse large swaths of the globe with facile and, yet, influential ease. Francia justifiably connects contemporary representations of the Third World by the West to the literary and visual scripts and rarefied representations of “the Other” found in the colonial archives. Contemporary images of

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 5.

³ Luis H. Francia, *Memories of Overdevelopment: Reviews and Essay of Two Decades* (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, 1998), 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

those in the Third World (including Filipinos), as Francia points out, are “fragmented and emphasisiz[e] the sensational,” much akin to the iconic representations of the ethnographic savages of the colonial era.⁶ For over a century representations of Filipinos have remained remarkably flat.⁷

If the obvious tension in Francia’s statement is the oppositional relationship and the discursive predicaments engendered by United States-Philippine relations, this tension that emerges out of the historical entanglements between the two is also a productive one. Francia’s statement intimates a proposal of sorts, a call to action that responds to image-making practices and image distribution systems within a globalized visual economy.⁸ Indeed, for image-makers in Francia’s “here” (the United States), it is a call put forth to them for more context in the production of images to fill the lack that, for Francia, seems to predominate in the West. While Francia’s behest for context should be rooted within a framework that considers not only what is represented and

⁶ Ibid., 76. Francia’s keen observations with media-driven representations that are flat, fragmented, lack context and linked to colonial representations draw connections to Edward Said’s discussion of the media’s role in shaping and promulgating stereotypes in what he calls “the electronic, postmodern world.” Said observes: “Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient.’” Said, 26. I have also referenced the ways in which Marlon Fuentes challenges flattened ethnographic representations of Filipino bodies culled from the American colonial archives in his influential work *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995). See Chapter 1, “Surface-Depth Tactics: Marlon Fuentes’ *Bontoc Eulogy* and the Reconfiguration of the Archives” of this dissertation.

⁷ The flatness of images from the archives of American empire is challenged by the dynamic topographies of Marlon Fuentes’s *Face Fusion* series. See Chapter 2, “Improbable Topographies: Marlon Fuentes and the Kinetic Landscapes of the *Face Fusion* Series.”

⁸ My use of “visual economy” gestures to the larger social, political, cultural, and economic structures and mechanisms within the contemporary moment that have facilitated the global processes of visual production and distribution, each side accumulating significant value. I am also influenced by Deborah Poole and her usage of the term “visual economy” in her anthropological study of the culture of image production, image circulation, and image reception in the Andean colonial context; within each of the three visual prongs that Poole establishes, she examines the socio-cultural processes involved in the creation of a visual value system that drives the Andean visual economy. See Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 9-13.

visible on the surface of the images but also the processes involved in the images' creation.⁹ It is a call for images that attempt to break away from the constraints that have brought rise to the status of iconicity and whose discursive force and cultural power have remained contingent on constant inscriptions and reinscriptions of race within the Western visual archives. In other words, Francia calls for images that move beyond representations of residents of the Third World, including global migrants, in flat, two-dimensional terms – and calls for images that question these very representational categories. In many ways Francia's words speaks to the very core of Stephanie Syjuco's posited quandary of "being neither here nor there."

As an artist working in the United States (in San Francisco), Stephanie Syjuco is arguably at the receiving end of Francia's appeal for nuanced representations produced within the confines of "here." At first glance, Syjuco's statement about culture, in all its geographic or spatial vagueness, might not satisfy Francia's call for context. But it is precisely her use of "here" and "there" that binds her words to his, adding a rich layer to even his own conceptualization of the terms. What comes into view when the opening epigraphs are paired next to each other is a call-and-response dynamic, productive in its subtlety. If Francia calls for socio-cultural and historical context in visual production emerging from the United States, then Syjuco responds in a way that takes into consideration the globalized context within which she locates herself as an artist and the resulting "cultural state" attached to her identity as a Filipino immigrant to the United States. Syjuco's attempts to contextualize her visual production and exceeds perhaps Francia's focus on the ramifications of history, culture, and politics that

⁹ Chapters 1 of this dissertation conveys the importance of film and photographic surfaces in Marlon Fuentes' work; at the core of his work, however, is a conceptual depth that influences his archival imperative. The subsequent archival reconfigurations attempt to confront the colonial mechanisms that have ossified representations of Filipino bodies in reductive and iconic ways.

emerge only from United States-Philippine relations. Through her visual work, Syjuco conveys a desire “to articulate being an ambivalent subject of forces larger than myself – politics, global economics, capitalism, and the corporate cultural machine.”¹⁰ It is within the context of global labor markets and consumer-driven global cultures, as well as producing artwork from the vantage point of being within what Francia calls “the belly of the beast,” that Syjuco is able to claim a Filipino identity that is defined not necessarily only by the dichotomous relationships between the United States and the Philippines, but rather takes into account “[t]his odd form of ‘forced cosmopolitanism’ due to economic opportunities abroad and the domestic hardships at home.”¹¹ In other words, the global outflow of Filipino migrant laborers from the Philippine islands and the relevance of the Filipino diaspora have inspired a Filipino identity for Syjuco that is neither “here” nor “there” – an identity that straddles “the state of being ‘between’ things.”¹²

The opening epigraph by Stephani Syjuco suggests that being situated within an in-between or interstitial position inspires more than stifles her creative process. In considering Syjuco’s response, we might think about the ways that Meena Alexander frames migrancy in this contemporary context when she observes, “Migrancy, a central theme for many of us in this shifting world, forces a recasting of how the body is grasped, how language works.”¹³ Syjuco’s artwork, I argue, engages her viewers to think about their predetermined ideas of the word “body” as it is used to describe corporeality in relation to the mechanisms and machineries that inform its in/visibility

¹⁰ Stephanie Syjuco, “Unsolicited Collaborations and Undercover Agents: Notes From a Local Underground” (MFA thesis, Stanford University, 2005), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 1.

within the contemporary moment. In the accompanying exhibition catalog for the 1998 *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* exhibition, Syjuco's close attention to bodies is captured: "To the degree that ties and history are lived out in and by bodies, they seem to be worked out as a personal engagement of will."¹⁴ Even when represented in their most visually minimal composite forms such as in the *Portrait Series II* (1997), Syjuco actively pursues "the body" as a driving conceptual force in her artwork. In the *Portrait Series II*, Syjuco uses green chalkboard paint on several black matboards individually framed and grouped together to create an assemblage of cell-like forms (see Figure 4.1); the green cells become metaphors for the inevitability of life and the predicaments that might arise when growth cannot be maintained within the defined structures of the frames.¹⁵ The piece questions directly the predicament of Filipino migrancy within a global labor context. In *Portrait Series II* and certainly in the *Black Market Series* (2005), Syjuco creates a visual language that emerges from a questioning of her "Filipino" identity, a process prompted by her presence in the United States and distance from the Philippines. Her vantage point allows Syjuco to conceive of Filipino bodies as "the world's best 'undercover agents' in that they seem to be

¹⁴ "Stepahnie Syjuco," *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum), 124.

¹⁵ To further elaborate on my read of *Portrait Series II*, we might consider the ways in which each individual frame represents a Petri dish; each green form represents growth of an organic kind. Placed within the context of migrancy, each green growth allegorizes migrant bodies within the context of global labor markets; the color green suggests the conflation of money and bodies (or the worth of migrant bodies). The green clusters grow larger as demand for cheap labor increases; ultimately the clusters exceed the frames boundaries. The pieces in *Portrait Series II* allude to the possible dangers and predicaments that await a growing reliance on migrant labor within the rigid structures of transnational economies. Jeff Baysa, one of the curator of the 1998 *At Home & Abroad* exhibit, offers an important detail in Syjuco's *Portrait Series II* that only those who attended the exhibit first-hand could experience. He observes, "the black matting under glass is reflective." The reflective properties of the pieces implicate viewers in the frames, as participants or accomplices to the growth and demand of migrant labor in the contemporary moment—it is an inescapable reality. This experiential and interactive quality of *Portrait Series II* is, I argue, characteristic of her larger visual oeuvre. Jeff Baysa, "Longing/Belonging: Filipino Artists Abroad," *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum), 54.

everywhere in the world and yet completely invisible” – here and there and yet neither/nor.¹⁶

In this chapter, I examine the contours of Stephanie Syjuco’s interstitial interventions and visual politics in her *Black Market Series* that comprise of nine digitally altered images found on the Internet displayed alongside asymmetrical black sculptural objects (see Figure 4.2).¹⁷ *Black Market Series* embodies visually the impact of what Lisa Lowe calls “the emergence of a global or transnational economy”.¹⁸ This transnational economy has relied on Filipino migrant bodies for cheap skilled and unskilled labor throughout all sectors of the global economy. Historically, Filipino men and women

¹⁶ Syjuco, 4. Allan Isaac also highlights the stealthy “undercover” qualities of the Filipino American body in relation to Andrew Cunanan, who murdered of fashion designer Gianni Versace in 1997. Cunanan’s identity of Filipino and Italian decent confounded media outlets, such as the *New York Times*. The newspaper, as Isaac notes, “puzzled over Andrew’s enigmatic unrecognizability.” Isaac surmises, “this national media blindness could have also described Filipino presence in the United States and in the Americas.” Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxiii.

¹⁷ In the same year she created the *Black Market Series*, Stephanie Syjuco created the *Black Market Blowout*, inspired by the American modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright and his masterpiece *Fallingwater* (1935). The *Black Market Blowout* is a large-scale installation structure created as a postcolonial reconfiguration of a Wright’s *Fallingwater* and also as a display for black sculptural objects that Syjuco produced. Syjuco originally conceptualized the installation piece and objects to be displayed alongside the digitally altered images of the *Black Market Series*. While it remains unclear from Syjuco list of exhibitions if *Black Market Blowout* was ever formally exhibited, the *Black Market Series* was shown at the James Harris Gallery in Seattle in 2005. Because of space restrictions at the James Harris Gallery, the digital prints were shown only with the black sculptural objects, without the reconfigured *Fallingwater*. The black sculptural pieces were instead displayed on shelving on the walls where the prints also hung. For this chapter, I focus only on the *Black Market Series* prints and the accompanying black sculptural objects shown at the James Harris Gallery in Seattle, their interplay, and their conceptual possibilities. Recently, Stephanie Syjuco has created a new series entitled *Strange Attractors* (2008), that is, as she describes, a “series of drawings is loosely based on a previous “Black Market” sculpture project. Using gouache and ink tracings from product catalogs and magazines, “aggregates” of commodities are created and juxtaposed with collaged images of classical and Modern furniture.” For a description of the changes in the *Black Markets* see Lucia Enriquez, “Syjuco undertakes questions of history, design and consumer culture,” *International Examiner*, Sep 21-Oct 4, 2005, 8. For a list of her exhibitions, see Syjuco’s CV: Stephanie Syjuco, “CV” <<http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/cv.html>> (accessed March 31, 2007). For images and the description of *Strange Attractors*, see Stephanie Syjuco, “Strange Attractors” <http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/cat_new.html> (accessed June 13, 2008).

¹⁸ Lisa Lowe, “Out of the West: Asian Migration and Modernity,” in *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xxii.

have fulfilled labor shortfalls in the United States and throughout the world, as nurses and domestic servants, seamen and sailors, and cannery and agricultural workers.¹⁹ Within a transnational economy that is fueled by consumerism, many Filipinos have also been transformed into sexual commodities, fulfilling libidinous demands in the Philippines and certainly outside its borders.²⁰ Centering Filipino bodies within this frenetic moment of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption demands a re-envisioning of Filipino subjectivities in addition to the re-examination of representational strategies and modes of visual production, as Lowe observes, “to be critical of racial essentialism and cultural nationalist formations of identity within the context of a single nation-state.”²¹ While not solely bound to the constraints of Filipino or Filipino American cultural nationalist projects, Syjuco interstitial vision in her *Black Market Series* emphasizes a Filipino diasporic poetics and political sensibility. Syjuco’s artwork, as she observes, is rooted in “a privileged place not bound by the formalities of how I should or shouldn’t be, and [I] have the freedom to have my artwork speak for and about a multiplicity of concerns.”²²

¹⁹ See Rhacael Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Kale Fajardo, “Filipino Cross Currents: Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2004).

²⁰ See Roland Tolentino, “Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space,” *Social Text* 48, 14: 3 (Fall 1996), 49-76.

²¹ Lowe, xxi-xxii.

²² Syjuco, 20. Syjuco’s statement echoes Elain H. Kim’s remarks on the plethora of possibilities afforded to Asian American artists who reside on the interstices. Kim observes “Location on the interstices of Asia and America, of black and white, of cultural nationalism and feminism, of aesthetics and politics, makes it possible to view the world from several different vantage points at the same moment.” Elain H. Kim, “Interstitial Subjects: Asian American Visual Arts as a Site for New Cultural Conversations,” in *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 50.

INTERSTITIAL VANTAGE POINTS

If one of the hallmarks of globalization is the movement of bodies across a multitude of spatial and psychic topographies, then Stephanie Syjuco, like many Filipinos, was ensnared by its forces early in her life. Born in 1974 in Manila, Philippines, Syjuco spent the first three years of her life in the islands before moving with her family to San Francisco, where they eventually settled. At age 10, Syjuco and her family moved to Japan, spending two years there before returning to San Francisco where she commenced her art ambitions, education, and where she continues to reside and work. Accompanying these back-and-forth movements were observations of Filipino and Filipino American (or “Fil-Am”) identities and cultural practices and politics influenced by the colonial histories of the Philippines, the racial and ethnic diversity of the islands, and the “rupture of a ‘localized’ or home-based Filipino identity” due to transnational economics. The Philippines, as she observes, “is a country of mixed allegiances and mongrelized pedigrees.”²³ Syjuco recalls, “In my adolescent years, even up until recently, I was confused by my inability to be recognized by Filipinos and Filipino American (Fil-Ams) as ‘one of them.’”²⁴ Disheartened by her perceptions of incongruities or “mistranslations” (a term she refers to repeatedly with regard to her work), Syjuco questioned the means of entry into either community.²⁵ Until 2000, she traveled using a Philippine passport, and yet she still felt denied “entry into the secret undercover world of the global Filipino underground,” lacking, as she points out, “the right passwords, the right accent or inflection due to my Americanization.”²⁶ Moreover, because of her physiognomic appearance, a result of her racially and ethnically mixed

²³ Syjuco, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8. See also Syjuco’s artist statement: Stephanie Syjuco, “Artist Statement” <<http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/statement.html>> (accessed March 31, 2007).

²⁶ Syjuco, 5.

background as a “chinoy” (or Chinese-Filipino), Syjuco acknowledges an ambivalent, if not conflicted, relationship to the Filipino American community, and in a larger sense the Philippines as a whole.²⁷

Syjuco’s perceptions of her inability to situate herself within the two communities speaks to the construction of a third-space, an interstitial location, that affords her autonomy and a productive distance to create her artwork; it is within this interstitial space that she has transformed herself into her own “secret agent,” a tactic that ironically permits her entry into the global community of Filipinos despite her perceptions to the contrary. It is from the interstitial location that Syjuco is able to read her own lived experiences against the experiences of Filipino and other inhabitants of Third-World geographies, establishing important connections and building and strengthening a conceptual repertoire that is creatively and intellectually responsive to transnational capitalism and its consequences. Syjuco observes, “I had this idea in the back of my mind that these objects I was making were an extension of what was being made in the Philippines.”²⁸ Supporting the wide-range of her aesthetic surfaces in her artwork is Syjuco’s socially and politically-minded conceptual language. Syjuco

²⁷ I use the word “conflicted” to describe her relationship to Filipinos and Filipino Americans deliberately because of her comments about her “chinoy” racial and ethnic background that prevent her entry into either community. While I think Syjuco’s commitment to addressing the politics of globalization and their effects on representations of Filipinos as well as others in the Third World is evident in her artwork, her conceptions of Filipino race and physiognomy – “many Filipinos and Filipino-Americans have darker complexions and wider, flatter noses, looking more like Thai or Indonesian” – run the risk of essentialism, the very thing, I believe, her visual projects seem to confront and challenge. See especially endnote #7 in MFA thesis in which she describes the incongruities between her “chinoy” appearance vis-à-vis the physical appearances of what she considers encompass the majority of Filipinos and Filipino Americans. Moreover, Syjuco also makes another bold statement concerning the reception of her artwork by Filipinos that runs the risk of essentializing a particular type of Filipino audience. She states: “Filipinos do not consider my work ‘of them’ or speaking to them as they do not find any ‘recognizable’ ethnic imagery (pictorial portraits, brown faces, explicit political, social, or cultural concerns).” Ibid. 24, 21.

²⁸ David Spalding, “The Missing Link: Art, Biotechnology, and the Disappearance of Difference,” *Artweek*, 33.8 (October 2002), 13-14.

observes: “In thinking of how I want to proceed and of which dialogues I want to participate, I can think of no better place to speak from than the space ‘between things.’”²⁹

Framed within the context of racial or ethnic allegiances – specifically with regard to Filipino or Filipino American communities – the cultural state of being neither here nor there encompasses a psychic quality, as much as it does a geographic imperative. Remarking about the Philippines, Syjuco points out, “I don’t have a lot of solid memories, but it has become a bit of a psychological tie.”³⁰ Created in 1996, *Pacific Theater Operations*, a series of 10 cross-stitched portraits, evidences an early instance of Syjuco grappling with the systems and mechanisms that govern the production of memory and history – official and personal. The portraits reflect a mediation of her affective and spatial connection to the Philippine islands. In two of the portraits, Syjuco recreates World War II battles in the Philippines using cross-stitching as a mode of representation. Movements of troops by land, sea, and air are denoted by red and black cross-stitched arrows, some pointing at each other, while others point only toward unknown terrestrial or oceanic masses (see Figure 4.3–4.4). If the portraits double as maps that exhibit, as Syjuco points out, “specific actions, events, and contestations” that occurred during pivotal moments in Philippine history, then they also take on the added dimension of becoming a guide map of Syjuco’s inner struggles to situate herself. The arrows not only point to actual military incursions, but they also all fundamentally direct viewers to the Philippines – a space embedded with real, historical conflict as well as psychic battles. The portraits enable Syjuco to confront the physical geography of her country of birth – the arrows direct semiotically to unnamed locales all in the

²⁹ Syjuco, 22.

³⁰ Victoria Everman, “Stephanie Syjuco: Capitalism’s Worst Enemy,” *Pearl Necklace*, 2.2 (2006), 9.

Philippines – but they also evidence “her pretty tenuous” connection to it through the portraits’ fragmented, dotted, and disjointed lines.³¹ *Pacific Theater Operations* draws our attention to her psychological bond to the islands, engendered in large part by the spatial distance from the islands as well as her interstitial location within the Filipino global community.

During her time in the early 1990s at the Art Institute in San Francisco, Syjuco confronted the overwhelming pressures of identity politics sweeping through the art scene that she neither fully embraced nor entirely rejected. Much of the artwork motivated by identity politics, in Syjuco’s opinion, made weighty and authoritative claims to race, ethnicity, and culture. The least successful and compelling artwork for Syjuco encompassed a “shrillness,” while even the top artwork influenced by identity politics conveyed a didactic or “remedial-education tone” that she found off-putting.³² Syjuco struggled to find ways to transgress the reductive qualities of artwork motivated by identity politics, while not entirely dismissing the politic import of the movement. Elucidating this point further, Syjuco observes, “I was also searching for a way to address things in a less specific or ethnically authoritative manner, as I felt I had no claim to cultural authority.”³³ Straddling the intersections between Filipino and Filipino American culture provided a rich counterpoint and alternative to the reifying tendencies that Syjuco felt imbued artwork inspired by identity politics. Insofar as her position at the interstices allowed her to move beyond “speak[ing] *of* or *for* the Filipino

³¹ Ibid. 9.

³² In her MFA thesis, Syjuco references the work of Felix-Gonzalez-Torres and Robert Gober as examples that challenged her to think about and create work motivated by things personal to her in ways that relied on “the formal and conceptual with the particular.” Their influences helped Syjuco transgress what she saw as artwork based on the overwhelming reductive framework of identity politics. Syjuco, 3.

³³ Ibid., 5. Syjuco also points out, “As much as I want to be ‘just an artist’ there are forces at work around me which insists I articulate *what type* of artist, and *to who do I speak for?*”. Ibid., 20. Original emphasis.

community,” claiming an interstitial position permitted her, ironically, to articulate and confront the mechanisms and institutional regimes that facilitated constructions of “Filipino-ness” and the disjunctures faced by her and other Filipinos throughout the world.³⁴ If “dealing with abstracts in stead of realities” describes the contours of her early career, Syjuco has since established a conceptual and aesthetic ethos based on the impact of transnational capitalism on Filipino and Third-World bodies.³⁵ Syjuco refined the political and cultural import of creating artwork from the interstices that spoke to the larger structures that guide visual production by attending Stanford University for an MFA degree (graduating in 2005). Her graduate education also shaped the conceptual interstitial language she displays in her artwork, reflective of what Rolando Tolentino calls “the geopolitics of the visible.”³⁶

Describing the function of Philippine cinema, Rolando Tolentino observes, “It lays bare the geopolitics of the visual in order to render the almost invisible working operation[s] that make both visibility and invisibility possible.”³⁷ Syjuco’s interstitial interventions in her artwork are premised precisely on elucidating and exposing the larger and often invisible regimes (globalization and American cultural hegemony) in the contemporary context that give rise to the vagaries of representations. Syjuco explains, “I love thinking that the power of style or image can be turned on its head — that using a convention of historical diagrams or wood grain can be altered in such a

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁵ Diana Gaston, “Diana Gaston in Conversation with Stephanie Syjuco & Jo Whaley,” *Exposure*, 40:2 (Fall 2007), 5.

³⁶ See the important collection *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Cultures*, ed. Rolando Tolentino (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000). Rolando Tolentino’s “Introduction” provides a concise explication of what he terms “the geopolitics of the visible.”

³⁷ Rolando Tolentino, “Introduction,” in *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures*, ed. Rolando Tolentino (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), vii.

way to subvert the viewer's assumptions of its authority."³⁸ While her artwork is inspired by the systems the govern representations within this contemporary context, her focus on the global's impact on the local (and vice-versa), especially in relation to migrant bodies, work to, as George Lipsitz observes, "undermine foundational certainties about the meaning of local and national identities, the value of personal and collective histories, and the solidarity of social relationships and social networks."³⁹ This interstitial imperative is exposed in her re/creations of the *Black Market Series*.

BLOWING-UP THE *BLACK MARKETS* – EXPLODING THE UNARY IMAGE

The *Black Market Series* consist of 9 chromogenic lightjet prints of digital images that the artist found on the Internet. Eight of the images display market scenes (or *palengkes*) in nondescript locations in the Philippines, while the ninth image captures two Filipino kids on a stationary vehicle (see Figures 4.5–4.13). In each of the digital images, Syjuco has digitally redacted areas in the frame, leaving behind only the anonymous Filipino bodies in the reconfigured market place suspended in their shopping or selling of goods (or in the case of the ninth image, Filipino bodies frozen curiously on a stationary vehicle outside of the market place). Her redactions are focused only on the commodities being bought and sold. In the images, the black redactions become figurative "black market goods," and the market scenes, likewise, are transformed into "black markets," or spaces where illicit goods are bought and sold. The images leave viewers to speculate what lies underneath, or even behind, the black-colored areas. Some images display redacted areas, with uneven and jagged edges from the digital paintbrush/eraser tool used, whereas the large surface areas of the other

³⁸ Gaston, 7.

³⁹ George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3.

images are blanketed almost like spilt ink throughout, leaving only the minimal depiction of the Filipino bodies present in the scenes. To be displayed with the *Black Market Series*, Syjuco created black sculptural objects out of wrapping unknown commodities/objects of different sizes and shapes using paper mache and painting them with a glossy black finish; the final results resemble abstract and asymmetrical forms, what she calls “bobjects,” that strip the former commodities/objects of their particular function and value in consumer culture and transforms them into unknowns.⁴⁰ If the digital images with the redactions capture the literal manifestations of “black markets,” the space that holds the *Black Market Series* are transformed into a black market as well. Together the images and the bobjects in the *Black Market Series* make visible the triangulations of transnational economies, visual production, and American empire within the context of Filipino migrancy. Her series explode the flattening effects of globalization in Western representational practices while also implicating American consumer culture and empire within these processes. The *Black Market Series* enable Syjuco to address the geopolitics of the visible from the vantage point of being neither “here” and “there” nor *dito at doon* through which she is able to paradoxically exist and experience the “here” and “there” and the *dito at doon* of the Filipino global diaspora.⁴¹

The *Black Market Series* inspire a conceptual Filipino interstitial visual practice and language that relies on the use of familiar objects, mediums, and conventions; taken together, Syjuco deliberately reconfigures the dominant ways we think of each of their popular functions. She notes, “I began creating objects and surfaces that looked strangely familiar, manipulating conventions of style and structure.”⁴² Her fascination with flattened representations and their mobility within transnational economies

⁴⁰ Syjuco, 18.

⁴¹ *Dito at doon* is Tagalog for “here and there.”

⁴² Syjuco, 5.

converge in her 2004 *Pacific Super*, created a year before the *Black Market Series*. *Pacific Super* is a Fuji lightjet print that captures an assortment of Asian food products arranged to precisely mirror the popular destination of Stonehenge in the United Kingdom (see Figure 4.14). The print captures the popularity of Asian goods sold in Western countries, but more aptly draws a connection between the global circuits of commodities – be they products bought in Asian supermarkets or Asian bodies themselves – to the economics of travel. If Stonehenge entices people to visit, the Asian goods that resemble the monument also attract potential consumers. The print captures the freighted entanglements between Asia and the West, both have become mutually constitutive of each other.

The conceptual underpinnings of the print allow it to transcend its inherent two-dimensional flatness, a strategy that Syjuco adheres to in the *Black Market Series* with her attention to notion of “bodies.” Syjuco interstitial interventions in the series confront the larger processes that result in the objectification of Filipino bodies in the visual domain, largely contingent on the economics of migrancy and the masculinist gaze. Syjuco is keenly interested in the ways Filipino bodies are seen and understood within a moment when the Filipino presence throughout the world has reached staggering proportions; one critic notes, “Judging by the airport lines, it would seem that Filipinos have developed a special ability to navigate between homeland and foreign shores with greater ease and flexibility than natives of most other nations.”⁴³ While “ease” and “flexibility” of Filipino mobility may seemingly provide Filipinos with a certain degree of privilege, they are also a catalyst for rarefied visions of Filipino bodies.

⁴³ Dana Friis-Hansen, “Adrift in the Pacific: Filipinos in the Contemporary Art Scene,” *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998), 28.

In this moment of mobility, Filipinos have established themselves within all sectors of the transnational economies, within sanctioned channels of labor and production, but also within their illicit and stigmatized underbelly. Regarding Filipinas, Rolando Tolentino remarks, “[they] have been integrated into the circuits of transnationalism in various ways: as sweatshop factory workers in multinational corporations within the national space, and as entertainers, domestic helpers, nurses, and mail-order brides in international spaces.”⁴⁴ So too have Filipino men been ensnared within the forces of globalization, as seamen, factory workers, and laborers in the Middle East. Tolentino aptly points out that “Transnational space keeps the Philippine economy afloat.”⁴⁵ Syjuco’s interventions broadens Tolentino’s invocation of “transnational space,” by playing with the duality of official and unofficial, licit and illicit, sanctioned and unsanctioned, and visible and invisible tensions that drive the Philippine economy and sustain the circuits of transnational labor and goods from the islands to the rest of the world. What you see, isn’t necessarily what you get in Syjuco’s visual oeuvre – an oppositional tactic that directly confronts the popular WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) acronym attached to technological systems and applications that ensure a visual parity between the screen (before) and the final output (after). Her compositional choices in the *Black Market Series* offer an important gendered rebuttal to the ease to which flattened images of Filipino bodies are produced and distributed within an age of digital and new media technologies such as the Internet. Like American colonial visual practices at the turn-of-the-century, image production in the present-day setting carry significant material and psychological stakes; flattened

⁴⁴ Tolentino, “Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space,” 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

representations, past and present, afford Filipinos very little agency and notions of interiority are, likewise, often denied.⁴⁶

The Filipino bodies captured in the digital images in the *Black Market Series* are overwhelmingly women, as makers, sellers, and buyers of goods. A few men and boys are pictured, yet the images themselves present the marketplace as a highly-gendered quotidian experience. Rather than photographing the scenes herself to ascertain the images' veracity, Syjuco culled from the Internet digital images of marketplaces in the Philippines. The Internet becomes, for Syjuco, an important archive that she returns to frequently in her artwork and represents; it is, for Syjuco, a type of global "collective collection—a repository of stuff that may or may not be true."⁴⁷ Her vision of the Internet as a "collective collection" denotes its reach and certainly its didactic functions in consolidating racial, ethnic, and class distinctions. While viewers are privy to the images' location (the Philippines) through Syjuco's catalog description of the series, the location's truthfulness is suspect, especially given the artists' own stance concerning the archive. Syjuco observes that "The speed in which things can become 'out there' or even viral is a double-edged sword, both a positive or negative depending on how [you] utilize the flow."⁴⁸ It is with a sense of purpose and direction that Syjuco "utilizes" the Internet to speak a certain truth about the Philippines regardless of whether the scenes are taken there or some other Asian location. As part of her interstitial intervention, Syjuco re/inscribes a certain truthfulness about the local economic system in the

⁴⁶ In Chapter 2, I write in detail about Marlon Fuentes' reclamation of "interiority," altering dominant conceptions of the term from images found in the American visual archives. The contemporary moment has inspired a similar denial of interiority in images of Filipino bodies. One could argue that because of the expediency of image-making and image-distribution in today's world, flattened images of Third-world bodies pervade and are more effective in consolidating racial and ethnic types.

⁴⁷ Gaston, 7. Stephanie Syjuco has utilized the Internet in other pieces: *Composite Bamboo Forest* (2004) and *Unsolicited Collaboration with Shaun Odell* (2004), to name but a few.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

Philippines, especially in the ways her images highlight the marketplaces as gendered economic systems.

In her interrogations of the transnational economy of the Philippines, Syjuco's artwork allows her to connect to the localized system of producing, buying, and selling of commodities. While she admits to an internal struggle of claiming or submitting entirely to a Filipino or Filipino American identity, her artwork facilitates an ironic attachment to the people pictured in the market scenes. Pictured in the *Black Market Series* is not "a distance that she cannot overcome," as one critic notes, rather quite the opposite.⁴⁹ Instead, Syjuco conceptualizes herself within the frames of the images and succeeds in connecting her own life to those pictured. Syjuco articulates this connection, observing "it's a chilling idea to me that in another life I could have wound up on the production end of my own consumerism."⁵⁰ Born in the Philippines, Syjuco acknowledges the very real possibility of having a different life than what she has now. It seems obvious to read into the images an impossible separation or distance – an exilic detachment – between the artist and the Philippines, her country of birth. Yet such a reading intimates a dismissal of her connection to the systems that have constituted and shaped the very identities and practices captured in the frames. She is indeed connected, and the *Black Market Series* allow her to visualize the palpable connections, as well the postcolonial feminist praxis from which her work emerges.

Identifying her art practices within the systems of Third-world labor production and consumption, Syjuco situates herself in the gendered labor practices of migrants, more specifically connecting to Filipinas who make up "the largest and widest flows of

⁴⁹ Regina Hackett, "Photos bridge a culture gap uniquely" (September 16, 2005), http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/visualart/240871_inbrief16.html (accessed March 10, 2008).

⁵⁰ Stephanie Johnson, "Designing Women," *BUST* (August 2006).

contemporary female migration” in the world.⁵¹ Speaking about her art practices, Syjuco points out “I considered myself a self-imposed ‘factory worker,’ producing multiple forms of the same product on a home-made assembly line.”⁵² Her artwork facilitates the emergence of the Filipino artist as migrant laborer, a strategy that offers her the ability to critique both the masculine regimes that drive transnational economies and the production of good within what she calls “‘sanctioned’ channels of capitalism” (including the highly elitist art world).⁵³ The nine *Black Market Series* images, as well as the black sculptural “bobjects,” reflect this overarching sense of repetition or seriality of the production of artwork as commodities, all which are tinged with a factory-line sensibility. Syjuco admits, “I wanted to implicate myself in both types of labor – the ‘high end’ labor of art production, and the ‘low-end’ labor associated with factories and assembly plants.”⁵⁴ Syjuco recognizes that contemporary transnational economics are contingent on “colonial, militarist, and capitalist histories,” all of which are driven by a masculine ethos; she responds by offering a postcolonial feminist vision that bestows agency and resistance onto the lives of migrant Filipinas.⁵⁵ By equating her art practices to the labor practices of Third-world migrants, Syjuco conveys the conceptual nuance and intervention that gives her artworks’ surface critical surface and decolonizing depth.

Where light, film negatives, chemicals and solutions, and print paper are used in the conventional photography process, digital image production is contingent on

⁵¹ Parreñas, 1.

⁵² Syjuco’s factory-line sensibility gestures to Andy Warhol’s “Factory.” In referencing Warhol’s artistic production as well as migrant labor, Syjuco is able to situate herself with the rarefied terrains of high art, critiquing its culture and art practices, while also producing a postcolonial critique. Syjuco, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁵ Tolentino’s situates his investigation of Filipina mail-order brides within these masculine and heterosexual circuits, observing, “The discourse of mail-order brides certainly is symptomatic of the Philippine-U.S. relationship.” Tolentino, “Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space,” 49, 51.

computer technologies. Digital images are composed of an arrangement of numbers that computer programs and technologies sequence to make visible, whether on computer monitors or printer paper. The visibility of digital images on the screen or when printed rely on the arrangement of binary data (zeros and ones) within a bitmap grid composed of pixels. Bitmaps containing larger numbers of pixels can be printed or viewed in large-scale, whereas bitmaps with smaller number of pixels, when blown-up, often reveal the square pixelations. The more bit-data each pixel houses, the greater its color depth.⁵⁶ Syjuco's use of digital images instead of conventional photography harnesses the digital images' inherent properties of depth. By enlarging or "blowing-up" the *Black Market Series* images to their 20" x 15" dimensions, Syjuco allows viewers to see the limitations of the images' pixel count. The visible, non-redacted surfaces, appear blurred or grainy, and the edges of the objects and bodies in the image reveal the obvious pixelation; and yet Syjuco manages to, as Weston Teruya observes, "exploit the low resolution of her downloaded sources to develop a provocative space for new narrative possibilities."⁵⁷ For Syjuco, the digital images possess an inherent compositional depth.

Syjuco's use of the digital images in the *Black Market Series*, by themselves and unredacted, signify the immediacy of the digital age in creating and distributing representations. These are images that capture the quotidian realities of the Third-world/Filipino "Other" – images that pervade the distribution system of the Internet

⁵⁶ Viewing or printing images smaller retains the details of a digital image that is composed of a smaller the number of pixels within a bitmap. One bit of information – one or zero – in a pixel guarantees at most two colors. For an incisive and accessible examination of the process of digital image-making, see Chapter 1, "What Is Digital Photograph?" in Jonathon Lipkin, *Photography Reborn: Image Making in the Digital Age* (Henry N. Abrams: New York, 2005).

⁵⁷ Weston Teruya, "Do Pirates Dream of Pixelated Sheep? Asian American Identity & Pirate Futurism in Contemporary Art," *Sightlines* (San Francisco: California College of the Arts, 2007), 247.

and are created for a range of original intentions: tourism or social networking sites, personal blogs, or even images left stored on storage servers unattached to any particular Websites. In the present context, the Internet has become the vehicle for the ways meanings and values of digital images within the contemporary context are produced. Digital images on the Internet, whether sensational or mere everyday snapshots, are often glanced without a moment of thought. They are a commonplace feature in today's world, inspiring global vernacular modes of digital production and a reception premised on detachment and desensitization. As one critic of the *Black Market Series* aptly observes, "Globalized consumption is so boring."⁵⁸

While Syjuco's use of digital images conveys the reach of the Internet, even in its prosaic state, her decision to use them (rather than 35mm film) confronts the material and political consequences of the immediacy of the cyber-present in the production of meaning that often escapes the cognition of those ensnared within the moment. The *Black Market Series* remind us that even in a highly-digital and connected contemporary moment, digital images (in their pixilated states) can transgress the flat or prosaic representations that are easily inspired by global vernacular modes of digital modernism – that is, a modernism based on the immediacy of image-production and consumption and the consequences of detached reception by the viewing public within the cyber-present. She demands of her viewers to reconsider the processes of digital production and consumption, especially in light of the ways these modes have the potential to disempower the bodies represented within the frames and ossify social and cultural hierarchies. The pixels contained within the digital images contain the binary data that allow images their visibility; Syjuco, however, broadens her images' pixilated

⁵⁸ Charles Mudede, "Redacting Capital: The Post-Global Art of Stephanie Syjuco," *The Stranger* (September 15-21, 2005), <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=23115> (accessed March 10, 2008).

depths by resignifying their emergence through the act of redaction. The pixilated terrains become kinetic fields of vision as Syjuco deliberately alters their conventional meanings and their intended functions. Indeed, the pixels are more than just binary data that bring rise to visibility. Through the process of digital redaction Syjuco brings awareness to the digital images' inherent depth and, in doing so, their connection to the "bobjects." The interplay of the two-dimensional images with the three-dimensional black sculptural surfaces captures her vision of enlarging or "blowing-up" the notion of "black markets," as much as it is her imperative to get beyond the flatness of digital image-making, or, simply, to exceed what Roland Barthes calls "the unary image."

Syjuco's inclination to use digital images is not only timely, given its pervasive global presence, it also confronts the digital vernacular modernity steeped in the quotidian. The popularity of digital image technology has largely replaced 35mm photography as the most expedient means to make and distribute images, though much of the receptive impact – indeed, their cultural work – of digital image-making are remarkably similar to its film-based predecessor. Take for example Walter Benjamin's likening of photographic modernity as the catalyst for what he calls the emergence of "the age of mechanical reproduction."⁵⁹ Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction would ultimately liberate artwork from the historical, cultural, and the ritualistic constraints of society, noting in particular "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."⁶⁰ The presence of the auras in Benjamin's assessment alludes to a culture that pays reverence to the uniqueness of artwork which ultimately, as he argues, sustains class hierarchies. Alluring to Benjamin is mechanical

⁵⁹ See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 221

reproduction's ability to transform art practices from ritual into politics.⁶¹ Benjamin's assessment of mechanical reproduction's impact on visual production and reception dovetails with Roland Barthes' notion of the "unary image," a notion that Barthes attributes to film photography. For Barthes, the unary image "emphatically transforms 'reality' without doubling it, without making it vacillate (emphasis is a power of cohesion) ... The unary Photograph has every reason to be banal."⁶² Simply, unary images (for Barthes, news images and pornography) reinforce a sense of cultural cohesion among its viewers, premised on their predictability and therefore an emotive detachment due to their quotidian status.⁶³ While both Benjamin and Barthes speak to the consequences of mechanical (or photographic) reproduction, their views are rife with contradiction. For Benjamin, the liberation of the aura promotes a politicization based on accessibility of images that cuts across class hierarchies; these effects, as Barthes would argue, has produced a proliferation of images that inspire unary images steeped in banality.

Following Benjamin's assessment then, the digital age — clearly, a hyper-version of the age of mechanical reproduction — has effaced the auras from many images through sheer ease and speed of image-making, yet it has also inspired a critical and conceptual art praxis that hinge on precisely their necessity, especially in within the contemporary moment. Syjuco's *Black Market Series* emerges at the interstices of Benjamin and Barthes' competing notions of the aura (or lack thereof) and the notion of the unary image. Syjuco observes, "discussions of my work kept circling around the craft of faux-ness and the perception that what I was exploring was a nihilistic tech-noir

⁶¹ Ibid., 224.

⁶² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Hill & Wang: New York, 1981), 41.

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

or lack of 'aura'."⁶⁴ Syjuco, however, confronts the contemporary moment in her artwork differently, consciously seeking out the auratic potential in her digital work. This strategy is premised upon a conceptual language based on reinscribing quotidian practices and products – here, digital image-making – with alternative ways of thinking about their standard functions within the current moment. Syjuco's acts of reconfiguration are situated within a political vision of transgression by, as she observes, "remak[ing] *other* artworks that held either a conceptual or historical significance for me."⁶⁵ Syjuco remakes the everyday experiences of the Philippine marketplace in the *Black Market Series*, reinscribing the image with auras through her deliberate redactions on the enlarged print surfaces. Thinking about the process of "re-making," Syjuco questions, "could simulation still offer a chance to be 'infinitely dangerous' to the order of things ... ?"⁶⁶ We need only look at the digital redactions in the *Black Market Series* and their disruption of the unary digital surface through the re-implantation of the aura in her artwork to answer her question. Syjuco's digital images exceed that to which viewers are inured, as a way to produce affective and spatial connections that have otherwise been compromised within the digital age.

Syjuco visual work cuts across a multimedia spectrum, though she largely considers herself a sculptor.⁶⁷ Present in her work is an attention to their overall physical presence within the spaces they inhabit. Syjuco observes, "I'm incredibly interested in 'object-hood' and how an object is a literal presence, a physical manifestation of an idea or metaphor that insists on being there."⁶⁸ Something stands

⁶⁴ Syjuco, 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11. Original emphasis.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁷ Gaston, 10. Syjuco received in B.F.A. in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1995. In 1997 she trained at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

amiss, however, in the *Black Market Series*. Objects (and pixels) within the images' frames are literally erased, leaving behind only large swaths of visible black voids, begging the question: can an object's presence be visualized through its absence? Moreover, can an object's physicality – the space that it occupies – be constructed from without? In Syjuco's digital images, absence and presence are intertwined; one cannot exist without the other. The dualism ties into her conceptualization of the term "black markets." For Syjuco, the term "implies that, on the flip side, there is a proper and regulated way to consume and produce."⁶⁹ The absence of regulation produces the presence of black market goods, and vice-versa. To visualize the systems that pervade local black-market economies, like those in the Philippines, Syjuco offers a reconfiguration of digital modes of production and reception. Notwithstanding the two-dimensionality of her digital images in the *Black Market Series*, Syjuco injects the images with the sensibilities of a sculptor; the oxymoronic task of digital sculpting produces an expansive and tactile terrain that encompasses the breadth of her conceptual ideas, surpassing the paper and the pixels on which the images reside, and challenging her viewers to consider the generative functions of redaction.

The *Black Market Series* moves viewers into what Barthes has called "the subtle beyond."⁷⁰ It is a personal and potentially collective space that exceeds the delimited dimensions of the images' frames – exceeding even the enclosure in which the artwork is housed – where critical mediation occurs between the visual work and the viewer(s). The existence of "the subtle beyond," much like the flatness of unary images, is constituted by the current cyber-moment. In reflecting on photography that inspires

⁶⁹ Syjuco, 17.

⁷⁰ Barthes' notion of the "subtle beyond," relates to, what he calls, "the *punctum*" found within photography. The *punctum*, or a detail in the photograph that might "prick" Barthes, carries him to the subtle beyond. Barthes, 42-59.

“the subtle beyond,” Barthes notes “it is there that I animate this photograph and that it animates me.”⁷¹ Syjuco’s digital images facilitate this critical mediation, asking of viewers to reconsider the material and psychic stakes of the absence and presence of objects in her work. Indeed, in her images the notion of being present and, therefore, visible stands counter to the compositional process of redaction; but it is exactly through the black erasures that allow the images to have not only depth but also volume, both of which give the digital images their auratic presence. Syjuco is literally blowing up the digital images through redaction; the act of redaction is not only seen in each of the images but also felt, as a tactile quality in the *Black Market Series* exists that connects viewers to the Syjuco’s digital cursor and her presence within the work, while simultaneously also moving her viewers towards the spatial presence of the black erasures.

We find in *Black Market (Boys Market)*, for example, redactions with jagged edges that impart the swiftness of Syjuco’s digital strokes; what remains is an image of Filipino boys, surrounded by scribbles of black that cover the goods to be sold (see Figure 4.8). Syjuco’s strokes are carefree, yet all the while maintaining her authority. In *Black Market (Basket Woman)*, however, her strokes are more meticulous and fluid, and the edges of her redactions are rounded; her strokes ensure that all the goods being sold in the baskets are blacked-out without compromising the integrity of the women’s hands and arms (see Figure 4.9). There is also a palpable ease to which Syjuco redacts the large swaths of spaces in *Black Market (Display Table)* and *Black Market (Array)* (see Figures 4.10 and 4.11). The interplay between the quality of her strokes or the ease to which spaces are filled-in with redactions – whether resulting in jagged or smooth edges – remark on

⁷¹ Ibid., 59.

dichotomies inspired by the reality of the black markets in third-world geographies. The production of black market spaces and goods are driven by the ease to which these local economic spaces emerge within Third-world geographies as well as challenges and constraints provoked their existence. On one hand, the prevalence and dynamism of black markets in Third-world locations like the Philippines capture this ease to produce and sell black-market goods, whether authentic or counterfeit. Yet in these black-market spaces, where authentic or brand-named goods exceed the reach of a majority of Filipino consumers, counterfeit goods pervade. Syjuco observes, “Just the idea that people who don’t have the money but are faced with looking at goods of capitalism, like high-end expensive products, they’ll find other way[s] to get around it.”⁷² Transnational economies have inspired locally-based counterfeit black-market systems where goods are judged on their exterior presence. Do the goods pass muster? While the obvious challenge to any black market hinges upon not being caught by authorities, we might also consider the challenge of whether the goods being sold pass as authentic consumer First-world goods. The integrity of the edges of the black redactions offer viewers a window to contemplate the double-edge sword-like quality of black-market systems in the Philippines.

In *Black Market (Girl Holding)*, she departs radically from her compositional techniques in her other redacted images. Where the movements of her strokes are present in the other digital images, in *Black Market (Girl Holding)*, Syjuco seemingly abandons the cursor by redacting much of the image’s surface area. What she leaves behind is a smiling girl, with only her arm, hand, and finger visible (see Figure 4.12). As the title suggests, she is caught in the act of holding—but what she holds is left to

⁷² Everman, 9.

speculation. If her redactions in her other images reveal Syjuco playing with the socio-political trajectories of the black markets, the extent of redactions in *Black Market (Girl Holding)*, likewise, embodies the ease of redaction, symbolizing the ubiquity of the local economic black market system. This image, in particular, moves viewers into conceptual terrains that connect Syjuco's art practice to the very act of producing black-market goods, connecting and becoming the Third-world migrant laborers who work black-market systems, all the while attempting to convince the viewing public and the art world to buy her products. Reflecting on Third-world producers of counterfeit goods, Syjuco observes, "As opposed to buying it, they'll make the items themselves and sell them, which I think is really hilarious."⁷³ The Filipino girl's smiling face connects to Syjuco's amusement with the "ingenuity and personal creativity" that drive local Filipino black market economies.⁷⁴ What pervades black market economies like those pictured are creative acts of resistance – the unsanctioned acts of producing and selling counterfeit First-world goods. The Filipino girl holds onto the redactions that Syjuco and her viewers also hold on to. Like the goods that she erases, the redactions are tangible commodities despite their absences in the digital images. There is a tactile element to the redactions in *Black Market (Girl Holding)* that Syjuco challenges her viewers to grasp. The redactions become not just empty voids, but hearken to their physicality – viewers are able to hold onto the redactions like the Filipino girl. The redactive acts in the *Black Market Series* brings rise to a presence through absence.

The *Black Market Series* embodies an aesthetic affront to the constraints imposed by transnational capitalism and the digital age on Filipino migrant bodies. Syjuco connects herself precisely to the smiling girl because both cling onto their goods that

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 9.

constitute their livelihoods, indeed their survival. What they hold onto allows them to challenge the politics of consumption as well as representation within the globalized present. Syjuco notes, "The adage is true that 'capitalism stops at nothing' and I guess the trick is to see if it is at all possible to work within its constraints to turn it upon itself."⁷⁵ What better way to confront the flattening and paralyzing effects of the digital age – a moment driven by Third-world migrants like those pictured the series – than to literally blow-up the black markets.

In the literal sense, the act of "blowing-up" allows Syjuco to visualize and impart the conceptual depth of the pixilated terrains by exceeding the optimal resolutions of the images. With the sharpness of the images compromised by their enlargements, left behind are the images' inherent and visible topographical properties. Metaphorically, the act of "blowing-up" denotes a combative and violent action. If transnational capitalism has created seemingly impenetrable divides between the First and Third-world and constraints that resonate in visual production and reception, Syjuco can resort to nothing short of utilizing the redactive explosions found in her images. The black redactions evidence Syjuco's explosive compositional processes that are not solely bound to the print paper nor do they only connote a destructively ephemeral quality. On the contrary, the redacted areas of the images, when blown up, explode off the print paper to become the black sculptural blobjects. The connection between her digital prints and the sculptural objects demands of her viewers to reconsider the material and real-time consequences engendered by the digital age.

Considering then the generative properties that emerge through her redactions and Syjuco's conceptions of her identity as being "nether here nor there," the black

⁷⁵ Gaston, 14.

surfaces and the blobjects collectively resemble abstracted landforms – metaphorical maps (the digital prints) and islands (the blobjects). If Syjuco holds onto the redactions for survival, then it is also a survival that is premised on a continuing visual practice to chart and locate her identity. Survival, in the *Black Market Series*, points to an unrelenting desire to situate the Philippine Islands in her life and her artwork. Together the redactions in the digital prints and the blobjects resemble a network of islands that are abstracted by the legacies of multiple colonialisms and the burdens of U.S. empire. The cartographical sensibility found in the *Black Market Series* is a conceptual conceit that was formed early in Syjuco’s visual oeuvre. Like her abstracted maps in *Pacific Theater of Operations*, the *Black Market Series* act as spatial and psychological conduits for Syjuco. If the unnamed lines and arrows in her *Pacific Theater of Operations* guide her back to unfamiliar terrains and battles within the Philippine Islands (within the context of U.S. empire and war), then close to ten years later we find Syjuco grappling with similar battles of identity, although visually situated in the contemporary present in the *Black Market Series*. The redactions and the accompanying blobjects in the *Black Market Series* become maps that facilitate her viewers into the subtle beyond, while also guiding Syjuco’s personal journey back to the islands and their people.

THE GREEN RIDE

In 2001, four years before the production of *Black Market Series*, Stephanie Syjuco created 12 digitally-manipulated prints of varying sizes as part of a series entitled *Comparative Morphologies*. Printed on “lush paper with deckled edges,” the series showcased an array of electronic plugs, cords, connectors, and USB devices (among others), shot and arranged in ways that resembled classic scientific illustrations of plant

and animal life (See Figure 4.15 – 4.16).⁷⁶ Syjuco profiles the electronic accoutrements that surrounded her workstation as if categorized and grouped according to a set of laws that govern their classifications. Accompanying the individual pieces in the prints are letters and numbers that direct viewers to their respective descriptions – descriptions that Syjuco fails to provide. Together the prints document Syjuco’s fascination with integrating classic disciplinary visual regimes found within the historical archives as a means to confront the contemporary present’s obsession with technology. Syjuco observes that the digital images in *Comparative Morphologies* “try to attain the aura of having both history and future embedded within.”⁷⁷ Syjuco’s efforts to take her viewers to the subtle beyond in the *Black Market Series*, likewise, capture her investments in establishing archival connections between the past, present, and the future. The re-implantation of the aura in the *Black Market* digital images not only facilitate a critical praxis that involves the consequences of the contemporary moment on “the body” (in all its corporeal and material incarnations) but asks of the viewers to consider the critical import of temporal and archival connections within her work.

Of the images in the *Black Market Series*, one in particular stands out certainly for the thematic departure away from the market scenes, but also for the hermeneutical movements that it inspires. If *Comparative Morphologies* showcased Syjuco’s transparent attempt to implicate the historical archives in her compositional and conceptual repertoire, the fixation on time doesn’t go unnoticed in the aberrant ninth image. In the ninth image, entitled *Green Ride*, Syjuco chooses a picture of two Filipino kids riding on an unknown object (see Figure 4.13). As the title of the print suggests, the object is a “ride” of some sort upon which the Filipino kids sit. Her redactions differ from the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

other images in her choice to use the color green to erase “the ride.” It is a productive redaction, much like the other images in the series, where absence inspires a generative mediation among its viewers. The children stare forward, as if anticipating a movement in a direction that leads outside of the image’s frame, a space that viewers must work to get to.

What is the object redacted from the *Green Ride*? Why the color green? Why the departure from the market scenes? Syjuco offers clues for the viewers to decipher the identity of the redacted object in the frame. The image evidences Syjuco’s meticulous hand at redacting the object, conveying the speed and precision of every redacted angle and corner. The green edges outline the object with nary a stray or scribble away from it and without compromising its integrity. Her deft handling of the object captures the object’s importance within the frame. Clearly the edges of a front wheel can be made out along with a rear, side wheel. In the background, beyond the latticed metal fence, Syjuco leaves another “ride” – a motorcycle – unredacted. The front wheel of the motorcycle corresponds to the redacted wheel, so much so that we might assume one of the components attributed to the green ride is a motorcycle. If this is the case, the children sit atop a sidecar attached to the motorcycle. The clues in the image all point to the object being a tricycle, a ubiquitous mode of transportation in the Philippines. Much like the redacted goods in the market scenes, the tricycle has become a commodity item to be bought and sold. Moreover, if the redacted goods being sold in the other images direct us to modes of survival in transnational economies like those found in the Philippines, then the redacted tricycle likewise becomes symbolic of economic mobility and livelihood – the color green, a nod to wealth and status.

Insofar as Syjuco's inclusion (or exclusion) of the tricycle in the ninth image connects to the redacted goods in the other prints, and to the larger commentary of the impact of transnational economies in Third-world geographies, the tricycle also directs our attention to the epistemological undercurrents – the movements of ideas across disciplinary regimes – that guide Filipino visual production. The apt figuration – even in its redacted form – of the tricycle speaks to the legacies of the consequences of modernity in the Philippines on the historic and symbolic movements of Filipinos across temporal, spatial, and epistemological topographies, largely influenced by American modernization projects. The tricycle symbolizes, moreover, Syjuco's vision of moving her viewers – and the larger Filipino/American community – into hermeneutical terrains (within the subtle beyond) that are grounded in a language of conceptualism. Observing, "There is a dearth of writing exploring issues of conceptual art practice and its reception within the Filipino community," Syjuco offers her own conceptual texts through her digital images.⁷⁸ Indeed, the *Green Ride* becomes a vehicle for her viewers, and like the two Filipino kids, they await transport into conceptual terrains that exist beyond the present moment and outside the image's frame.



The *Black Market Series* capture the impact of history on Filipino migrant bodies as it does a conceptualism driven by an ethos to understand the archives and their ability to bring rise to knowledge and visibility. Syjuco's conceptual language is bound by the constraints imposed by history – in all its redactions; and yet it is exactly these constraints that permit her to envision a future laden with possibility and corporeal presence within the "here and there." Like the two Filipino children in the *Green Ride*, Syjuco stares into the distance, pointing us to the subtle beyond.

⁷⁸ Syjuco, 18.

FIGURES



Figure 4.1: Stephanie Syjuco, *Portrait Series II*, 1997,
chalkboard paint, frames, overall 144" wide.
Reproduced from *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists*
(San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998).



Figure 4.2: Stephanie Syjuco, partial installation view of *Black Market* exhibition at James Harris Gallery, Seattle, WA; pictured are two framed chromogenic lightjet print, 15" x 20" from the *Black Market Series* (2005) digital images hung with "blobjects." Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).

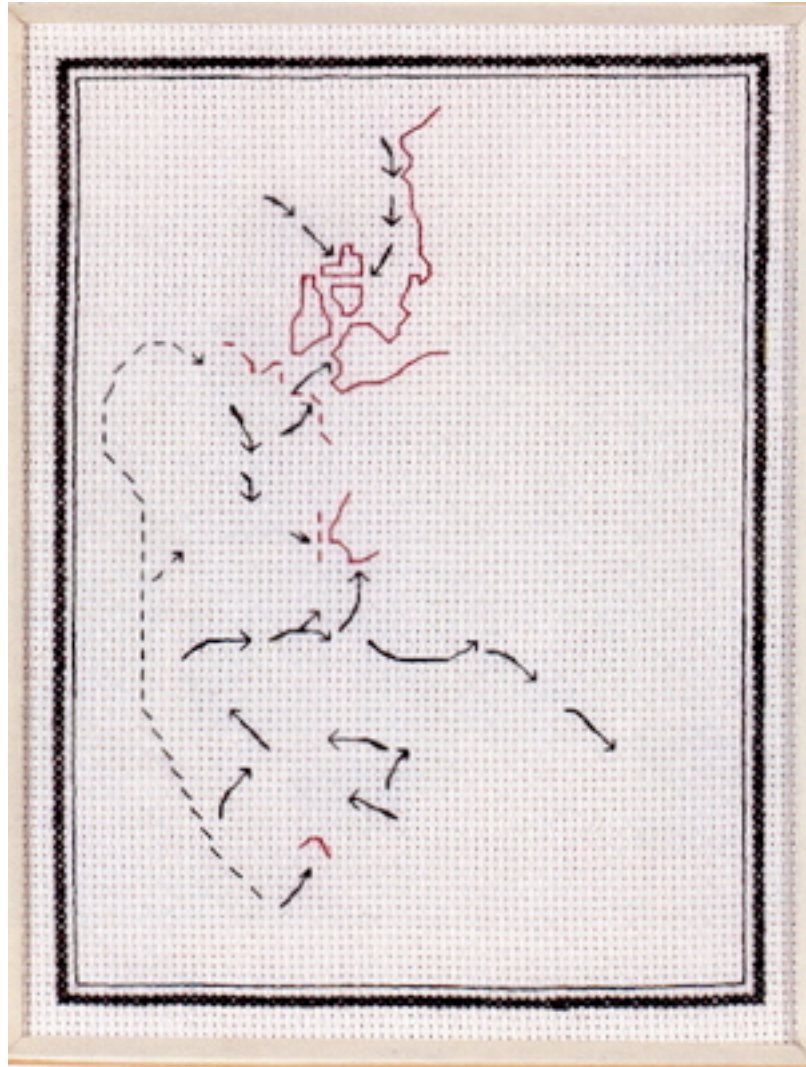


Figure 4.3: Stephanie Syjuco, *Pacific Theater of Operations: Reconquest of the Philippines*, 1996, cross-stitch panel, 10" x 13." Reproduced from *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998).

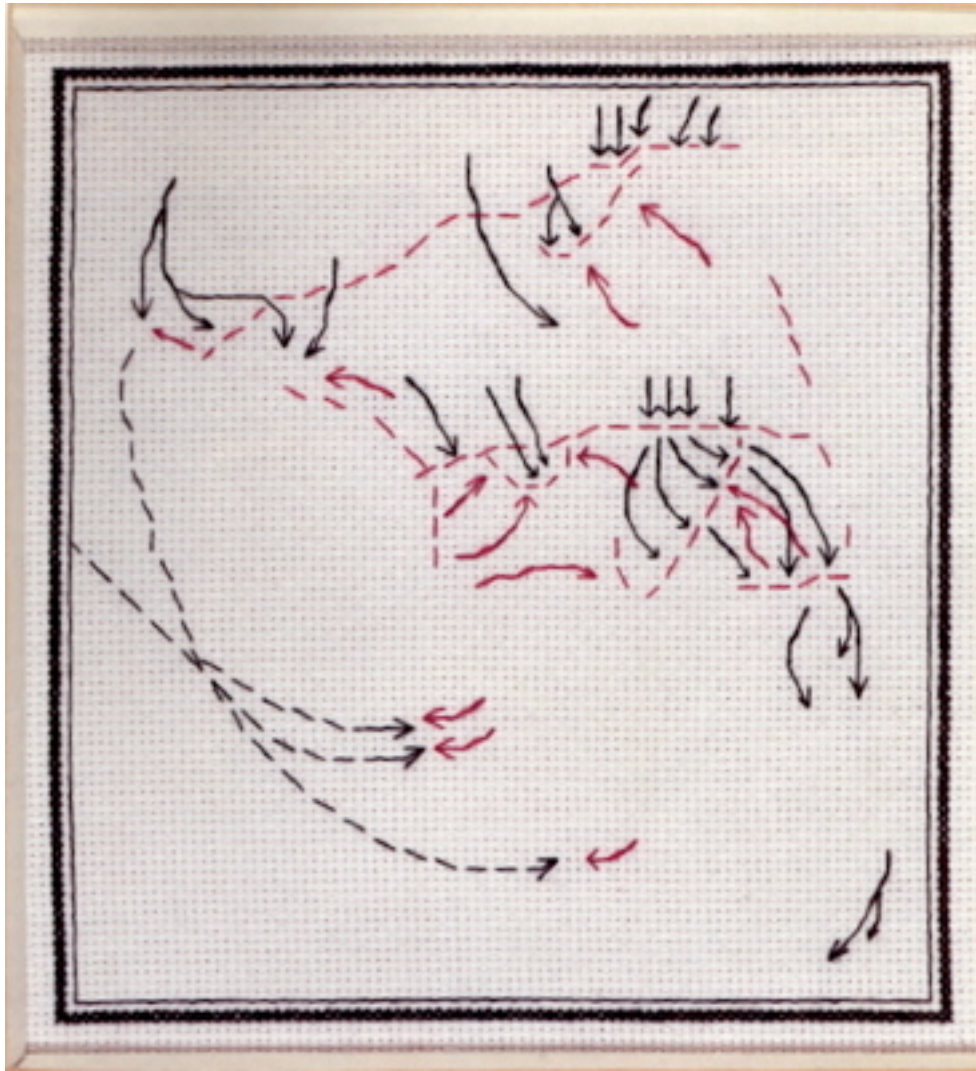


Figure 4.4: Stephanie Syjuco, *Pacific Theater of Operations: Bataan and Corregidor*, 1996, cross-stitch panel, 10" x 13."

Reproduced from *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1998).



Figure 4.5: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 40" x 30". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).

Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.6: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 40" x 30". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.7: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Boy Vending)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.8: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Boy's Market)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.9: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Basket Woman)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.10: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Display Table)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.11: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Array)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.12: Stephanie Syjuco, *Black Market (Girl Holding)*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.13: Stephanie Syjuco, *Green Ride*, 2005, framed chromogenic print, 20" x 15". Included as part of the *Black Market Series* (2005).
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005* (San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).



Figure 4.14: Stephanie Syjuco, *Pacific Super*, 2003-2004, fuji lightjet print, 40" x 30".
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Strange Objects & Unnatural Histories, Works: 1995-2005*
(San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006).

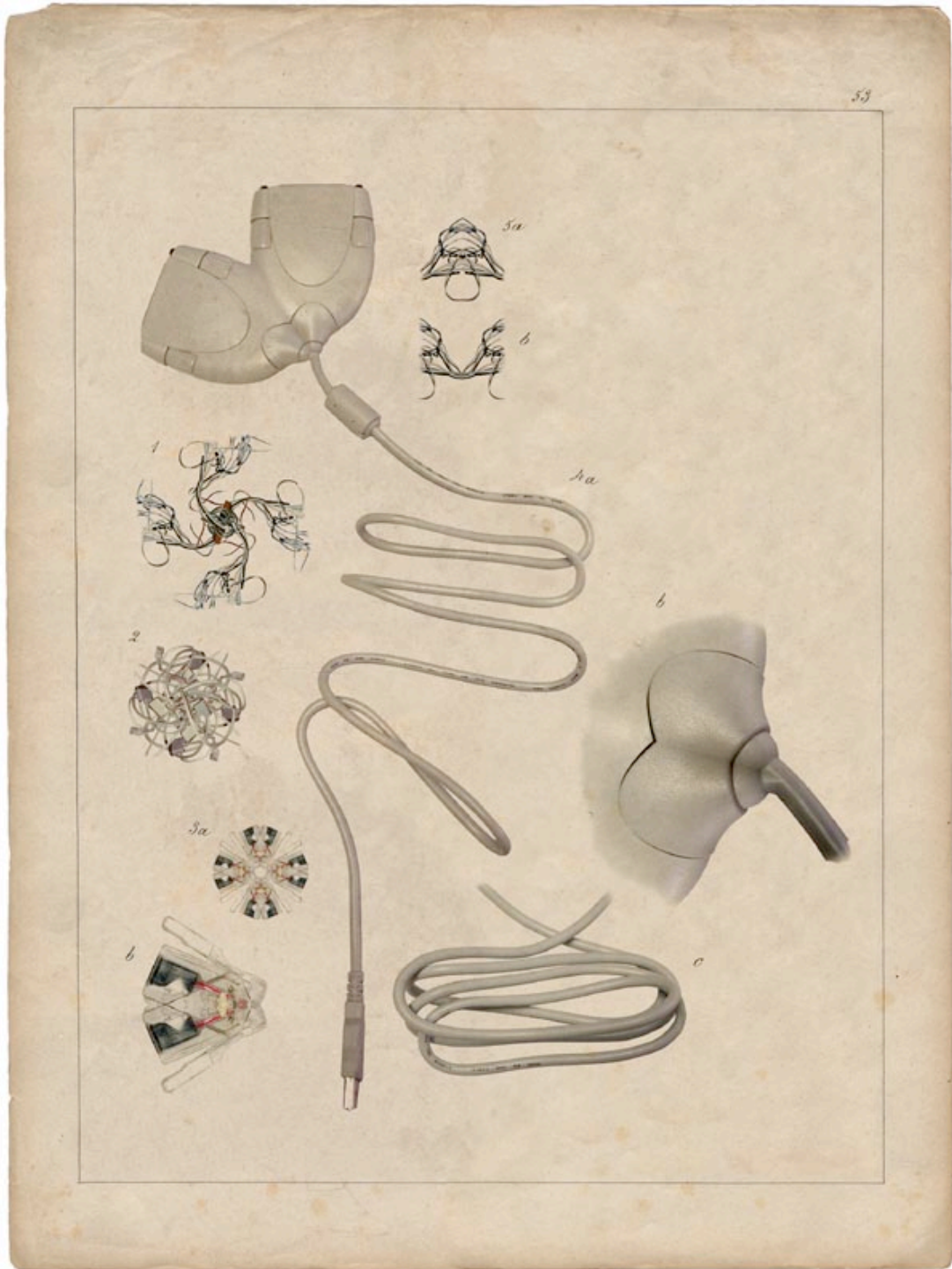


Figure 4.15: Stephanie Syjuco, *Comparative Morphologies* #53, 2001,
Iris print on Somerset paper 32" x 10".
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Comparative Morphologies: Complete Variations*
(San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006)



Figure 4.16: Stephanie Syjuco, *Comparative Morphologies #3*, 2001,
Iris print on Somerset paper 28" x 21".
Reproduced from Stephanie Syjuco, *Comparative Morphologies: Complete Variations*
(San Francisco: Stephanie Syjuco, 2006)

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