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Quotidian Rhetorics: Estrangement, The Everyday, and Transitioning Filipinoness into An/Other Beginning

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QUOTIDIAN RHETORICS: ESTRANGEMENT, THE EVERYDAY AND TRANSITIONING FILIPINONESS INTO AN/OTHER BEGINNING

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

by
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May 2017

Accepted by:
Dr. Cynthia Haynes, Committee Chair
Dr. G. Jeff Love
Dr. Cameron Bushnell
Dr. Akel Kahera
Abstract

This project studies the fragments of the everyday lives of Filipino Americans, captured and interpreted via vernacular video. Read through three modes of estrangement (translation, nostalgia, and transition), Filipinoness is rendered as unheimlich or “homeless” to open multiple interpretations of this cultural identification. Filipino racial and cultural formation in the United States is often concealed by categories that tend to homogenize Asian American experience and disregard the specificity of the colonial relationship between America and the Philippines, flouting Filipino and Filipino Americans’ struggles against a simultaneous ambiguity, invisibility, and strangeness as hybrid persons of color. Through an interpretive reading of Filipino Americans’ everyday encounters with Filipinoness, a quotidian rhetorics emerges to provide a framework with which Filipino American videos are read as a way for creatively working through and improvising with multiple identities against persistent stereotypes and a frequent displacement in historical and cultural narratives. Referencing episodes in the colonial history of the Philippines and the United States, this study links the forgotten struggles of Filipinos/Filipino Americans with audio-visual representations of their estrangement from cultural artifacts, language, and images of Filipinoness. Emancipatory discourses are revealed in the strategic use of hybridity, and engagements with fragments of language and
memory. As a movement that foregrounds their struggle for homeliness in the elasticity of multiple identities and historical discourses, estrangement as unheimlich provides Filipino American videographers (as well as Filipinos) with opportunities to (re)write narratives of emancipation that emerge from encounters with Filipinoness and Filipino American presence and struggle in everyday life.
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Chapter 1 | Estrangement: a montage of everydayness

“I came to America one month ago, and people say to me, ‘O, Steve, you’re a FOB?’ I said, ‘what’s FOB?’ ‘FOB means, fresh-off-boat.’ I don’t know why people say ‘fresh-off-boat’ because I flew here. So dat do not make sense.”

–Steven, True Life of a Filipino FOB

In the Philippines, when someone says s/he is moving house, one can mean this literally. This is called bayanihan, an ancient tradition that involves a

Figure 1.1. Carlos Francisco. "Bayanihan sa Bukid" from the Project Bayanihan website at MIT. Web.
group of about 20 or more able-bodied males who lift and carry these dwellings from one place to another. A painting by Philippine National Artist Carlos ‘Botong’ Francisco depicts the bayanihan in some generic rural area in the Philippines. Titled “Bayanihan sa Bukid (Bayanihan in the Countryside),” Francisco recreates the crucial moment in the process: that of actually lifting the house, and moving in unison.

The word bayanihan finds its roots in the word “bayan”, which means hometown or homeland. A neighbor is a kababayan. Its derivative, bayani means patriot or hero. Inherent in all these words is a sense of rootedness to a place or locale—“home”. A connection to the land of one’s birth, as well as to those who were born in the same place, suggests a deeper sense of kinship shared between kababayans. A grounding in a shared sense of belonging to a physical and material space where one experiences language, traditions, and learning, speaks to the origin of one’s identity. This groundedness, literally, in the earth

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1 For Gertrudes Ang, “bayanihan is a practical response to both individual and community needs which, under certain circumstances, would be difficult to achieve if people with meager means did not organize themselves and pool together their resources. It may be said that the unselfish cooperation characteristic of bayanihan is very much like the sense of brotherhood the homesteaders of young America displayed” (91). Today bayanihan connotes a concerted, communal effort to offer assistance to one’s kababayan in need. The bayanihan spirit is a knee jerk reaction among Filipinos to rally together especially during times of calamities, as was evident during the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Filipinos abroad sent aid in cash and kind, enterprising online communities set up methods to track family members, and individuals gave their time and effort to help survivors at ground zero. "It means having a special responsibility to family, neighbors, and the community at large. Bayanihan signifies an indigenous appreciation of democracy that has been a Filipino tradition since the earliest Malay settlers arrived on Philippine shores" (Pascual, 109). Today bayanihan connotes a concerted, communal effort to offer assistance to one’s kababayan in need. The bayanihan spirit is a knee jerk reaction among Filipinos to rally together especially during times of calamities, as was evident during the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Filipinos abroad sent aid in cash and kind, enterprising online communities set up methods to track family members, and individuals gave their time and effort to help survivors at ground zero. "It means having a special responsibility to family, neighbors, and the community at large. Bayanihan signifies an indigenous appreciation of democracy that has been a Filipino tradition since the earliest Malay settlers arrived on Philippine shores" (Pascual, 109).
from which one has grown, provides one with an identity that finds its source in an actual location. Bayanihan then is a coming together of all the elements that make up the land, the people, the traditions, the languages, and the stories that grow out of this intermingling.

The idea that a house is traditionally displaced however, suggests a contradiction in the notion of a “rooted” culture. The house is constructed with its imminent mobility in mind.² Transplanting a house physically from one location to another speaks to an openness towards uncertainty and a dependence on the people around you. The bayanihan tradition happens not at a fixed time or place (the way other traditional gatherings might coincide with harvest or fall on a specified date), but as an activity that responds to a particular, emergent situation: a family’s decision to move and live in a different environment. *It is a strange, and estranging moment.* For a short time, the family is actually homeless. They walk alongside their home in an uncanny situation: that of seeing their dwelling suspended above ground, moving along with them. All the contents of the home are ‘unhoused” and carried between the family members, as they traverse the distance between where home used to be, and where it will be next. The connection to the ground is temporary, and in the painting, it is not clear where the house will be set down. There seems to be no final destination; just the promise of one. In the meantime all those involved in the bayanihan carry on, one

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² Made of light materials such as *nipa* grass, bamboo beams and *anahaw* or palm leaves, the house is only temporarily secured to the ground, anticipating a move at any time.
foot in front of the other, struggling together to keep the house moving.

This project is about estrangement in the everyday, and the manifold possibilities that emerge from a reorientation of our relationships to beings in the world. Estrangement speaks to a displacement, or what I render a *homelessness*: that uncanny sensation of seeing and experiencing the familiar in an unfamiliar way. In these encounters, a quotidian rhetorics emerges: a tool or ‘language’ with which to consider or reveal how ordinary and mundane activities and objects persuade us of forgotten or hidden meanings. The everyday—that which is most familiar or homely and is most accessible to us—is the starting point for an analysis that reveals layers of meanings that are peeled back through estrangement and quotidian rhetorics. In this study, I engage Martin Heidegger’s notion of the everyday and emphasize the idea of estrangement and its relationship to homelessness. These terms transform in his writings through his (re)readings and interpretations. Just as he returns and reinterprets, I revisit his thought and extend the meanings he gives these terms. I suggest, as he does, that estranging the everyday creates a homelessness that opens one to a freedom from the structures, frameworks, and ideologies that mask themselves in the very things that we think provide us with a sense of security in the everyday. I suggest three further modes of estrangement that emerge from experiences of Filipino Americans: translation, nostalgia, and transition. These modes of estrangement allow us to perceive patterns of homelessness through visual
rhetorical readings of Filipino cultural artifacts and traditions, and their connections to issues of race, the flouting of historical narratives, and the interrogation of identity in the artifact of vernacular video.

REORIENTING FRAMES: THE FILIPINO STRUGGLE AS PREMISE FOR CHANGE

“Since I don’t understand Tagalog...it doesn’t matter what song I listen to...I can make it mean whatever I want it to mean.”

—JRdaFilipino, Reasons why I love being Filipino American

The object that pulls all these ideas together is vernacular video, particularly vernacular video created by young Filipino American videographers (second generation immigrants) and their definitions of Filipinoness. For my analysis I randomly collected 30 videos that present a list of characteristics that prove Filipinoness. Some of these have similar titles: “You know you’re Filipino when,” “Shit people say to Filipinos,” or “Want to know if you’re Filipino.” Most of these videos are presented as vlogs, others are reenactments, and a few of them are presented in genres like rap songs and mockumentaries. The earliest video in my sample is dated 2007, while the latest video is dated 2015. Through these
videos, I argue that the struggle to make sense of Filipino American identity in the midst of the everyday, mediated through audio visual media on the Web, indicates a homelessness: Filipinoness as an identity is a “home” to which they constantly return yet their arrival always seems deferred (Boym). They are therefore always moving between traditions, languages (in some cases), practices, images, and memories—sometimes ones not their own, handed down to them through another layer of mediated narratives—with no where to set themselves down. In other words, this project rhetorically analyzes the search for homeliness in provisionally-labeled moments of Filipinoness. It reads their attempts to grasp the fleetingness of these moments and the struggle to make sense of their complex relationship to a culture that invaded and “benevolently assimilated” their ancestors, as movements against invisibility and forgotten histories.

Filipinos make up the second largest group of Asian Americans and is the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States. Intertwined with this fact is the forgotten imperial/colonial relationship between America and the Philippines that lasted from 1898 to 1934; some say it lasted til 1996, when the last US military base in the Philippines was shut down (Campomanes, San Juan). In this short time span, relative to nearly 400 years of colonization by the Spanish beginning in 1521, American culture, education, and the English language, profoundly reshaped the Filipino’s perception of herself, her relation to the
Western world, and her own culture (Roces and Roces, San Juan, Campomanes, Rafael). This perception has encouraged immigration, education, and transnational flows of brown bodies, commodities, images, and messages that reify a neo-colonial presence in the islands. Yet it also motivates the Filipino to assert an identity equally deserving of recognition in the global sphere. The Internet and the World Wide Web have become powerful conduits that support these transnational flows, and personal mobile technologies allow the capture and dissemination of enactments and embodiments of the assertion of a Filipino/Filipino American identity as a desire for nationalism. And yet, according to scholars of Filipino American and Asian American studies, Filipinos have remained excluded from the historical narratives of empire in the United States. “[A] full accounting of their presence necessitates a full accounting of a largely unthinkable history. Just as the notion of the United States as an empire has not fared well in dominant US historiography, neither is the notion of Filipinos as colonized subjects” (Tiongson, et. al., 2). This invisibility in the institutional discourses of nation and citizenship reveals gaps that extend to issues of identity and racial and social formations among Filipinos and Filipino Americans that find expression in their everyday lives.

In this project, I argue that working through identity and identification, especially among second generation Filipino American videographers descended from “waves” of diasporic Filipinos beginning at the turn of the 20th century, is an
estranging moment in their everyday. The internal shifts and displacements that happen within the individual occur in the search for a stable ground on which to stand. Nostalgic renderings of an “authentic” culture that is out of reach constantly displaces these Filipino American youth because of the work needed to reconcile his/her everyday condition with those of their diasporic elders’ memories of a “golden age” of Filipinoness. The vernacular videos studied show videographers cut off from their elders’ language. Understanding the contexts of its use, and connecting with their sentiments is always an irruption in time and space—one that can be extremely humorous or can turn into a confrontation between generations. More than a “generation gap” it also indicates a cultural divide. The distance between these videographers and their parents’ cultures is bridged by the suturing provided by stereotypes (Bhabha) that have the tendency to ossify as representations of a race, eschewing the histories, narratives, and struggles that were a response to the oppression and abuse of nearly four hundred years of Western colonization and imperialism. These stereotypes are reproduced as an attempt to connect, out of a desire for inclusion and belonging, and of coming to terms with morphological and material differences in videographers’ current worlds. The identity formations that occur become simplistic, problematic, and formulaic representations that attempt to explain away the complexities and asymmetry of assimilation, the effects of class, gender, and to some extent, the struggles of racially hybrid individuals. What kind
of analysis then does justice to the struggles and histories of Filipinos and Filipino Americans?

Asian American rhetoric has opened up a space to acknowledge and account for the distinctly historical and racial experiences, and discursive practices of Asian Americans. In their book, *Representations*, Lu Ming Mao and Morris Young offer a space that highlights the tension or contradiction between the desire to claim a sense of unity or homogeneity for Asian Americans in America and elsewhere and the realization that our discursive practices are fraught with differences, defying any clear-cut, categorical space for Asian Americans where identity, community, and memory are inflected with uneven historical relationships and vexing contemporary contradictions (10).

Translation and transformation are tropes that permeate the field of Asian American rhetoric. But Mao and Young point out, the tropes are applied to Asian American discourse in a way that positions the Asian American as a perpetual foreigner (Espiritu), a passive presence *in need of* translation and transformation, which acts from within the parameters of assimilation and otherness, and conforms to terminology that presupposes their “natural” exclusion from a white society. The struggle for Asian American rhetoric, say Mao and Young, is the
orientation of the Asian American as the “agent” of translation and transformation, an agency that allows Asian Americans to use the tropes creatively on their own terms.

One of the ways to reorient Asian American agency, says Lisa Lowe, is the integration of empire as a critical frame, not just in rhetorics but in disciplines that deal with Asian American, Filipino, and ethnicity studies. An experience unique to Filipinos as Asian Americans, “US imperialism has been conspicuously absent from the purview of post-colonial studies. In both traditional and emergent disciplines, then, the study of Filipino social formations on its own terms has yet to materialize, remaining outside the disciplinary focus and scope of these fields” (Lowe viii). This move holds “institutional and historical conditions” (Tiongson, et. al, 3) accountable for the invisibility of Filipinos in scholarly disciplines, and the shortcomings in pushing for race-based, colonialist/Orientalist lenses in the reading of American history. This move also responds to the overwhelming absence of legitimate representations of Filipinos in everyday media products, and the silence of narratives that capture the sacrifices and challenges of coming to terms with a very particular set of historical and political relationships, especially when it comes to identity formation. “The issue has less to do with Filipinos themselves and deficiencies in their constitution or culture than with a particular set of social relations and historical circumstances that define their terms of intelligibility, but only at the cost of a certain epistemic violence that
elides their particularities” (3). In other words, the frames and lenses with which Filipino American experiences are made visible paradoxically conceal the real conditions of their invisibility in the first place: the overlooked historical and institutional erasure of imperial rule in the Philippines.

Extending the methods of Asian American rhetoric to include imperialism/colonialism as a critical frame, especially in the case of the Philippines, implies a disruption in agreed-upon categories of Asian American experience. Filipinos’ inclusion in Asian American studies as former subjects of empire “constitute a disturbing presence to be contained or effaced because of the challenge they pose to the coherence of these fields” (Tiongson, et. al.). If this is the case, Lisa Lowe asks, “Why is Filipino American formation not treated as an object of knowledge that requires a transformation of the methods and the research questions customarily employed by disciplinary formations?” (viii). If the Filipino experience falls outside of the spheres and categories of Asian American studies, is it ethical to subject Filipinos to yet another layer of exclusion? Why has this “problem” not inspired a reorientation of approaches that can help “thicken” the arsenal of research methods and analyses across disciplines, and not just in Asian American rhetoric? This dissertation is a response to that challenge. As witnesses of, and dwellers in, the post- and neo-colonial/imperial environment, Filipinos/Filipino Americans past and present hold the stories and experiences that can provide significant steps to developing new tools and lenses for reading
the plurality of Asian knowledges, practices, and histories. They hold those possibilities close to, and on, their bodies, stored in their memories, and coded into the density of multiple hybrid languages, which are willingly shared among those who would listen. Hence it is all the more imperative to develop critical imperialist frames in rhetorical studies. On the one hand it responds to the need to make the Filipino/Filipino American experience legible, and foregrounds the intentional amnesia of a violent period of American history that continues to contribute to the erosion of Filipinos’ sense of national identity. On the other hand, it keeps the discipline of Asian American rhetoric engaged and innovative, and by recognizing the glaring historical-cultural difference and omission of Filipino Americans, keeps the homogenizing tendency of a “hybrid” rhetoric at bay. Just as the Delano Manongs of California arrested and disrupted the international grape markets with their strike to demand better wages, living conditions, and basic civil rights, so too do scholars of Filipino American studies complicate the presence and position of Filipino Americans, and their daily struggles for recognition in a forgetful nation (Behdad). The illegibility of Filipino Americans as complex and multi-faceted subjects denies Asian American studies rich perspectives. Yet scholars should avoid the pitfalls of constructing Filipino Americans as mere specimens and objects forced through the same lenses as other Asian Americans. Perhaps it is their movement, and their constant transitioning subjectivities through history and the everyday, and the notion of
estrangement as persons of color, as former subjects of empire, as hybrids, that will provide that transformative starting point.

In the next section I discuss notions of the everyday and the framework of estrangement that structures this project. The discussion focuses on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and the layers of estrangement he suggests frame the existence of Dasein, or human being. I discuss these notions alongside postcolonial theories and approaches, Filipino American history, and the concept of fragmentedness that permeates estranging experiences of people of color—particularly Filipino Americans—in the section on postcolonial theory, and montage. How these elements interact in vernacular video indicate the modes of estrangement I distinguish as translation, nostalgia, and transition. I suggest that these modes of estrangement characterize the continuous task of working-through what it means when we talk about “Filipinoness.”

**ESTRANGEMENT, EVERYDAYNESS, QUOTIDIAN**

“Where are you?”

--Sexyanip13, Shit Filipino Moms Say!

As an object of analysis, the everyday is a potentially amorphous and difficult, even ambiguous subject matter to discuss. How does one actually think
of the everyday as an analytic when one is deeply embedded in it, is constantly in the midst of its flows and subject to its sudden surges; when one is surrounded by the kitsch and cliché of artifacts that are deemed necessary in order to operate as a “normal” human being living in the world? As a palpable though invisible film of something that seems to hold together “stuff” in the world, the everyday is familiar to us as a general condition of being and living in the world yet one that we fail to constantly perceive as an opportunity for revelations about ourselves, the worlds we live in, and the relationships to things and beings in those worlds.

The elements of everyday life figure prominently in the works of Western philosophers. The everyday has been theorized through the concept of work and alienation (Marx), the reification of commodity capitalism and fetishism (Lukacs), urban uses of space and leisure in the context of capitalism (Lefebvre), tactical versus strategic remapping and use of capitalist structures and activities (de Certeau), and the decay and deterioration of everyday spaces and objects (Benjamin). Contemporary scholars of aesthetics and social change have latched on to the everyday as their object of study, where everything from nature and the weather (Saito), to the cityscapes, urban spaces, and abandoned neighborhoods (Soja; Grosz; Chaney), to the politics of post-modern everyday life, especially in a technological age (Highmore, Roberts), have contributed to a rich and robust discourse of one of the most commonplace human experiences. Their ideas and
concepts have all informed the way my understanding of the everyday and the quotidian has emerged.

The everyday is both present and invisible, something we try to hold on to and simultaneously something we try to escape (Blanchot; Highmore). It is a way for us to become familiar yet also that which conveys a strangeness or uncanniness. It is oppressive and freeing, boring and mysterious (Highmore), obvious and taken for granted, messy and beautiful, ordered and chaotic, all at once. In *Everyday Aesthetics*, Yuriko Saito presents the everyday as an aesthetic experience. The idea of the aesthetic becomes less a set of qualities, and more of an attitude that identifies an experience as aesthetic. Saito discusses the aesthetic as the sensual reaction of the body to certain forms, designs, phenomena and activities which encompass not just the pleasant, but the unpleasant in the everyday (Saito). She brings into the discussion a definition of the aesthetic as “those responses that propel us toward everyday decisions and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation” (11). On the other hand, Gloria Anzaldúa approaches the everyday as building blocks of a culture through artifacts of tradition that are formed. The mysticism associated with the hidden domestic world presents itself as an impetus for invention for Anzaldúa. In her seminal work, *Borderlands/la Frontera*, Anzaldúa turns to her “third” culture to make sense of the daily struggle of a mestiza living on the border of a racial, gendered, politically and geographically divided everyday.
She pulls from her own personal experiences – as a picker in the orange fields, as a student, as a woman coming to terms with her physical conditions – to theorize about the transformative moments that emerge from the network created by her indigenous heritage, her European ancestry, and her identity as a queer/woman, and an American.

Every time she [the New Mestiza] makes “sense” of something, she has to cross over, kicking a hole out of old boundaries of the self and slipping under or over, dragging the old skin along, stumbling over it… It is a dry birth, a breech birth, a screaming birth, one that fights every inch of the way. It is only when she is on the other side and the shell cracks open and the lid from her eyes lifts that she sees things in a different perspective. It is only then that she makes the connections, formulates the insights. (Anzaldúa 71)

This “dry birth” is a deeply personal and unique experience that is formed out of a quotidian experience in the space of the self’s “old boundaries.” Articulating “that fight” and the passage to “the other side” is constituted by the unique circumstances and struggles that are confronted in the micro aspects of the everyday. Hence it attempts to defy a unitary view of the quotidian and subverts a generalized view of the everyday. This generalizing, unifying view of the everyday, which post-colonial theory considers a move towards whiteness
(Bhabha), is challenged when articulated from the position of one’s cultural or morphological hybridity or the condition of being a person of color, an other. In her book, Second Skin: Josephine Barker and the Modern Surface, Anne Anlin Cheng posits an active, subtle exchange event when one’s gaze settles and “worlds” that which marks an other: skin. Skin orients how one sees, and in seeing Cheng says we as viewers are transformed more than the object of our gaze. We, too, acquire a skin/surface that either shows, or conceals. The everyday perhaps can be considered a skin, or a way of “cladding” (Cheng, “Skins, Tattoos, and Susceptibility” 98). It presents itself as something akin to surface tension; what Julia Kristeva might refer to as a harmony. Dominant power structures maintain an everydayness to cloak any disruptions, on the one hand. For the marginalized (those who are kept “hidden” or cloaked, or keep themselves and their traditions/differences hidden or cloaked), the everyday is also potentially a place to enact their traditions through the activities that give them their identity. Yet beyond an examination of an interior and exterior, there is something about reading surfaces that leads us back to a resistance of a unifying gaze; in race studies, it is a critical response to colorblindness, or the whitewashing of race issues and difference. Investigating surfaces, and “what the visible hides” (Cheng, “Skins, Tattoos, and Susceptibility” 101), invites us to reconsider our gaze and see the ordinary in a new way. It reconsiders the ruptures events cause on these surfaces and examines the work that the
traditionally marginalized, racialized voices do to suture the tears. It is an
acknowledgement of the scars that form on the surface of the skin of everyday
life after the event has ended – the misshapen, hyper-pigmented pits and scabs,
some of which don’t go away and fuse into the fibers of the everyday.

These calls to read against a unifying and homogenous everyday is one
to which the notion of estrangement responds. The actuality of the everyday
finds some structure or form in the artifacts that fill spaces meaningfully and in
some instances clutter them recklessly. The “surface” of the everyday, expressed
in the materiality of objects, takes on a quality that we recognize as mundane,
banal, quotidian. Their “everydayness” allows them to be seen and concurrently
be taken for granted or forgotten. And yet these observable and commonplace
objects and encounters become keys to connecting to insights and discourses
that are not immediately obvious or have been covered-over by the “skin” of the
quotidian—unless their presence, their function, the very space they occupy in
the everyday are reoriented temporally, providing an estranging way to achieve
those insights.
In *Being and Time*, Heidegger declares, “That which is closest and ontically well-known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked” (69). He sets up his “existential analytic of Dasein” (69) in the familiarity and proximity of the everyday—what he called *average everydayness*. His project takes the everyday—its overpowering presence, and all the things and beings in it—as the way to reveal *Dasein* (being-there), or the fact-ness of human beings. We are fallen, says Heidegger, and this *fallenness* is one he describes as a complete absorption in average everydayness that makes us unaware of the everyday itself. The everyday is the world humans build to make sense of their being there. Paradoxically, to show that there is a “there” that exists in relation to them, and “them” in relation to a world, the everyday is forgotten and “hidden” in plain view. In other words, human beings have no choice but to be intimately and intricately entangled with and immersed in the physical, material, quotidian world, and to do so means to forget about it.

In such an entanglement, human beings live in the everyday through two modes: the *inauthentic* and *authentic*. Heidegger sees inauthentic living as the actuality of daily life. It includes the necessity of living and working according to
the norms and traditions of “normal” life. We surround ourselves with things that make us feel at home, and work to maintain this state of “comfort” that reinforces our *thrownness*. To be thrown, according to Heidegger, is the condition in which humans come into the world through categories of class, race, gender, in some place among other humans, reproduced and reinforced in the everyday. Thrownness compels us to orient ourselves according to a predetermined script that outlines who we are and how we are supposed to occupy certain spaces. These scripts diminish the fear and anxiety of feeling lost and tell us what roles we are to play, what ideas and beliefs we should keep, what politics we should abide by, what things to say to maintain harmonious relationships.

These are basic conditions of living within frames and frameworks that keep us from feeling and being displaced. In other words, preoccupying ourselves with the everyday turns us towards the quotidian and makes us *homely*. It turns us *away* from that which makes us truly human beings: the fact that our being-there is always already contingent as Being-towards-death, or, the reality of our finitude. Put more simply, the everyday conceals the constant awareness of time and anxiety about death. To face uncertainty and to be unhomely (*unheimlich*) is the mirror aspect of Being that Heidegger referred to as authentic. Though we need the homeliness of the everyday to operate “normally,” this same everyday—that which is closest to us—distances us from the truth that homelessness can reveal: that is, our finitude and the contingency of human
experience and existence. When we face this unhomeliness, or homeless-ness, everyday Being-in-the-world becomes authentic. The *unheimlich*, which Heidegger translates as the uncanniness, and the homeless-ness of Being, emerges from the structures of the inauthentic everyday.

We get to an authentic\(^3\) mode through our moods, or those moments when we feel strangely alienated or disturbed, when we begin to question the everyday (our daily routines or rituals), or even our own purpose for being there. Unsettling and often promoting an uncanny sense of displacement, they attune us to our thrownness and fallenness, and make us “see” the precariousness of the frameworks and ideologies we have constructed. In other words, we become estranged, and for Heidegger the unheimlich or being not-at-home is the most fundamental estrangement of being that allows Dasein to emerge. “In anxiety one feels ‘uncanny’… As Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the ‘world’. Everyday familiarity collapses…Dasein has been individualized, but individualized being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘not-at-home’” (233). Estrangement in the everyday turns us toward difficult questions, difficult truths about our beliefs and about ourselves. It is both terrifying and freeing at the same time, deepening the dialectical relationships

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\(^3\) To be clear, authenticity is not an attribute that Being (Dasein) possesses; authenticity is always a process of becoming authentic through struggle. “At the beginning of the analysis, Da-sein is precisely not to be interpreted in the differentiation of a particular existence; rather to be uncovered in the indifferent way in which it is initially and for the most part. This indifference of the everydayness of Da-sein is not nothing; but rather a positive phenomenal characteristic. All existing is how it is out of this kind of being, and back into it” (B&T, 41). The notion of uncovering Da-sein suggests that authentic Being is always already present in the ontic and inauthentic. Dasein needs the inauthentic to be authentic.
that Heidegger proposes at the outset: what is closest to us is also farthest; what is familiar is uncanny; what is most obvious likewise conceals. That which we build in order to function “normally” also turns us away from what is most truly ours and ourselves; the inauthenticity of everyday actuality is the precondition for authenticity. For Heidegger, authenticity and inauthenticity are not causal relations. Both conditions are necessary for Dasein to reveal itself and live authentically. “But the inauthenticity of Da-sein does not signify a ‘lesser’ being or a ‘lower’ degree of being” (40). Living in inauthenticity (existentials) is necessary if we are to live in the world at all. But a breakdown in the “normalcy” of everyday life comports us to an alternate everyday, one that is revealed to us when we experience a rift or a tear in the world we built and everything becomes uncanny. Working through this realization is the response that causes anxiety, but also turns humans to the truth of the instability of ontic reality. We become homeless.

In two important later works, Heidegger deepens his interpretation of homelessness and estrangement. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger interprets homeless-ness on a deeper level by revealing that human beings are *to deinotaton*: the most uncanny, the most unhomely. In other words, in estranging, humans are the *most* estranged being. He reads the first chorale ode

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4 It’s easy to think of these two terms as binary opposites, one being preferable than the other. One should note however that in Heidegger’s project, language functions as a means of destabilizing the very categories we have in our heads, the same categories that allow us to identify the negative vs. the positive, or how concepts belong in neat boxes that exist independently of each other, or ones that act as mere causal relations.

5 “Actuality” is what is accessible to us, and can be in the form of routines and traditions that structure our being in the world. In other words, things provide us with a framework for “normal” living.
of Sophocles’ *Antigone* and focuses on Sophocles’ word, *deinon*, usually translated in English as “‘terrible,’ ‘fearsome,’ ‘mighty,’ ‘powerful,’ ‘wondrous,’ or ‘strange’” (Withy, 108). Heidegger translates it as *un-heimliche*, the not-at-home. He emphasizes the word *heim*, or “home,” which one can read (beyond the physicality of a home or the concept of it) as any mode of being “at home,” that is, of dwelling in the familiar and secure (inauthentic). In this reading, he no longer just refers to anxiety as the way to experience Being authentically, but a panicked terror that is “inwardly reverberating (159)” as the human being is “thrown out of all relation to the homely (162)”. Unsettled and home-less, humans are exposed as the “overwhelming sway” that Heidegger calls Being, and to which humans belong. The word deinon takes on another level of meaning, indicating both Being and human beings as “doubly deinon in an originally united sense” (160) as *to deinotaton*: human beings are homeless and violence-doing. In other words, the desire to feel and be at home is violence-doing against the nature of the deinon as uncanny. Heidegger here pulls in the metaphor of the *polis* (site, or “city”) as the site of beings. Once estranged, human being becomes *apolis* (without city), or without site or ground, without place. Antigone is the figure of the most uncanny, embracing the truth of her uncanniness, or more powerfully, owning her uncanniness (Capobianco, Ward, Withy). Her knowing embrace of death “throws” her out of the polis, or whatever sense of belonging she had in the ontic realm of the physical and constructed world as a human being. Being
thrown out allows Antigone to transgress that unsettling realm of human understanding of death as something to avoid, and cross over to the embrace of Dasein as the most uncanny: as the very Being that faces death. Human being “must transgress the limits of at-home modes of being in order to exist authentically in relation to Being” (Capobianco, 159).

This double unhomeli-ness and estrangement not only estranges the everyday in which human beings find themselves, but they are themselves the most estranged, even from themselves, because they are always unsettled in relation to Being (Capobianco). Flung out of his/her world, and never secure in Being either, the human’s estrangement compels him/her to wander. “Everywhere trying out, underway; untried, with no way out he comes to Nothing” (162). In wandering, and overcome by fear, the human begins to build new worlds in order to make sense of his unhomeliness. In other words, the human as to deinotaton has to build a home, and build away from the truth of his fundamental homelessness. As uncanny beings attempting to overcome their uncanny condition, humans employ their tools and skills to overcome their terror.⁶ Heidegger here implies humans’ deployment of power (and violence) against nature, and he cites agriculture, technology, the development of culture, and

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⁶ Contrasting this need to create with the state of nature, Heidegger says that through “violence-doing, the human disturbs the calm of growth, the nourishing and enduring of the tireless one…breaks into this sway, year by year they break it up with plows and drive the toilless earth into the restlessness of their toiling” (164). The human, encountering the openness of the overwhelming sway, begins a profound struggle against the inchoate possibility.
language as the methods of violence that humans activate. But Heidegger is quick to clarify that the estrangement and violence-doing he speaks of are not mere invention or the application of a skill or human quality. They are the human’s fundamental encounter with itself as uncanny and recognition that Being is at all times a “happening of un-canniness itself” (169). Yet it is a realization that seems destined to fail because in that realization—that Beings possess and are possessed by the uncanny power to create opportunities for themselves to transgress into the unhomely—they somehow seem to revert back to a mode of creation that makes one homely.

Heidegger singles out language as the most uncanny of these tools: humans tend to think of language as something that emanates from their being human. Heidegger argues the opposite—humans and humanity emerge from language.

The extent to which humanity is not at home in its own essence is betrayed by the opinion human beings cherish of themselves as those who have invented and who could have invented language and understanding, building and poetry. How is humanity ever supposed to have invented that which pervades it in its sway, due to which humanity itself can be as humanity in the first place? (167).

Heidegger uses language as a metaphor for estrangement: what humans think is closest to them is actually the most distant, especially in the awareness of the power of language in “disciplining and disposing of the violent forces (167)” called for in world creation.

For when human beings are everywhere underway in this sense, their having no way out does not arise in the external sense that they run up against outward restrictions and cannot get any farther. Somehow or another they precisely can always go father into the and-so-forth. Their not having a way out consists, instead, in the fact that they are continually thrown back on the paths that they themselves have laid out; they get bogged down in their routes, get stuck in ruts, and by getting stuck they draw in the circles of their world, get enmeshed in seeming, and thus shut themselves out of Being. In this way they turn around and around within their own circle. They can turn aside everything that threatens this circuit. They can turn every skill to the place where it is best applied. The violence-doing, which originally creates the routes, begets in itself its own un-essence, the versatility of many twists and turns, which in itself is the lack of ways out, so much so that it shuts itself out from the way of meditation on the seeming within which it drifts around (168).

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7 He singles out language as the most uncanny of these tools: humans tend to think of language as something that emanates from their being human. Heidegger argues the opposite—humans and humanity emerge from language.

8 I quote Heidegger here at length:
Hence, the paths humans create in their initial venture seem to lead them back to the ontic mode of experiencing the everyday: as they get more and more “stuck” in their ways, humans reject any attempts at disturbing their sense of being at-home. In other words, humans, when thrust out into the sway or the overwhelming, use the tools that are closest to them to tame that sway. Taming that sway only returns one to inauthenticity. For Heidegger, the only “exit” out of this vicious cycle is the recognition of finitude as the most uncanny thing—that which belongs most to humans and will allow them to encounter Being and authenticity in a way that frees them from any urge to ward off the certainty of mortality. “The human being has no way out in the face of death, not only when it is time to die, but constantly and essentially. Insofar as humans are, they stand in the no-exit of death. Thus Being-here is the happening of uncanniness itself” (169). To be human is to be constantly attuned to the fact that death is what makes human beings what they are in the first place. Therefore what makes us human is our finitude. Humans, as Dasein, happen, and the only way this takes place is when humans face their unsettledness, and their fundamental estrangement in Being.

To recap so far: the emerging definition of estrangement progressed from the notion of estrangement as located in the everyday. The everyday is the site where Being (humans) determines presence (being there) in terms of the other beings with which it surrounds itself, and identifies relationships through the
modes of concealment and unconcealment of their (humans’) uncanniness and fundamental unhomeliness in the quotidian (average everydayness) affairs of daily life (Heidegger, *Being and Time*). A second notion of estrangement moves beyond the notion of the uncanny as the most accessible and most familiar (the everyday), to humans as the most uncanny. *Thrown out of* the everyday, humans are exposed to the overwhelming sway and the unsettledness of their Being. An inherent compulsion to do violence on the openness that suddenly faces them is a method of *making sense of* their homeless, unsettled, and uncanny condition. Being tries to find home again, without realizing that “home” is not homeliness among other beings, but home is actually the sense of being *at-home* in Being. In other words, humans, as the violence doers, do violence to forget that they are *most at home in their uncanniness as the estranged Being*.

Heidegger offers yet a third notion of estrangement in his 1942 lecture, *The Ister*, which is based on the hymn of German poet Friedrich Hölderlin about the Danube river. In the lecture, he returns to the chorale ode in Sophocles’ *Antigone* and revisits the words *deinon* and *unheimliche* (Capobianco; Bambach). He then connects this reading to an interpretation of Hölderlin’s poem, “Der Ister.” What stands out to me in this text is the trope of a turn, a return, the multiplicity of the uncanny human, and a foreignness that emerges from within the uncanny that s/he encounters or even seeks out as the unhomely.
In The Ister, Heidegger acknowledges his previous ideas on Dasein, unheimliche and deinon as a forgotten way of being among humans. He picks up where he left off: his notion of the human as uncanny and homeless, as the violence-doer against the overwhelming sway. However a new thread opens up in his discussion: in the section that explores the word deinon, Heidegger points to a turning that occurs and “stirs” (pelein) within deinon. “The fear that the deinon awakens can also be that fear pertaining to reverence and awe. The deinon, as the fearful, is then not that which is frightening, but rather that which commands and calls for reverence: that which is worthy of honor…We may already gather from this that something counterturning prevails in what the Greeks name deinon” (63, my emphasis). He points out that the deinon can be one or many things at any occasion, and speaks to a “powerfulness” that may be both benign or actively violent. “That which is powerful always exceeds our usual and habitual powers and abilities. The deinon is therefore at the same time that which is inhabitable” (63). We may take the word inhabitable to mean something that one cannot feel at home in, something not customary; unfamiliar and therefore foreign or estranged. He mentions and plays on the first words of the ode, polla ta deina, specifically the word polla, which he translates not as “many (the usual meaning of the word),” but “multiple” and “manifold,” insisting that the uncanny is “multiply folded, that is, placed together and thus individuated…simultaneously interwoven and hidden” (68). This multiplicity is an
essential element of the uncanny, not as individual parts that can be separated and counted, but as a singular essence of uncanniness that keeps unfolding (68).

Turning to Hölderlin’s poem, “Der Ister,” Heidegger sees the river as an embodiment of the uncanny flowing within itself and the journeying of the water along its path as encounters with the usual turned foreign: “The river is locality and journeying. The enigmatic unity of these essential determinations may be expressed in a formulaic manner in the following statements: The river is the locality of journeying. The river is the journeying of locality. The locales and the journey, the back-and-forth between the foreign and the homely” (43). We can think about the course of a river’s journey as a movement away from a source and out towards the unknown or unfamiliar, indeed a movement towards what is foreign. However, in the case of the Ister, Heidegger likens the river’s source to the polis or the “realm and locale around which everything question-worthy and uncanny turns in an exceptional sense…[it] is polos, that is, the pole, the swirl in which and around which everything turns” (81). The river, which flows vigorously into the foreign, also appears to move backward, turning back toward the source and indicating a return to what is considered its “home.” Yet we know the river can never return as it once was to the source. It’s the same way with human beings: the passage into the foreign creates a desire for the homely, but to be at-home again is never the same once s/he is estranged. Here Heidegger reveals that because beings are fundamentally not homely—that is, estranged and
uncanny—“their care is to be homely” (71). In other words, the source is something we can refer to as the space or condition that provided what was homely, the hearth⁹ from which things originate: one can consider it the everyday, the home, the very space of all that is familiar and secure, and where one felt a sense of belonging. The care to be homely makes humans turn towards many unfolding possibilities that begin at the source, yet that care continues to lead into more and more foreignness, always with a view to coming to be at home in the foreign. It is a venturing into what is foreign in order to find what is one’s ownmost. Thus human beings can either seek a homeliness in building a home against what is foreign—in other words, they continue to build against what is a supremely foreign aspect of human life, but that which is the human beings’ ownmost: death. In constantly avoiding the truth of death or finitude, human beings are always incomplete, and this manifests in their unhomeliness and the desire to return to feeling at-home in the everyday. They may, as unhomely, (re)build their worlds to resolve their estrangement, or find a way of embracing homelessness and estrangement as a fundamental aspect of their being here.

The unfolding of multiple possibilities that emerges from the passage through the foreign flows towards a desire to be homely. It implies a constant process of revealing and (re)building. Beings shuttle back and forth between the

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⁹ Heidegger renders the source as “the hearth” drawing it from the Greek term Hestia, which likely points to the Greek goddess Hera, the goddess of the home and hearth, the one who stays and sustains Mt. Olympus as the home of the gods.
foreign and the homely, venturing and homeliness, authentic and inauthentic, always unsettled, questioning and struggling. As such, the human being, and all his/her undertakings, is always unfinished. This is the nature of the uncanny. Just as Antigone knowingly embraced her fate, taking “as her all-determinative point of departure that against which nothing can avail (The Ister, 103),” the human who has embraced uncanniness will always be in transition. The one who steps into the swirls that pull one towards the foreign and simultaneously washes over one with the desire to be at-home, knows that to be at-home is not to be at a location. It is not a return to some source that was its beginning. To be at-home for the uncanny is the struggle to find homeliness in his/her homelessness: to be open to the encounters with the foreign, to “dwell” in that openness, and to accept and own the perpetually unfolding project of Being—indeed, to be at home in Being.

Estrangement in the everyday then is the condition of coming to terms with a constant reinterpretation of encounters and engagements with one’s reality, and ultimately with one’s identity. The reinterpretations happen as one translates, transitions, and remembers, and in that reinterpretation, new meanings and narratives are revealed. We consider the everyday’s inauthenticity as an inconsequential edited sequence of events that slides like a unified audio-visual montage across time and space, forming a smooth surface on which we build our

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10 She steps into what is supremely foreign: death. Heidegger then refers to her as the supremely uncanny.
lives. Estrangement encourages us to look between those sequences to the cuts and joins that remind us of possibilities that exist beyond the current frames, towards what is foreign yet also what is fundamentally our own: the instability, uncertainty, and finitude of being human on the one hand. That which is most alien and unfamiliar to us is the fact of our incompleteness. It forces us to question the frames and scripts with which we have structured our experience of being in the world. On the other hand, estrangement opens us up to the notion of manifold possibilities of being human. While estrangement encourages us to disturb the apparent order and unity of any existing everyday narrative and reveal hidden and forgotten meanings and discourses, it reveals that we, too, are still unfolding and unfinished, and thus any stable notion of who we are is always put into question. We always already are, and will always be, in the middle of a “radical incompleteness.” Estrangement is the condition that allows us to face it.
Estrangement and quotidian rhetorics reveal and excavate the connections between the episodic events in history and connect them to the present, stitching them together as in a montage of scenes in a video. A viewer pieces together a narrative from the unfolding scenes in a montage, but a second look might reveal covert storylines and meanings that go unnoticed on the first pass. A third reading may even uncover a surprising counter narrative embedded in the ways the scenes connect to each other, through various transitional elements such as music, sound effects, stylized images, or simple cuts. In other words, the first level considers the surface, the things as they are and as we understand them in our routine dealings with them. A second level could be a destruction of that surface and the subsequent ordering and organizing into legible codes and beings. A possible third layer is a highly experimental or radical mode that is contingent and unsettled, moving not just between identified poles of interpretation but suggesting an attempt to move outside it. In this project, I
suggest that estrangement occurs in three modes: translation, nostalgia, and a transition I call strategic hybridity. Each mode exists alongside the others, yet visual rhetorical readings disclose the existence of each mode by creating the space to read the next mode in one’s analysis. These disclosures don’t occur in any hierarchy, nor do they follow any rules or dependencies that will allow them to emerge. These three modes appear as layers of estrangement overlaid over each other, all already existing, as if nested within each reading of, and uncovering new meanings in, the mundane. These modes of estrangement emerge in the way references to Filipinoness travel in and around representations of the everyday, providing each reading with a deeper meaning of, and path towards, a quotidian rhetorics.

To ground and build my analysis, I re-read episodic moments (Rafael) in Filipino and Filipino American history from 1902 to 1934, roughly the time when the United States set up a military insular government in the Philippines up until the enactment of the Tydings-McDuffie Act that granted the Philippines its independence. Following the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the Philippine-American War in 1899, this period of American occupation of the Philippines is one that scholars of Filipino/Filipino American history and culture consider the

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11 I formulated this term as I was writing the final chapter of the dissertation. However, due diligence revealed a book section written by comparative literature scholar Paul Sharrad where he used the same terms. Sharrad applied the lens of strategic hybridity in readings of Pacific islander literature. Unfortunately, I came to it too late, and did not have time to include it in the discussion. It makes some excellent arguments similar to the ones here, and uses the same basis for the term “strategic hybridity” (Sharrad engages Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, as I do). However, his notions apply to a different culture, a different set of texts, and different historical and (post)colonial conditions. I would like to explore the similarities further in a future project.
moment of an aborted Filipino Nationalism (San Juan, Constantino, Baldoz, Campomanes), and consequently a homeless-ness of Filipino identity.

In my reading of three modes of estrangement, I argue that these modes emerge as everyday conditions of Filipinos and Filipino Americans as racialized and marginalized persons, both in their own country, and abroad. I read movements of displaced and alienated Filipinos through a postcolonial lens and extract notions of estrangement that likewise emerge in vernacular videos. These readings respond to questions about identity: How does one reconcile an identity to a past time or place that one has never known, or never existed? How does one negotiate his/her being in the world through languages or practices that can result in either inclusion or exclusion in a group? Are Filipino Americans’ interpretations of Filipinoness limited to notions of hybridity, or do their interpretations suggest multiple and manifold views of Filipinoness that as yet remain illegible beyond the postcolonial frameworks? If they are, how does one talk about or demonstrate them without imposing the same kind of violence that colonial or imperial methods of making-legible inflicted on the colonized Other in the first place? Postcolonial theory has demonstrated how the Other is always already removed from her originary contexts through constructions of their identity imposed by the West. It is a result of the task of making the subaltern difference legible to them. In the case of Filipinoness, Filipino subalterity is “written” into historical narratives as inferior and in need of civilizing. In many
cases, the colonized is influenced by the view that these Western frames impose, especially notions on how the colonized should see herself. In other words, colonialism/imperialism/Orientalism has caused a permanent rip in the subaltern’s sense of self as a whole being.

Imperialism/colonialism contains the other. Identification with practices, traditions, and languages provided the space and opportunity for the subaltern to enact and embody their own personhood. This is in contrast to a static identity that constructed the dominant culture as the measure of what one ought to be and work towards. In other words, the subaltern identity was always defined in opposition to the imperial master, who was almost always white and European (Said, Bhabha). The Other’s way of life was framed and tagged as intellectually and culturally inferior. Meanwhile, as identity is conferred on the Other, an irreparable split and an unresolvable feeling of displacement trembles within him/her. Frantz Fanon captures it succinctly in this oft-cited passage from *White Skins, Black Masks*:

Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far from myself, and gave myself up as an object…My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day…The white man is all around me; up above the sky is tearing at its navel; the
earth crunches under my feet and sings white, white. All this
whiteness burns me to a cinder (93-94).

A consciousness of himself as other in the eyes of a white boy (of all places and
times, on a mundane walk in the streets of Paris) makes him come to himself: he
is not only one thing but many things (uncivilized, something to be feared, slave,
/etc.) and the colonizer has successfully fractured any sense of completeness that
he once possessed. The person of color and the hybrid are forced to move as an
Other through a white world defined as strange against the “norm” of whiteness.

In the above passage, Fanon is forced to confront his blackness, read via his
skin, his features, his presence. To the white colonizer, it is a difference and
strangeness that mars the pristine surface of the white world—a foreign body that
needs to be contained, lest it infect or “eat up” the white other. He is, according to
Sarah Ahmed, the stranger who is automatically singled out as uncommon,
simply because he does not fit into the expectations of what is known as common
and is therefore suspicious, threatening. “Information is not given about how to
tell the difference between normal and suspicious, because that difference is
already ‘sensed’ through a prior history of making sense as the making of ‘the
common’...it looks out for and hears the threat to the common posed by those
who are uncommon, or those who are ‘out of place’ in ‘this place’” (29). A
fragmentedness therefore characterizes the experience of the subaltern, as she
is able to see herself removed from one culture or race and thrown into another
in which she would have to negotiate a new identity. In W.E.B. du Bois’s terms, a double consciousness afflicts the person of color and former colonized native: we become visible to ourselves as many and manifold, a terrifying moment of confusion and possibility, or a moment of formlessness, strangerness, that is always already excluded from any community. The colonized/person of color recognizes that his/her everyday is different from everyone else’s—and what is different compels those in power to contain it.

Scattered fragments of a body “disjointed and redone” need places to go; fragmented identities need to be rearticulated with a view to becoming whole again. Translation, nostalgia, and transition are modes of estrangement that attempt to explain that struggle to fit in, or fit together again. I suggest the modes are movements towards homeliness, either as a return to what was once considered homely and familiar, or movements towards what is foreign. How do vernacular videos respond to these issues? Vernacular video, by the name alone, implies a constant presence in everyday life, capturing the mundane and the banal moments that may be useless to a general public. However I believe that the audio-visual sequences recorded in the midst of everyday life hold clues to understanding a racialized and marginalized group’s struggles to find a homely existence within the dominant culture’s norms. Vernacular videos are made up of fragments of audio-visual sequences that capture the lives of people who are invisible to society. Arranged in a montage, vernacular video speaks to the same
Vernacular video becomes a surface that returns his/her image and offers the subaltern an opportunity to reflect, not just by viewing the video, but more in the act of making it. According to Gregory Ulmer, vernacular video’s presence as a medium and its form as a montage lends itself well to the “invention potential” of “highly personal “chance occurrences” that permeate an individual’s experiences. Ulmer uses video as one of the main protheses for the embodiment of his theory of electracy, which according to him can illuminate certain aporias or impasses in everyday life. Its electrate form is what he calls a Mystory (Ulmer). In Teletheory, Ulmer explains that his use of Roland Barthes’s concept of the punctum, allows one to “write an intuition” (Ulmer 37), privileging a “felt knowledge” (Arroyo 14) and a (re)presentation of our “unconscious thought.” According to Sarah Arroyo, the practice of “working with image-events ... and producing moving images” (12) allows the individual to access a writing strategy that can develop organically from their specific experiences. It permits an opening up – provides a space or chora – to confront other issues not as easily articulated through text (Arroyo). The jagged-edged aesthetic that these vernacular videos exude allow for its malleability as a medium (Arroyo). Its open-ended form lends itself to multiple re-interpretations and inscriptions,
allowing authors and viewers to react and refer to the dynamic content in subsequent projects.

The images are important and offer a starting point for orienting the analysis of subaltern experiences. Representations of the subaltern, especially Orientalist and Imperial depictions of everyday life of the natives, engender stereotypes that are easily reproduced and disseminated. Analyzing vernacular videos on that (surface) level provide opportunities for correction. It also draws out the implications on the kinds of representations that continue to circulate about marginalized groups and encourages the exploration of approaches for alternative representations. However, I contend that the gaps in between moving images and the ways in which these scenes transition offer rich opportunities for articulating the estrangement that postcolonial theory reveals. Homi Bhabha’s notion of the ambivalent third space is an articulation of the gap, an “unhomely moment” where the disavowal of a traumatic event’s occurrence, and the presence of bodies experiencing that trauma, collide. The trauma of a loss of culture or the trauma of exclusion and invisibility are embodied on the one hand in vernacular videos, but are without a definite form since they exist in the “interstitial intimacy (13)” created by visible images and invisible struggles: the intimacy of domestic spaces (as many of these are shot in their homes and bedrooms) and practices, and the overtness of video shared with the public. In other words, the estranging moments reside in the cuts between scenes, the
方式他们被加入，以及在方式上从场景到场景的过渡，我甚至会建议，从历史到记忆到实际到图像和语言。

菲律宾裔美国摄影师使用非正式视频承认了存在的缺失——一种缺失，即使第一眼不清楚它到底丢失了什么。

移居、损失、排斥和不可见性指代前殖民地有色人的隔离，无论他们是否留在自己的国家，还是决定移居国外——特别是前殖民中心。菲律宾人在菲律宾在早期的美国占领时代被自己的语言和文化所隔离，因为英语作为公立学校系统、政府和大众媒体的媒介。菲律宾人开始在菲律宾的美国国家作为农场劳工移居美国，经历了作为移民的极端形式的移居和隔离。和排斥。与他们在一起，美国当局让菲律宾人被社会和国家所隔离，对他们发誓的忠诚。随着这些事件在菲律宾人日常生活中的展开，他们生活方式的代表成为了为美国在菲律宾的存在辩护的养料。通过电影和照片描绘他们的“野蛮”方式，美国对白人的负担和使命的认识加强了美国批准的文明使命。
Congress. The Filipino and Filipinoness were easily turned into a caricature of barbarism and inferiority. Myths and stereotypes circulated about their filthy habits, abject poverty, and insatiable and corrupting sexual appetites (Brody, Rice, Vostral, Bernabe). Anthropologists attested to their (especially of non-Christian tribes) ignorance and the need for the continued “guidance” of scientific approaches to help them develop into civilized human beings (Brody, Capozzola). These notions totally disregarded the fact that there were members of an educated upper class who were capable of running government. (In fact, General Emilio Aguinaldo established a revolutionary government in June 1898, half a year before America declared it an insurgency and invaded Manila.) These stories were made invisible in reports and media, lest they cause fissures in the imperial/colonial government’s insistence on keeping up the veneer of helplessness. The Philippines was portrayed as incapable of self-governance, and therefore should remain a colony of the United States. How do these events in Filipino American history connect to vernacular videos then? I see vernacular videos as a way to connect to and open up the narratives of these episodes from a forgotten chapter of American history. Connections are formed between past and present that possibly mirror the experiences of estrangement of Filipinos and Filipino Americans through time, and opportunities for the interpretation and re-interpretation of these events reveal more about Filipinoness.
Translation: Against Assimilation

The English language estranged Filipinos during the American occupation of the Philippines, and language continues to estrange Filipino Americans today. The American imperialist project’s most potent tool, according to Funi Hsu, was the use of English to homogenize the population with a view to assimilate Filipinos into a civilized society imagined by the Americans. It was a project that aimed to transform Filipinos into the image of their imperial masters. Learning English over indigenous regional languages distanced Filipinos from their own culture and history. The institutionalization of the English language became a mode of homelessness for Filipinos in the Philippines. Americans drove the project of assimilation through a “tender violence” (Wexler in Hsu, 18)—and the most violent of all was a forgetting of Filipinoness. However the vernacular videos seem to indicate otherwise: they eventually distanced themselves from home as more of them dreamed of, and actually did, migrate to the United States. Armed with their language and knowledge of American culture, Filipinos thought integrating into US society would be easy. Unfortunately the “special relationship” that was promised them was never reciprocated. What Filipinos didn’t account for were their accents, which quickly became enmeshed with the fact of not being white. In chapter two, I analyze vernacular videos and the layers of estrangement present in Filipino American videographers’ reenactments of Filipino accents, and their attempts to speak in Filipino. How do these videographers translate the
estrangement from the Filipino language and accents, and how do they translate their experience through languages? Highlighting the unmistakable Filipino accented English, I argue that the videographers reveal an interstice that escapes forgetting. By speaking in the voice and “language” of the other, the fact of colonization is acknowledged, but also creatively re-appropriated as a means to contingently “touch” a Filipinoness that is specifically their own—a prosthesis of origin (Derrida) that is constituted by experiencing language as emanating from and directed at the Other. In other words, no language is ours alone and it belongs to no one specifically, but is always on its way to becoming what we make it out to be. Filipinoness then lies in wait for the Other’s presence to constitute it.

Nostalgia: Restoration and Reflection

Although today’s Filipino Americans don’t experience the same blatantly extreme racism and homesickness as early immigrants did, what resonates and transcends generations is the desire to return to a source that provides an authentic Filipinoness or belonging—a nostalgia for a place and time that may or may not have existed. According to Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia” is an intense and painful longing for home. Though this may seem like it is a longing for a physical structure or place that one can return to, it is also the longing for a journey back in time that can never happen. In chapter three I discuss nostalgia as a mode of
estrangement that allows an individual to escape an oppressive everyday on the one hand through memory and the presence of physical artifacts that remind one of home. However, I also suggest that if maintained in this way, nostalgia fosters an attachment to figures and symbols of a time and place that may reify (racial and cultural) stereotypes that force marginalized groups into more abject spaces and positions. This is because a nostalgia that tries to restore home hopes for a complete image of what home was, or what it ought to be. Among Filipino American videographers, nostalgia exists in their reproductions of an identity checklist that enumerate trivia and traits that claim to distinguish and define Filipinoness. These checklists are the scripts that lead them in their inquiry into that aspect of themselves that seem alien. Figures of the primitive tend to be reproduced and are associated with depictions of their immigrant elders, and a nationalism based on “American-endorsed” symbols, objects, and figures tends to conceal the insidious rhetoric of a list logic aimed at control and containment. Just as anthropological classifications, reports, images, and films attempted to present the United States as a benevolent power and the Filipinos as hopeless savages, so too do scripts with static definitions of Filipinoness attempt to control emerging experiences with oppression. Nostalgia can be productive if approached reflectively—that is, if Filipino Americans focus specifically on “the gaps in memory, identity, and resemblance” (Boym, 50) that invite an ironic and humorous attitude towards loss. A reflective nostalgia embraces the
fragmentedness of experience, and hence fluidity and the “irrevocability of the past and human finitude” (49).

**Transitions and Strategic Hybridity**

Despised and excluded because Filipinos’ presence threatened their jobs, American nativists made sure Filipinos knew their place. Clearly marked boundaries in law, as well as socio-civic spheres kept Filipinos from planting roots in America—that is, making a home and starting a family. The stereotype of the primitive, sexually corrupt, dumb Filipino was relived and reinforced everyday as the *manongs*, or Filipino farm laborers, toiled in the vegetable fields, vineyards, and canneries on the West Coast. Denied basic civil rights despite their vague though hybrid status as US Nationals, the special relationship that Filipinos banked on seemed to be nonexistent on the US mainland. The forgotten history of this complex relationship is a symptom of a “historical amnesia” which Ali Behdad defines as a disavowal of the violence and exploitation of immigrant and non-white others as constitutive of America’s own identity as a nation. The vernacular videos in this study overwhelmingly equate Filipinoness with benightedness; crude stereotypes are reproduced throughout and suture the videographers’ sense of homeless-ness from an originary culture. The figure of the stereotyped Filipino becomes the new savage, the new primitive, and the perpetual foreigner (Espiritu) and stranger (Ahmed). “Emptied of any content, or
any direct relationship to a referent, precisely as they are tied to a (missing) history of seeing and hearing others: they are…already seen and heard as ‘the uncommon’ which allows ‘the common’ to take its shape” (Ahmed 29, author’s emphasis). Filipinoness, identified and enacted in contrast to the “normal” American everyday, is locked in a perpetual back-and-forth between its assertion as a unique identity against, and its need for recognition by, the former colonizer (Lavie and Swendenburg; Cheng, V.). On the one hand, the struggle for acknowledgement and equal, fair treatment disrupts the prevailing conditions that prevents one from identifying herself, and motivates one to establish new, and creative ways of claiming an identity. In their parodic reenactments of their elders, I suggest that videographers are remaking the frames in which they are recognized and identified. They deploy a hybridity, and yet, there is something else that wants to escape beyond the space created by that liminal position. In chapter four, I read an episode of Filipino American labor history through the lens of what I call “strategic hybridity,” or what I envision is a contingent and improvisational activation of Filipinoness that is unaccounted for in the interstitial encounters between a recognized subaltern/Orientalist identity and the co-optation of the hegemonic culture. A continuous transitioning of subaltern identification extends beyond a third space and highlights the temporal aspect of Filipinoness. I argue that the presentations of the everyday in Filipino American vernacular video actually indicate a strategic activation of Filipinoness that
complicates the stereotype and infuses Homi Bhabha’s “discursive image” inhabiting the “stillness of time and a strangeness of framing” with an agency that not only crosses crossroads (13). Strategic hybridity activates in a rhetorical situation and calls on tools of language, memory, tradition, and the body in an emergent framework that is always transient, but transitions into other layers of other possible interpretations of what Filipinoness is and could be.

HOUSES AND BEINGS

“So what are you? What are you exactly?...Where are you from? No really,

where are you from?

--Michael Harley Cruz, Sh*t People Say to Filipinos

Former colonized, racialized groups cannot not be estranged, and a homeliness in identity is always impeded. Like the painting of the Bayanihan discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the racialized individual will always be displaced, always unhomely. The subaltern is in a constant crisis of longing to belong—a belonging that seeks admittance and homeliness in the colliding worlds of the indigenous “home” that is slipping away and the colonial “home” that s/he was forced to accept, and a fundamental sense of belonging to oneself. A deracination experienced by the subaltern in the everyday is a quotidian

12 Based on a conversation with Dr. Jeff Love.
experience that finds articulation in a collection of fragments in search of a structure, a narrative, that allows the Other to inscribe him/herself in history. The making of these quotidian records through audio-visual materials is a constant working-towards and movement towards a homeliness that has yet to take some shape or form. In the same way, I feel that the fragments of Filipinoess collected in these vernacular videos offer themselves as a collective surface from which a researcher like me launches an inquiry into what else is possible, always cognizant that these fragments can fall away and be forgotten at any time. Estrangement provides an awareness of this contingency, and a reminder that Filipinoess, or any identity for that matter, is partially constituted by colonial History and subaltern histories, and the unexpected microinteractions and negotiations that go unnoticed and forgotten in the everyday. At the same time, the possibility of any stable notion of Filipinoess can be undermined by the same things that “built” it: the mundaneness and taken-for-grantedness of the everyday and vernacular video, the ridiculousness of stereotypes, the injustice of disavowal. In other words, we dwell in the transition from knowing to not knowing, from remembrance to utterance to movement, from the spaces of what we perceive as “home” to the moments of homelessness. I return to the painting of the Bayanihan. That little grass house is suspended above ground and its stability depends on the tired and wobbly bare hands and feet of the townsfolk holding it up. While it may look like they have nowhere to set it down, their
collective presence is what defines its position, its final address. It is no “where.”

Rather, it is “when”—it is in the moment that the elements and bodies connect and carry “home” together. To us, it may be a frozen scene, a snapshot of a time that lives only in nostalgia, yet the orientation of the kababayans in the scene indicate a direction. Standing on the threshold of an openness (Haynes), the painting reveals a movement beyond the frame towards an unknown destination and the unfolding of untold possibilities.
Chapter 2 | Translations: From one Other to another

“When you’re gone, the man said,
I shall listen to your voices with my eyes closed
and you’ll be here again and I won’t ever be alone,
no, not anymore, after this.”

--Bienvenido Santos, “The Day the Dancers Came”

Videos not only show, they speak. Though this project is primarily a study of visual rhetoric, one cannot ignore the voices that permeate these audio-visual artifacts. The voices in these videos reveal an important aspect of Filipino-American life, particularly in encounters with Filipino languages and interactions with the English language. Living in between linguistic spaces magnifies peculiarities about each language and the videographers’ positions in it. The positions alternately evoke humor, confusion, difference, and in some cases embarrassment (and even trauma). In all these situations, the strangeness or unfamiliarity with the words and their pronunciation become markers of Filipinoness, underscoring the weirdness of what Filipino ethnicity is. This is evident in the way “Filipino” is used as an adjective to “American,” a moveable and unstable descriptive that cues us into the multiplicities of American-ness itself.
Filipinos have a funny accent. This is a general theme that gets reenacted in videos produced by second generation Filipino Americans. In his video, “You know you’re Asian/Filipino if…” GJAce not only writes out the words (“It’s party time” becomes “It’s farty time”) but also peppers his reenacted conversations with Filipino filler words such as ano (what) and over-pronounced vowel sounds. Chris Raeburn in his video points out that Filipino accents also include “exaggerated” or long rolling r’s. The hilarity with which language and accents are portrayed, however, are intensified when actual words are transformed alongside the contexts that they purport to represent. In the video, “Why I love being Filipino American,” JRdaFilipino demonstrates the mix of accents and the choice of words used to describe or express intense emotions. He shows what a heavy Filipino, or Tagalog\(^\text{13}\) accent sounds like when one swears in English:

\[
JRdaFilipino: \text{“I don’t give a pak—a pak of Lucky Me Ramen noodles!”} \\
\text{“Oh shet—a shet op paper!”} \\
\text{“You son op a beach—a beach towel!”}
\]

JRdaFilipino emphasizes some of the peculiarities of the Filipino accent, still present in the speech of first generation Filipino immigrants to America (i.e., their parents and older relatives): the use of “p” and “b” for English words that begin with “f” and “v”; exchanging short vowel sounds for long vowel sounds in English.

\(^{13}\) According to the Pew Research Survey, Tagalog is the most widely spoken Filipino language among Filipino Americans.
words; and the pronunciation of pure vowel sounds in place of the schwa sounds in English. However, beyond the comedic twisting of English words, and the deconstruction of the English language, what JRdaFilipino presents is the subtle way with which Filipinos and Filipino Americans travel between two languages and create clever ways to bridge the distinctiveness of both. Using puns as a link to familiar idioms, and using a word in one language to point to ideas in another, JRdaFilipino demonstrates how he can actually connect diverse ideas through a deep experience of and learning with both languages.

The question is, do these videographers (and members of their audience, like myself) consider these merely parodic/comedic reifications of stereotypes, or do they consider it a way of “entering” a discourse about their unfamiliar heritage? Generally one might conclude that videographers who produce these videos simply comment on the quirks in order to poke fun at the immigrant generation’s non-Americanness. Videographer DongsaengDaniel even asserts that Filipinos not only have weird accents, they also “have bad grammar.” Yet, a couple of videographers who call themselves Dabamy speak in a heavy Filipino accent and ask each other an existential question: why do they say “pish” instead of “fish?” In the same scene they look at the camera, addressing the audience and turning angry: “what’s wrong with my accent? There’s nothing wrong with my accent …Don't make fun of it!”
A phenomenon of simultaneous association and disassociation occurs when videographers put on the affectations of Filipinoness. Identifying their ethnicity so they reserve the right to joke about it may be one thing, but the phenomenon presents a set of complex situations when we look at this through the intersections of language and identity. JRdaFilipino and other videographers seem to associate this weird language and accent as one that belongs to Filipinos and not *Filipino Americans*. Though they identify themselves as Filipino American and proudly admit their Filipino heritage, they create a distance between themselves and the weird characteristic of this “weird English.”

The videographers seem to perceive this weirdness from their position as native English speakers, having grown up with the accents they consider commonplace among their peers. What they consider a warping of English by their older relatives foregrounds the differences in the environments where they grew up, learned, and practiced a version of English. However, it likewise foregrounds the forgotten fact that there is more to them (the videographers) as just kids born in America, where American-accented English is spoken as the norm; they come face to face with a heritage that is not widely considered “native” to America. What they might think is a stand out trait that would define what the “other” heritage is in comparison to what is commonplace-American, is a trait that was actually co-constituted by the presence of American English at a specific place and time in history, but one that has been forgotten, even by Filipinos in the
homeland. It was very likely that what motivated their immigrant elders to come to America was their command of the English language, albeit heavily accented, with vernacular words substituted for unfamiliar ones, and the tongue twisting and bodily adjustments needed to pronounce words “the right way.” Pronouncing words the right way, speaking English the right way becomes what I consider a convenient and assured way of assimilating into American dominant culture.

How language positions these individuals in certain contexts reveals the intersections of race, history, ethnicity, and culture in the mundane settings and situations that make up everyday life. This phenomenon is particularly true in the case of the Philippines and its relationship to America as its lone colony in Asia at the beginning of the 20th century. Armed with a civilizing mission to unite what they perceived as a fragmented country of savage tribes, Muslim rebels, and a Catholicized majority, the US government unleashed its most lethal weapon in its quest for superpower status: education and the English language. The “tender violence” (Wexler qtd. in Hsu 18) that ensued gently and insidiously inspired a forgetfulness of Filipinoness, and an unwitting embrace of the possibilities as an American National in America (Constantino).

Today, nearly four million Filipino Americans call the US “home,” and we see a handful of these homes in these videos. The forgotten aspects of Filipinoness suddenly show up as characteristics represented as strange and comedic in these vernacular videos. The reproduction of these characteristics as
strange easily builds a stereotype, reifying the idea of Filipinoness as an unsophisticated characteristic on the one hand. On the other hand, the strangeness that is foregrounded in these video reenactments opens up a discussion of a moment layered with the unarticulated immigrant struggles not just of mastering a language. It attempts to articulate a new generation’s relationship to their fragmented encounters with a language they cannot speak, but which they know is a lost part of themselves. Despite their being native English speakers, they are navigating their position as members of an ethnic community whose language they have little or no access to, and so remain unfamiliar with a heritage they know is a part of them but in which they cannot seem to feel at home.

HYBRID RHETORIC

Language speaks the speaker after all. “One finds one’s way into the word” through language (Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 182). When these videographers employ the accents that their elders speak with, their performance temporarily inhabits a space that allows them to “try on” a Filipino ethnicity and achieve a sense of belonging among Filipinos. Addressing their audience becomes easier, connecting on a deeper level than just the suggestion of
intimacy through their visuals – of being at home, in their bedrooms or living rooms, as if “hanging out.” The use of the words “you” and “you’re” in the titles of their videos signal a second person address, already an intimate sense of knowing one another and moving in familiar cultural or ethnic contexts. Drawing their audiences in, these videographers attempt to establish a commonality and familiarity with Filipino culture, and the nuances of Filipinoness.

However, a claim such as “I’m half-Filipino, so I know what being Filipino is all about” (GJAce et al.) presents an interesting moment. The recognition of their hybridity not only provides the videographers with a license to talk about what they want, and how they want with their ethnicity and race (Banks), but also grants them the opportunity to slip in and out of their subjectivities, highlighting the “half” of themselves that they consider Asian/Filipino for the duration of the video, then slipping back into one they define wholly as “Filipino American.” As a rhetorical strategy this hybrid subjectivity (Guo and Lee) allows the videographers to categorize themselves according to ethnic characteristics, which, while risking an essentialization of Asian-ness/Filipinoness, provides them with an agency that challenges the ways Western/Euro-centric categorizations flatten identities of various Asian ethnicities.

Lei Guo and Lorin Lee employ Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak’s ideas on hybridity and strategic essentialism, respectively, to create a model for analyzing vernacular discourse. In their model, Guo and Lee show how Asian
Americans play with hybridity in vernacular YouTube videos to create a space for marginalized Asian American voices. While their findings reveal that some videos work at challenging hegemonic discourse, most of them fall back on parodying the stereotypes they are talking about in an attempt at a comedic hook—this is particularly true for videographers who have become famous on YouTube, and aim to gather YouTube views and “hits” to keep their popularity ranking. This decision forces them to abandon any challenging discourse and resort to a hollow form of entertainment that identifies racial peculiarities as crude and funny or reinforces stereotypes using body humor/slapstick that focuses on racial peculiarities. This risks reifying racist discourses against Asians such as Model Minority, Robot Asians, and Foreigners Within (Guo and Lee). What the authors insist on, however, is the notion of agency. For Guo and Lee, agency becomes pivotal in the decision of whether or not to maintain the activity, or to silence one altogether, regardless of the YouTube requirements or counter discourse. This echoes Lu Ming Mao and Morris Young’s take on the multi-modality and multiplicity of discourse needed in Asian American rhetoric. The Filipino immigrant stereotypes that these videographers portray actually attempt to “play off the expectation and construction…as Other in order to perform their own transgressive acts of ‘translation’ (Mao and Young 11). Transgression and translation become tropes that open up spaces for discoursing about Asian American presence and the racialized experiences of an ethnically diverse group.
Against the larger hegemonic discourses in the United States, Asian American rhetoric exposes the asymmetrical power relations between dominant and minority groups.

Technology and race make a controversial pair. While Guo and Lee do point out the ways vernacular video provides a space for discourse about race, there is the danger of falling back on the conventions of the medium and bending the content to conform to the medium’s requirements to “succeed.” These actions contribute to reifying discourses about technology’s power to homogenize and commodify difference and erase issues of race, despite arguments for democratization and diversity on the web (Arroyo, Jenkins, Burgess and Greene). The sheer number of videos such as the ones I am studying practically form a genre for themselves, and such a genre threatens to fix stereotypes in the minds of viewers. Later videographers build on previous submissions (to YouTube) and repeat the tropes in their own creations. While one may argue that making videos such as these can be considered a form of estranging the everyday, it also very easily reinforces the ideas of inassimilability, primitiveness, and otherness of immigrants.

For some scholars, the notion of a unified diversity becomes tricky when imagined from the point of view of a specific nationality (Root, San Juan, Baldoz). Just like any larger, universalizing category, the grouping Asian American can potentially dilute the historical and racialized experiences of particular Asian
groups. In the case of Filipino Americans, one must consider colonialism as critical in shaping the experiences and engagements that have trickled down to present-day Filipino Americans and their immigrant elders. According to Maria Root, empowerment for Filipino Americans lies in the embrace of the colonial experience and the subsequent dispersion this caused. Accounting for oneself “in fractions,” according to Root, “is an act of colonizing identity” in that the desire to attain one identifiable self as Filipino American only serves to eliminate the fact of diaspora, cultural fragmentation and racial marginalization. Root believes that

We must reexamine the paradigms by which we seek our identity, if they do not fit our history, we will be forever lost trying to find our way home with a map that does not have our address. The dominant frameworks even within Asian America, do not fit Filipinos well. Contemporary, multi-ethnic and multi-racial paradigms are emerging that fit the Filipino American experience better. (88)

Root’s challenge identifies the need for a way to either open up the narratives, or fill in gaps in the articulation of Filipino American experience. Coming from a heritage that was shaped by 300 years of Spanish, and 50 years of American colonization – not to mention the settling of the islands by Bornean Datus and Chinese merchants well before the Spanish – Root does not believe in reducing identity to the identifiable markers that circulate today. Instead she seems to be calling for different ways of articulating that complex history or discovering ways
to make those ethnic markers speak to that complicated history. Transgression is only one way of discoursing about how a specific group appears within a dominant paradigm, with one’s presence defined as one of many struggling against a dominant discourse.

E. San Juan Jr.’s response is a call to recognize the fissures in Filipino American discourse itself. Articulated through tropes such as waves (because of immigration) and “structural-functionalist” analyses of ethnic traditions, values, and family structures, a Filipino American discourse should articulate the “ambivalence, opportunism, and schizoid loyalties” that pepper the experiences especially of second generation Filipino Americans (23). Current Filipino American writers, artists, and dabblers in compositional projects are removed from the direct struggles of the first Filipino immigrants traditionally identified as Manilamen\(^\text{14}\), laborers, or pensionados. Filipino Americans who make up the majority of the immigrant population in the US today are faced with subtler, but no less critical, challenges. According to San Juan, where the first groups of Filipino immigrants dealt with blatant physical violence and abuse, harsh and inhumane working conditions, and anti-miscegenation and racist government policies, immigrants in the 1960s through today, as well as second-generation Filipino Americans, deal with the ambiguity of their subject positions in American society, and in themselves. Speaking to the voices emanating from Filipino

\(^\text{14}\) Defectors from the Spanish Galleons who settled in villages outside the bayous of present-day Louisiana set up villages on the island of St. Malo.
American literature, San Juan claims that Filipinos and Filipino Americans have trouble coming to terms with the conflicted subject positions they find themselves in because of American society’s influence on them as a neocolonial power both economically and psychically. Once promised equal opportunities through their status as Filipino Nationals in the 1920s, Filipino Americans since then have been cast as mere reactionary subjects to the ebb and flow of American racial discourses and policies about them, “defining [their position] as class, gendered, ethnic agents…who are capable of being mobilized or pacified depending on varying conjunctures” (60).

Those conjunctures have lingered as nostalgic articulations of an “empty loss,” the longing for a culture that is actually a simulacrum of American-endorsed “Filipino” traditions and practices that serve to suppress narratives of struggle against the homogenizing ideologies of US immigrant policies. San Juan insists that artists and those in creative fields move away from narratives of invisibility and exilic-existentialist discourses, as well as postmodern strategies of deconstructed identities, which are easily co-opted and commodified by different media through ideas of “pluralism” and “multiculturalism” (66). For San Juan, the Filipino American experience might best be articulated through self-critique and defamiliarization. This move reveals reifying structures that reproduce binary discourses of belonging and marginalization, presence and absence, longing and assimilation, racism and orientalist ideologies, as well as the “temporary harmony”
among marginalized groups. Proposing a view that considers the intersections of American colonial history, immigrant struggles, and the current milieu, the defamiliarization and estranging of Filipino American-ness through creative projects allows for productive use of racial concepts and possibilities for the creation of other potential worlds and opportunities for Filipino American identity.

A FRAUGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH LANGUAGE

The recurring fissures in the speaking of Filipino-accented English draw attention to a particular moment in Philippine history. Unfolding in the homeland, the moment reverberates a century hence, and continues to mark Filipinos everywhere, as well as Filipinos of mixed heritage. The moment is the teaching of English, when over 500 teachers from different schools in the United States were sent over to the recently-“pacified” Philippine islands on President William McKinley’s civilizing mission of benevolent assimilation. Through the teaching of English, McKinley and the US government were convinced that the Filipino natives could be educated in the ways of civilization and eventually be fit enough to govern themselves. This idea strengthened the US government’s humanitarian justifications for occupying the island despite the instigation of a revolutionary government by its inhabitants. Underneath it all, of course, America had more
militaristic and strategic reasons for taking the Philippines; unwittingly, America took more from the Philippines that anyone would expect. The institution of English as the medium of instruction in schools and the medium of negotiation in the bureaucracy took over the use of most of the local languages in everyday life. And, if Heidegger claims that language is the house of Being, then English took our homes. “The being of anything that is resides in the word” (On the Way to Language, 63) and to reside in one’s language is to encounter the world through the presence of things, events, experiences that “well up” through the words/names we have for them. This phenomenon, says Heidegger, “points to the relation of the word and thing in this manner, that the word itself is the relation, by holding everything forth into being, and there upholding it” (73). The words of a language that is not one’s own, then, would throw one out of the familiar and into the uncanny.

It’s not that Filipinos have never encountered the English language before. Many *illustrados*, or rich mestizo Filipinos educated in Europe, could speak several languages and published essays in English. However, the upper class still primarily spoke in Spanish, and the peasant masses spoke Tagalog and other regional languages. Only a handful of literate Filipinos had access to more than their own vernacular language and a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish. Spanish was spoken only by the elite, which included Spanish government officials, their families, and the Catholic clergy. The only materials that Spanish
authorities allowed *indios* (derogatory term describing Filipinos) to read were Catholic texts.\(^{15}\) Some of these were translated into Tagalog and the indigenous alphabet; however the way most Filipinos encountered Spanish was through religious texts like the Bible. In a sense, though infused in modern Filipino language after three centuries of colonization, Spanish was seen as the language of the oppressor.

English, on the other hand, might be seen as the language of the liberator. One reason why the American colonization of the Philippines survives as a nostalgic moment in Philippine history is because of President William McKinley’s strategy of benevolent assimilation and the teaching of English. President William McKinley declared it the United States’ “white man’s burden” and its “manifest destiny” to “educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died” (McKinley qtd. in Schirmer and Shalom 22-23). The Filipinos were imagined as children who needed guidance and/or discipline from the US government after its “liberation” from Spain.\(^{16}\) The general narrative that

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\(^{15}\) Spain established the first public schools in the 1560s. Friars taught Christian doctrine primarily to convert the natives to Christianity, using Spanish as the medium of instruction. Although public schools for boys and girls were available, and the first Catholic universities were established, these opportunities were affordable only to the insulares (the Spaniards born in the islands) and a few rich Filipinos later called the ilustrados. (The ilustrados became that generation of enlightened individuals who traveled to Europe for higher learning, and developed the early revolutionary sentiments.) Educating four million indios or savages to convert them to Catholicism did not involve educating them so that they may one day govern themselves.

\(^{16}\) Filipinos were already in a revolution with Spain when the US intervened. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the revolution was interrupted by secret dealings between Spain and America. In the end, a mock war was staged by the US and Spain with the Filipinos believing that the US was their ally in the war. Secretly, Spain and the US signed the Treaty of Paris, which stipulated Spain’s cessation of all its territories to the US, including the
survives is that the United States defeated the Spanish in all their territories after
the bombing of the USS Maine, and liberated all their colonies. However, the
United States and Spain struck a deal via the Treaty of Paris. The Spanish-
American war, then, is seen as a farcical war that allowed both Western nations
to save face at the expense of the Filipinos, who were on the verge of
revolutionary victory (San Juan, Baldoz, Kramer). This incident angered Filipinos,
and they launched a nationwide guerilla war against the American military troops
who marched into the islands. The year was 1899, and the Philippines became
an official territory of the United States.

The United States established its administrative commission in the islands
in 1901 under the rule of William Howard Taft, the first civil governor of the
Philippines. America was cognizant of the tenacity and strength of the Filipinos
(Baldoz, Espiritu). After several years of a violent and bloody war, the US
government knew that force was not the way to subdue their newly acquired
subjects (Espiritu, Constantino). The US Commission in the Philippines was
tasked with the “‘earnest and paramount aim of the colonizer [to] win the
confidence, respect and affection’ of the colonized” (Rafael 21). Taking on the
role of a father guiding his children to growth, the United States justified its
intervention in the Philippine-Spanish war as a mission to save the Philippines.

Philippines. The US bought the Philippines from Spain for $20million. The event came to be known as the
Spanish-American War, erasing and discrediting the struggle of hundreds of thousands of Filipino
revolutionaries.
from Spain, to keep indigenous groups from warring with and killing each other, and to implement a government that would be turned over to the Filipinos when they were able to govern themselves.17

The US government sent the navy and military to secure the islands, control the *insurrectos* (insurgents), and pacify the populace. The Filipinos fought a protracted and bitter war against the Americans, many dying through military torture, and in inhumane conditions in concentration camps. The guerilla movement continued to rage well into the first decade of the new century but superior war technology and military tactics, alongside the co-optation of the *meztiso* elite (or what Fanon referred to as the “nationalist bourgeoisie”), overtook the revolutionary movement (Constantino, San Juan, Baldoz). None of these events circulate as major narratives in either American or Filipino discourse. Instead it is mentioned as a guerilla movement and an insurrection among scholars specializing in Philippine studies (Baldoz, Kramer). Before Vietnam, there was the Philippines, but this incident in history is seldom discussed this way (Francisco; Schirmer & Shalom). What does circulate is the heroic entry of white teachers onto lands of “Asian niggers” to liberate them from their ignorance and savageness.

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17 In the meantime, atrocities continued in the countryside, as General Jacob H. Smith razed and massacred civilian towns and its inhabitants to weed out Filipino “insurgents.” As with all colonial agendas, what was actually paramount was the elimination of immediate and pressing threats to colonial authority. This was an important step if the US were to introduce an efficient transportation system, a functioning municipal/government structure, implement policies and infrastructure for public health, and most importantly, establish a public educational school system.
Education was one of the most potent and successful tools for benevolent assimilation. America activated education and introduced the English language to civilize the Filipino “savage.” America took the Filipinos’ home to transform/create it according to their standards of civilization and return it to the Filipinos as a totally different place. It would become a Philippines in America’s image (Karnow) not physically, but politically, ideologically, and culturally. In a cartoon from *Judge Magazine* published in 1899, artist Grant Hamilton depicts President McKinley as he washes a savage-looking black baby in a pool of water labeled “civilization.” The idea of a bath, an easily taken for granted routine in daily life, becomes a loaded metaphor for US colonialism. “Washing off” the savagery was achieved through the introduction of the civilized language of English and education in the American-run public school system.
In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said says “the rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when deployed in an imperial setting” (xvii), especially in the case of imperial powers such as the United States. The rhetorical power of education and the acquisition of the language of power—in this case, English—was enough to inspire in Filipinos a new way of regarding the white man on brown shores. Instead of seeing him as the enemy, the presence of white teachers inspired hope. In her dissertation, *Colonial Articulations: English Instruction and the ‘Benevolence’ of U.S. Overseas Expansion in the Philippines, 1989-1916*, Funie Hsu points out that the “tender violence” (20) of US colonialism employed benevolence through the images and sentimentality of a familial
relationship, while the real economic, political, and militaristic aims of imperial expansion continued. The figure of a *padre de familia* became a symbol for President McKinley and America, the caring disciplinarian father figure rearing an archipelago of language-less, unruly, and uncivilized people who were treated as children. The familial relationships would continue with the *maestra* or teachers who would endow the savage Filipinos with language and knowledge.

Americans improved the existing public school system by setting up free public schools in provincial areas manned by teachers of various primary education subjects, and training aspiring Filipino teachers as well. In 1901, President McKinley sent 112 teachers from various institutions in America on the USAT Thomas; they became known as the *Thomasites.* Based on President McKinley’s Letter of Instruction and Philippine Public Law Act 74 (Hsu, Bernabe, Bernardo), an English-only policy was instituted in the public school system, where *only* English would be used to teach and was to be spoken by all students attending school.

Frank L. Crone came to the Philippines as a Thomasite to teach at the beginning of the 20th century. He worked his way up from an instructor at the

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18 The first group of Thomasites taught basic English, grammar, and reading so that students could access higher concepts in other subjects such as agriculture, geography, general trade courses, science, and math. Although President McKinley advocated for the use of vernacular languages for instruction, practically speaking, the Thomasites had difficulty learning the languages of the islands (which today number 170). Learning the local languages while teaching in English would not allow them to teach effectively; moreover, there were no local materials with which to teach in the vernacular in the first place. Ideologically, the use of English as the medium of instruction was thought of as a unifying language for the locals, and “would provide the Filipinos access to civilization … the life of reason and prudence” (Martin qtd. in Bernabe 18).
local provincial schools to become the Director of Education in 1914. In his time as Director, the public school system became the tool that ensured the success of benevolent assimilation. Above and beyond the skills and technical training instituted into the curriculum across the country (Education, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Director of Education [1914]*) , language was what pulled the project of colonialism and benevolent assimilation together. Crone made it clear that English as a primary language was needed to

1. give the people a common language to serve as a medium of the highest culture and as a factor in national unity and
2. to bring the Filipino youth into contact with democratic ideals embodied in personalities, for no agency is so potent in the establishment of a democratic social order as personal relationship with those who, in thought and action, reflect democratic principles (Education 27).

Crone considered the English language the mode through which Filipinos would nurture and transmit an elite culture. In naming a foreign language and not one, or several, of the major vernacular languages spoken on the islands as the medium of instruction, Crone operationalized the normalizing and neutralizing power of colonialism. Imposing the use of one language subtly eroded the indigenous histories embedded in the languages shared by specific groups of people in the various regions of the archipelago. The Philippines was a
predominantly oral culture. The “materials” that the Thomasites were looking for to teach with may not have existed in their conventional notions of textbooks or syllabi. Rather they may have existed in the conversations, stories, songs, and everyday artifacts of the various cultural groups that populated the islands. Material records did exist in the forms of drawing, weaving, metal crafts, pottery, and beading, among many others. However, in the project of colonization, there was no time to document or translate indigenous material for use. Despite the existence of texts in Baybayin, the islands’ ancient script, in vernacular translations of Spanish prayer books and bibles, the Thomasites abandoned any option of using these materials (Hsu), and instead introduced English texts and pedagogies that were yet another linguistic imposition on the Filipinos.

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19 Baybayin, the ancient Filipino script, was already in use prior to Spanish colonization, and was preserved by the Dominican friars through vernacular translations of Catholic prayer books and bibles as early as 1536. The first book written and published by friars in the Philippines, *Doctrina Christiana*, placed Baybayin and Spanish versions of the text side by side for use in its mission to Catholicize the indios. However, its use slowly diminished as the Spaniards introduced more foreign and complex taxation documents and policies in Spanish that were not easily translatable to Baybayin. The Spanish language was used as a means to mark class and racial boundaries, and to eventually exclude the indio (Filipino) from participating in society (Lao; Rodriguez; Woods).
The American teachers, military officials, and pro-expansion supporters of the war believed that through various levels of instruction, and through subjects taught to them in school (including technical and vocational techniques, agricultural skills, geography and arithmetic), the Filipinos would transition from *indio* to enlightened and civilized Westerner. These subjects were thought to endow Filipinos with the ability and knowledge to govern. Democratic principles and ideologies were transmitted through the structures of academic curricula, emphasizing a belief in a national government, the equal treatment of all citizens, and the free exchange of ideas and goods said to benefit the country. Unfortunately these ideals, though noble and appropriate for what historian
Renato Constantino called “stable national governments” such as those in the first world, proved detrimental to the Filipino situation. Democracy was an idea that was meant to serve American interests in the mainland, but not an ideal that would serve Filipinos as a sovereign state. According to Constantino, teaching the English language and learning via an American curriculum was the beginning of the mis-education of the Filipino.

The new Filipino generation learned of the lives of American heroes, sang American songs, and dreamt of snow and Santa Claus. The nationalist resistance leaders exemplified by [Macario] Sakay were regarded as brigands and outlaws. … Spain was the villain, America was the savior… Truly, a genuinely Filipino education could not have been devised within the new framework, for to draw from the well-springs of the Filipino ethos would only have led to a distinct Philippine identity with interests at variance with that of the ruling power. Thus, the Filipino past which had already been quite obliterated by three centuries of Spanish tyranny did not enjoy a revival under American colonialism. On the contrary, the history of our ancestors was taken up as if they were strange and foreign people who settled in these shores, with whom we had the most tenuous of ties. We read about them as if we were tourists in a foreign land. (433)
Without disregarding the benefits of an efficiently-run public school system, the bi-/multi-lingual skills learned, the ideals of democracy transmitted through the Thomasites’ syllabi, and an introduction to the opportunities available to anyone willing to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, we should consider the contradictory results that emerged from the imposition of an American view of democracy—especially the ways in which Filipinos were likewise subjugated by the very principles that were used to justify American occupation of the islands. According to Constantino, the English language and American curriculum were meant to “disorient” the colonial “from their nationalist goals,” and become a “carbon copy” of the conqueror. Revolutionary history and its leaders were forgotten, seen as outlaws; atrocities by the colonizer were buried by the rhetoric presented in schools of the country as an idyllic, rural landscape or a bustling and progressive metropolis; Western achievements were extolled as benchmarks for Filipinos to aspire to as they worked towards the goal of a civilized state.

Filipinos were taught to be good colonials, to learn as colonials and to function as subjects of the colonial master (Constantino). Learning about the Western world with Western tools also meant forgetting a complex history and heritage that was shaping the islands and its people long before the Spaniards arrived. Education became a matter of educating the Filipino to conform to an image that the US wanted for the Philippines: a race of people transforming right before the colonial master’s eyes. In his book *White Love and Other Events in*
Philippine History, Vicente Rafael suggests that an ambivalent notion of whiteness permeates the telling of Philippine history. The desire for whiteness was an invisible force behind the shaping of Filipino history; though it may not be mentioned in official accounts, it lives quietly behind the scenes of the grand “white man’s burden” narrative, in the anecdotal and invisible interstices of daily life in the colonial period. The decision to seize the Philippines from Spain and administer it through a civilizing mission would present a logical reason for the Americans to be on Filipino soil, to mine it for its resources, and erase the perceived difference of brown bodies against white ones. The perception of difference inspires a desire to overcome it and control its strangeness. To overcome difference is to tame it and fit it according to a set of rules or standards that give it over to control and, subsequently, subjugation.

The way Filipinos learned about the world, and their place in it, was through the language of the colonizer. According to Bernardo, “[i]t was as if the colonizer was lending its language to ‘civilize’ the subjects of the colony, so that they might participate in the society that was determined by the colonizer, in ways determined by the colonizer” (18). Language thus established the boundaries for how Filipinos would operate as individuals and as a collective group of people -- previously as indios to the Spaniards, and then as America’s “little brown brothers” -- rightful heirs to a democratic nation when they were deemed ready by the United States to “take over” governance of their own land.
The sense of subordination to white power and knowledge not only shaped how Filipinos’s sense of nation became contingent on America’s decisions about the islands; it also colored Filipino perceptions of their identity as being subordinate to the West, and aspirational towards whiteness. This aspiration was stoked by the rhetoric of finding greener pastures and narratives that framed the United States as the Land of Opportunity: that the United States welcomed everybody and allowed all those who landed on American shores equal access to work and uplift their status. Armed with the English language, an education, and with dreams of alleviating oneself and family from poverty, Filipinos would be herded into the hulls of boats that would take them to America to work on plantations and canneries on the west coast (Takaki). The illusion of a “special relationship” that Filipinos had with America “was one that promised much but failed to deliver” (Guyotte 2).

Filipino (in)Flux

Filipinos learned the English language well enough to travel across the Pacific to find work and live as farm laborers on the West Coast and as laborers at the canning factories in Alaska in the beginning of the 20th century. Filipinos’
status as US Nationals afforded them some benefits as colonial subjects, allowing them arguably more mobility than Japanese and Chinese immigrants (Takaki). (I discuss this episode of Filipino American history—the story of the manongs—in more detail in Chapter Four.) In a sense, the opportunities to aspire to a “civilized” lifestyle and eventually assimilate into American society were presented to Filipinos. A small group of pensionados were admitted to US universities annually to become ambassadors of the US to the Philippines. More Filipinos migrated as highly skilled workers in the health sector after World War II, which peaked in the late 1960s when the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act lifted restrictions on immigrants from Asia and other non-European nations, allowing them to apply for citizenship and petition families left behind in the Philippines to be reunited in the United States. In his book, Strangers from a Different Shore, Ronald Takaki points out that where pre-World War II Chinese, Japanese and Korean immigrants created enclaves for themselves where they socialized and worked, Filipinos (along with “Asian Indians”) joined US society as laborers, clerks, nurses, and mechanics, and would eventually move into predominantly white neighborhoods. Their command of English allowed them to move through American society fairly easily, and though they were dispersed even within the US, Filipinos in America established ties among themselves.

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20 When the US declared the Philippine Islands a colony, its inhabitants were given a US Nationals status, which allowed them to study, work and live in the US, but barred them from applying for citizenship.
through Filipino organizations and Filipino cultural activities (Espiritu, “The Intersection of Race”).

In social science disciplines, assimilation was traditionally seen as an evolutionary process of acclimating to a host country’s dominant culture, where initial groups of immigrants, exiles, or refugees would struggle to fit in but would eventually find ways to merge with the host culture. However, in their book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant claim that theories of assimilation were always underpinned by assuming “a default to whiteness” (46). Assimilation was one of two currents that underpinned the ethnicity paradigm, a body of thought that originated in the Chicago School of Sociology led by Robert E. Park. Assimilation was the positive end stage of the “race relation cycle” (Omi and Winant).21 The ethnicity paradigm aligned itself with a European model of racial hierarchy that acknowledged racial conflicts as but a stage in the assimilation cycle, and posited that these differences would eventually dissolve, thus “downplaying the political-economic dimensions, and indeed the corporeal markers that occupy such crucial positions in the social construction of race” (27). This deterministic view of race and its ideas of integration promoted a colorblind ideology towards the diverse struggles of

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21 The theory believed that succeeding generations would have an easier time integrating into society, having absorbed the nuances of their adoptive country. This idea was a departure from theories of eugenics and biologism that were popular at that time, and was considered innovative for its pragmatist approach, especially its (then) unprecedented consideration of the experiences of black Americans and “to a lesser degree, that of Asians.” (Omi and Winant, 26)
different people of color. According to Omi and Winant, later models that
developed out of and challenged the race relation cycle incrementally
acknowledged difference, conflict, uneven and multilayered racial relations, and
the interaction of cultural pluralism; however, the assumptions underpinning
these theories continued to obfuscate the dynamism and volatility of racial and
cultural negotiations for belonging, especially among non-white races
represented through the “immigrant analogy.” Immigrant ethnic groups (of
which Black Americans were constructed) do not simply settle; the way they live
their everyday lives resisted categorizations that attempted to diminish specific
group needs and ethnic recognition, and to an extent resisted (and continues to
resist) an unquestioned default to whiteness. “Resistance” should not be limited
to ideas of outright protest or violent demonstrations; resistance also shows up
as mundane and unconscious actions which when examined actually reveal the
inassimilable aspects of race and any attendant cultural artifacts that ascribe
identity.

In her book, *Filipino American Lives*, Yen Le Espiritu gathered first-person
accounts from second generation Filipino immigrants that showed assimilation as
“flux” rather than “continuity,” exposing multilinear trajectories over a unilinear
view of identity formation. The writers present differing narratives about second-

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22 The “immigrant analogy” was a common trope in these later theories, used to explain assimilation and eventual integration when different ethnic groups settled into their “social roles” defined by the economic, social, and political structures in US society. (Omi and Winant, 42)
generation immigrant life and how assimilation takes different forms: from being totally distanced from language to getting physically beaten for standing up for it; from discrimination among white Americans to discrimination within the Filipino communities; from desiring to be either “wholly” black or white to specifically identifying oneself as “half-and-half” (Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives*). The life stories of Espiritu’s interviewees underscore Omi and Winant’s ideas of resistance to assimilation, and show the micro situations that disclose the impossibility of an unproblematic merging of cultures and the necessity of recognizing those fissures. Tensions reveal themselves in the desire to fit into a racial category (black or white) that speaks to the transparency of the Filipino presence; as if being one or the other will allow them to be seen and heard as they are, and not as another unremarkable member of a homogenized group (Asian American). Meanwhile, wanting to be in the middle reinforces the need to survive in environments that are hostile to difference. According to Jacques Derrida,

…certain people must yield to the homo-hegemony of dominant languages. They must learn the language of the masters, of capital and machines; they must lose their idiom in order to survive or live better. A tragic economy, an impossible counsel. I do not know whether salvation for the other presupposes the salvation of the idiom. (*Monolingualism*, 30)
Did immigrant Filipinos yield their idiom to the detriment of the culture and their race? “Yielding” in Derrida’s passage suggests a voluntary act of subjugation, as if first generation Filipinos did not have a choice, and were faced with the necessity to dial down traces of the Filipinoness in their English to “survive.” To find belonging in a community, they erased their “idiom” in the family setting. And yet the language finds its way out in the flux of daily struggles to live as the “masters” do. Despite the decree to “blend into” the cultural background, the very struggles that shape everyday life are the very forces that allow traces of Filipinoness to surface.

The idea of flux as presented by Espiritu echoes the concept of the “chronotope” discussed by James Clifford in his book, *Routes*. Clifford describes the chronotope as “a setting or scene organizing time and space in representable whole form, [resembling] as much a site of travel encounters as of residence” (101). Drawing inspiration from sites like hotel lobbies, depots, ships, or buses, which are respectively points on a journey, and vehicles that make journeys possible, Clifford uses the chronotope to think about culture and language as sites of travel. The surge of activity at a specific place and time erupts as travelers converge and congregate, exchange information, merge previous knowledges and subsequently create new ones. Social activity, space and time become co-constitutive of each other, and of “a culture” that lives in

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23 The term was coined by M. Bakhtin to refer to a time-space in literary criticism that evokes meanings in texts. James Clifford uses the term as a lens in diaspora and migrant studies in anthropology.
empirical, objective forms of that culture, which include language and “spoken speech” (Peereen).

Bumping up against the veneer of assimilation and the oppressive everydayness of trying to belong, the linguistic exchanges that arise in Filipino American video projects assume chronotopic forms of resistance, especially the crisscrossing of Filipino English, Filipino, and American English in a moment of interaction. In her article, “Through the Lens of the Chronotope,” Esther Peereen identifies this space-time unit with the diaspora. Building on Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope as fulfilling the primary function of fusing “particular types of space and time into a world where only certain subjects, narratives, practices,” collide, Peereen adds “identities and memories” to extend it into an Althusserian ideological model. She says:

the chronotope may be said to function as an ideology of time-space that interpellates individuals as subjects in(to) collective space and in(to) collective time through specific spatial and temporal norms. In relation to diaspora, this interpellation is doubled; diasporic subjects are interpellated by more than one chronotope simultaneously. Subjected – in the sense Judith Butler uses this term in *The Psychic Life of Power* – by home chronotope, host chronotope, and the thirdspace chronotope of the journey
between these two, it is this double or triple interpellation that produces the hybrid communal identity we call diasporic. (71)

This “double interpellation” into a “thirdspace chronotope” mirrors Clifford’s ideas of travel-as-chronotope. I would identify these as moments of flux within assimilation, and the homelessness in travelling between languages by second generation Filipino Americans. I suggest that they have embraced their interpellations as racialized subjects, Americans, Filipino Americans, FOBs, and others, and these act as familiar points in the travel between the languages and accents they step into in their videos.

I am interested in the chronotope’s movement between assuming the personas of their elders and/or shifting between the little they know of the Filipino language, their American English and the accents they lay over their version of English. I would go so far as to suggest that it is a moving third space, which emerges in the negotiations of everyday life, the translation of feelings, situations, memory, history, and relationships that gather in the space-time unit. As Peereen points out, humans do not stand over and above these situations, but are in it and actually of it; they are co-constitutive of the chronotope (69). Caught in these intersections, the videographer is thrown into a homeless state and faced with the uncanny; she attempts to organize the situation and the information to make it meaningful. The videos become another chronotope, then, and one that emerges out of responses to the daily living conditions and encounters with the
strange familiarity of the Filipino language. More than just representations, says Peereen, these visual projects are “constructed within representation, not outside or before it…it expresses itself as a particular chronotope, characterized by conflict, hybridity and doubleness” (70). Multiple and collective subjectivities combine to create the conditions for the possibility of movement and the movement itself—the shifting, the displacement, and the moments of flux in translating language and life situations make these videos a window into the lives of second generation Filipino Americans as they navigate the middle of a linguistic ocean, caught between islands of languages that they can use but are not theirs.

“They speak English, but Filipinos sound bakya”

Reading these videos was a tricky task. It was easy to forget that the idea under investigation here was the experience of being Filipino American as seen through the creations of second generation immigrants, and not the immigrants themselves. Literature and research on the immigrant experience is vibrant and robust, and the issues explored in my research are tangential to studies on immigrant life. It was easy to ascribe readings of first generation immigrant experience onto the projects of second generation immigrants and make
statements that would reflect the experiences of diasporic Filipinos and the meanings first-generationers make of those experiences. Instead, what the readings of these videos wish to accomplish is an interpretation and analysis of how second generationers explore their subjectivities and how they move between and among different positions, especially with the use of language.

There are videographers who demonstrate the Filipino-accented English through reenactments, such as Take220 (“Sh*t Filipino Moms Say”), TitaClarita (“Tita Clarita in the Car”), and Sexcyanip13 (“Shit Filipino moms say!”); and those who talk about it through a vlog, like JRdaFilipino (“Reasons Why I Love Being a Filipino American”), GJAce (“You know you’re Asian/Filipino If”) and Dabamy (“Don’t know if you’re Filipino?”). The reenactment videos demonstrate situations that happen in the home and mimic Filipino elders communicating with the younger generation to which the videographers belong. The scenes that highlight encounters with language unfold throughout the video, with the videographers and their friends/cousins playing the part of their elders dressed up as their parents speaking in what has become a trademark accent. However, what is most noticeable is the way Filipino curse words and interjections tumble out of the characters’ mouths during reenactments of highly emotional scenes: when a mom receives the kid’s report card or whenever she asks her child to help with chores around the house, when a mom reacts to a suspenseful movie, when yet another mom releases her tension as she teaches her son to drive. The vlogs
meanwhile state the characteristics that identify Filipinos: some of the most mentioned are how Filipinos interchange their p’s and b’s, and their f’s and v’s; they abbreviate and substitute words in weird ways (they say “aircon” instead of ac; they say “close” the lights instead of “turn off”); they have a “funny accent” and pronounce words that could mean other words (as pointed out by the example at the beginning of this chapter). The vloggers appear as themselves, speaking to their audience in a friendly, familiar tone. They do not take on the Filipino accent when speaking to the audience, except to demonstrate their anecdotes about languages.

One might consider these videos a genre because of where they are recorded, and the content/topics that are discussed. These videos are shot in the home or in spaces associated with home (in the case of the TitaClarita video, the scenes take place in the car), places where the real life situations on which the videos are based were most likely to originate. The characters in the reenactments are usually in situations that involve Filipino elders establishing their positions of authority and the younger Filipino Americans “enduring” the encounter. The actors rarely speak directly to the camera in these reenactments, which are presented as a montage of scenes unfolding and pulled together not by any clear narrative, but by the parodic presentation of the character/s, and the repetitiveness of the scene or background, which is the home. Vloggers speak into the camera, usually in the privacy of their own rooms, addressing an
audience that they seem to think has an idea of the topic. The characteristics they mention have become mainstays in similar vlogs, which rattle off these items as if from a list. In these vlogs, the vloggers appear as themselves and simply mimic their elders when they begin to demonstrate the anecdotes and linguistic encounters with their elders. Unlike the reenactment videos, vloggers do not change the way they look (they don’t wear wigs or try to wear clothes similar to their parents’).

The vlogs come across as matter of fact. They remind me of a news program where the information is presented as objective and unproblematic. The vloggers present Filipinoness through language as is, existing in that moment as material, sonic proof of ethnic and racial authenticity. “You know you’re Filipino when you mix the p’s with the b’s and the f’s with the v’s,” according to videographer GJAce. This certainty about the trait solidifies itself into a property that defines Filipinoness through language. When one speaks of this “trait,” one belies his/her position as an apparently “correct” speaker of English, someone who has the authority to tell how that particular language should sound or be spoken. Nitpicking on accents reveals a sense of monolingual authority and not a way to link difference and hybridity, or even the side of themselves that they have identified as “Other.” This other side of them dwells alongside their dominant linguistic self as a subaltern and ghostly presence. In Ambient Rhetoric, Thomas Rickert relates Heidegger’s oft-repeated phrase, “language is the house of being”
to the formation of an identity, using the metaphor of a haunted house: a thing that is simultaneously familiar and uncanny, one that constitutes and is constituted by the relationships and interactions that emerge in that space. Rickert claims, “A sense of identity, of being at home, in the self or in the house, is rendered precarious by the presence of the uncanny, of the other that we cannot fully fathom or control” (103). Attempting to describe a language, or how a language is used by using categories and properties to identify what is Other draws the line between oneself and “them” and seems to permanently separate, in the speaker’s mind, the parts of him/herself that can be articulated as acceptable in society while suppressing the others except when the times call for it, i.e. when among family, or in the security of one’s home.

Some videographers admit to not knowing the language because their parents did not teach them the language, hence all they have to go on are the bits and pieces of Tagalog they pick up at home (JREKML, JRDaFilipino, Crazyron, etc). Their monolingualism then alienates them from any opportunity to access their parents’ homes—or imagined homes—as both a physical place and a place of nostalgia, and Filipinoness is reduced to easily digestible bits of cliché that can be made into a list. The characteristics are easy to transmit and talk about, easy to demonstrate, and hence have a stickiness factor. They are easy to memorize and replicate, providing us with a template so that it can be laid over everyday experience and allow easy identification and reproduction. Even their
reenactment is episodic in that they return to the moment through a video that reifies the compartmentalized nature of the event—as if, as Espiritu says, being Filipino is an event.

Possessing the language of authority allows these Filipino American videographers to mark Filipinoness as different and other, distancing it from the society and culture to which they belong. Embracing their American-ness through their command of English sets up a situation for them as individuals who can move through the whiteness of society and negotiate their position despite their status as a racialized group. As second generation immigrants, these videographers do not possess memories of the Philippines, nor the pain of migration or exile. There was no struggle to learn the dominant language, nor struggle to be understood while speaking it with an American accent. The absence of this challenge sets them apart from their parents in that assimilation was never an issue for them, and their command of their language—indeed what they might consider their mother tongue—excludes them from the worlds their elders/parents came from. They experience an alienation from the language and culture of the Philippines.

Filipino immigrants who carry the accented English from the homeland, and grasp at the idiomatic use of words in American English, are marked as
*bakya* by Filipino Americans who were born and grew up in the United States. Speaking English in a “weird” way is generally frowned on, even in the Philippines. To be *bakya*, especially when speaking English, marks one as unsophisticated. Associating the characteristics and perceptions of the *bakya* with language, then, means one was unmindful of the uncultivated use of English. In *White Love*, Vicente Rafael characterized it as an unselfconscious dislocation of English by those with superficial knowledge and command of the language. More than just mispronouncing words and having a heavy Filipino accent, being *bakya* meant being “non ironic” about the disjointed use of English, thus becoming an embarrassment to those “good” English speakers—mostly identified as the sophisticated urban elites (Rafael). Filipinos who are *bakya* bend English as the language of authority and mark their position as the “failed version of the urban elite” (Rafael 173). In their unironic use of the language I sense a power inherent in the twisting of the English language because it allowed speakers to explore other ways of expression, such as the example of JRdaFilipino at the beginning of this section. The English is funny and absurd, but it allows for the estranging of things taken for granted, especially in the way JRdaFilipino makes certain words point to something else, mostly by way of their

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24 “Bakya” is the Filipino term for wooden clogs, which were usually worn by folks in rural provinces, far from highly urbanized and cosmopolitan cities like Manila. The *bakya* was made of wood, and was measured to fit the wearer’s feet. Felt cloth and beading were then used to adorn the *bakya*, sometimes the more ostentatious the better. The heels were sometimes gaudily carved with rural scenery, featuring clichéd coconut trees leaning over grass huts. When worn, the *bakya* would make loud, obnoxious clacking sounds on the floor or on the ground when one walked.
accent ("Son of a beech—beach towel!"). Far from being a Pidgin or Creole invention, it is still an “experiment in mixing and mingling discourse conventions in order to bring about optimum understanding, partaking of extant patterns but altering them to fit new objectives. It can, I think, be productively applied to transitional discourses, logics, and literacies today” (Swearingen qtd. in Internet Invention, Ulmer 159).

What does it mean then when the second generation immigrants—the videographers—re-present that bakya-ness (kabakyaan in Filipino) in their videos? The irony of being unself-conscious is lost as the videographers consciously reenact the linguistic situations and anecdotes that occur in their everyday lives. Their reenactments seem like a mockery of their elders’ lack of sophistication, marking them as other. In their affectations of bakya English, the videographers imply a definition of acceptable and unacceptable ways of speaking and communicating. The bakya-ness is considered an endearment as far as families go, and as long as encounters with it are kept within the immediate vicinity of home. However, once it travels beyond the boundaries of home, i.e., people outside of the immediate family encounter the disjointed English in conversation (example of videographers telling of parents and friends talking), a distance suddenly emerges in the telling and representation of the encounter. The whole project actually travels far from the confines of “home” and onto unknown streams on the internet as viewership numbers accumulate on video
counters and commenters testify to the “authenticity” of the things said in the videos.

The videos of Take220, TitaClarita, and Sexcyanip13 are reenactments that focus on the mother. She is portrayed as the “voice of authority” shown speaking with a heavy accent, tripping on the pronunciation of certain words such as “pesbuk” (Facebook) and “it’s beri trapik here” (It’s very traffic here). Their scenes portray them as cranky, strict, or under stress. It is during these situations that the characters unexpectedly begin to swear angrily in Filipino (See Tita Clarita in the Car; Sexcyanip13; Take 220). One can infer that the addressee in these reenactments are always the children, especially when the scenes show them requesting an action or favor (“Anak\(^{25}\), can you hand me the remote?”), or when they are trying to stay in control of a situation, as in a scene in Sexcyanip13 where a series of shots edited in quick succession show the mother on the phone, in which she repeatedly asks, “Where are you?”

The videographers’ portrayals of (their) mothers as strict and cranky parents, demanding answers to rhetorical questions like “A minus? Why not A?” and their angry warning “Hoy!” when their requests are not fulfilled, become linguistic caricatures that seem to show Filipinoness as unsophisticated.

“Stepping into” the personas of their elders is a convenient way for them to present a crudeness that permeates the situations, but is simultaneously a

\(^{25}\) “Anak” is the Tagalog word for “child.”
convenient way for them to exit—because they can. For them to carry on this kind of speech outside of their immediate family environment puts them in an unhomely situation where they can become the targets of ridicule themselves. The suggestion of crudeness set against the environment of native English speakers seems to reify the view of the Filipino, and the Filipino parts of themselves, as primitive.

In *Homebound*, Yen Le Espiritu studied 2nd generation Filipino Americans and their experiences with language. According to Espiritu, many of her interviewees experienced being shunned or ridiculed because of their heavily-accented English. And a lot of the ridiculing came from fellow Filipino Americans, especially those born in the US; those who had just immigrated were called FOBs or “fresh off the boat.” This developed feelings of shame and embarrassment and a desire to reinvent themselves according to the dominant (white) culture where they lived and grew up (Espiritu). Many times, according to the interviewees, they turned their backs on anything that had to do with Filipino culture in order to “fit in” and be accepted. Espiritu’s research revealed that many Filipino immigrant households actually encouraged monolingualism among their children, precisely to avoid the embarrassment of speaking with heavily-accented English. A similar study of Filipino American college students in Vallejo, California, by Diane L. Wolf found that children of Filipino immigrants were not taught any Filipino language on purpose, and were encouraged to speak and learn English
“well” in order to avoid the embarrassment of speaking “broken English.” Immigrant parents knew enough of the language to build a monolingual household thanks to the widespread use of English in the Philippines (which, according to Renato Constantino, prepared Filipinos for America even before coming to US shores). Wolf’s analysis suggests that their parents’ command of the language maintains a sense of psychological and emotional control over the Filipino American youth. According to Wolf, compared to parents of other Asian immigrants whose control over their children and their children’s activities diminish as their children assimilate into the language and culture faster than their parents, Filipino American immigrants and their children experience conflict and contradiction in espousing the Western ideals of individuality and independence, while living up to expectations of their elders to maintain cultural practices and “values” even at the cost of a confusing double standard regarding levels of control and freedom. All this, says Wolf, occurs in the negotiations that transpire as immigrants and their children move between and among the languages (English and their own Filipino language) that are common to both and allow them to discourse.

That the mother is one of the most parodied characters in these reenactment videos is perhaps not accidental. Shown as the authority at home, and an anchor in the everyday lives of these videographers, she is also the bearer of the language that the second generation can only passively experience
on a daily basis. That language is tied to the feminine body in this instance echoes Erika Merced’s idea that women’s bodies “carry the nation; they have the responsibility to extend the love of the fatherland” (35). Extending that love is demonstrated in the way the mother moves through her domestic routines (and she is portrayed as only doing domestic chores) but also inviting her children to assist her. They do, albeit grudgingly and in a slightly deferential manner (*Tita Clarita in the Car*). There is a space that exists between the Filipino mother and the Filipino American offspring, constituted by either avoidance (*Sh*t Filipino Moms Say*) or standing one’s ground in an argument (*Tita Clarita in the Car*). The decision to represent the mother-child relationship in these ways perhaps cues viewers in to the way Filipino Americans handle their parents’ Filipinoness at the moment it erupts: they either stay silent or they engage it. Avoiding confrontation gives the mother character’s language the opportunity to fill the space hollowed by the child’s silence. Engaging in the situation sees two “versions” of English collide, with irruptions of Tagalog words expressing exasperation, fear, or anxiety at the actions/reactions of her son.

In contrast, *Sexcyanip13’s* video shows the mother moving around the home and speaking directly to the camera, as if she were speaking to her daughter; of course, Sexcyanip13 is the daughter playing her mother speaking to her. In the entire video, there is no one else except the mother, and she carries on a conversation seemingly with herself. There is physically no one with her in
the scene to respond to her or even avoid her. Unlike the first two videos, the other actors function as emotional buffers, options for viewers on how to manage the mothers’ angry reactions. In Sexcyanip13’s video, there is only the mother and us, the viewers. Without another actor in the scene, there is no way to avoid the mother character’s reactions or requests, and frustratingly enough, there is no way to respond either. Instead, we are forced to listen to her questions and rants, and in some instances laugh at the absurdity of her reactions. We are a captive audience this time, and we are pulled into the mundane details that make up her everyday life and her relationship with her daughter. One might go so far to suggest that we become the daughter she is imagined to be addressing – in the heavily accented, Filipino English that seems to alienate her, even in her home.

This is particularly poignant for me when in a scene in her video, Sexcyanip13, as her own mother, complains that she is being neglected, and
tries to convince her “daughter” to add her as a friend on Facebook. The mother gestures to her chest, looks sternly at the camera and says, “I am your mother. Are you ashamed of me?” (Shit Filipino moms say!) Throughout the video, the offspring “wears” an impression of her mother’s Filipinoness and we see her playing a role. However in a self-reflexive moment as her own mother, they seem to fuse, and the “I” in that sentence is destabilized. It discloses a moment of subjectivities in motion, and one seems to speak for the other, both attempting to understand, control, and even inhabit the other: the mother character to assert her authority using stern Filipino words, the child-as-mother to control the unfamiliar yet unmistakable Filipino accent, both trying to navigate the alienation that language brings.

The mother is not at home speaking English if she needs her Tagalog to help her express herself, and the child will always perceive Tagalog as a strange though recognizable language; both possess some amount of shame at not being able to speak either language as a way of tracing one’s identity back to the other. Can they, as Derrida describes, “project up to the idea of a route, and the trace of a return?” (58).

I say route and trace of a return, for what distinguishes a route from a path or from a via rupta (its etymon), as well as methodos from odos, is repetition, return, reversibility, iterability, the possible reiteration of the itinerary. How is it possible that, whether received
or learned, this language is felt, explored, worked, and to be reinvented without an itinerary, and without a map, like the language of the other? (58)

There is no prescribed way of navigating language. One must, in a sense, get lost in the speaking of that language yet find a way back that is less a return to some original starting point, than a continuous revelation of the ways that language allows one to take off again in different directions. The experience of speaking that language enriches it. Derrida believes that the monolingualism of the other is a testament to a language’s vibrancy in itself, and the untranslatability of the words that weave themselves into singular events; monolingualism is not a lack or loss of opportunity to learn another language, but the richness with which a single language creates a world for an individual. The challenge though is how one finds another to receive that richness and approach the being who is revealed in the exchange.

Is the way to see oneself to attempt to inhabit the untranslatable-ness of the Other? I would suggest that as the bearer of an alien language, and a speaker of a strange kind of English, the mother in these videos is seen as Other. And as Other she is easily conceptualized as an idea and is disembodied from the materiality of her past and her present struggles. For the videographers to step into the role of the mother as linguistic authority suggests the unsettledness and malleability of her identity. On the one hand this leaves her susceptible to
control and recolonization, her strangeness vulnerable to the ways the Thomasites and the principle of benevolent assimilation fixed in Western minds (and in the colonized Filipino’s mind) what being Filipino should sound like—that is, an approximation of a “brown English-speaking American.” On the other hand, this allows the possibility of re/invention. This contrasts with the comfortable, embodied state that certifies one’s subjectivity as locatable in space and time, as being in the moment (Arola and Wysocki). A defamiliarization occurs as the small gestures that make up everyday life in the home are magnified as encounters with language. The mother, or the videographer-as-mother, can therefore be imagined as a bridge to a past and a place that is inaccessible; a time and place that they unconsciously construct as a well of culture and ethnicity that confer on them an authenticity. Taking on a persona of authority speaking a different language transports the videographers out of their everyday lives as self-identified Filipino-Americans to become immigrants themselves within their linguistic chronotopes.

According to Derrida, language does not originate anywhere, nor does it point to some destination where its “roots” might be found. To him, language is a gathering of itself at a particular time, when events or experiences summon it to speak or describe what has taken place. Language is created and reappropriated at the moment of its use. Already the idiom always remakes itself, belying the impossibility of ever grasping it, so that we only ever have the promise of a
language, and an arrival that never is an arrival home (67). Derrida points to an intrinsic alienation within language, even the language most monolinguals feel at home in.

Language then always already constructs itself, and us, as Other. The temptation to apply linguistic yardsticks and templates – indeed stereotypes – constantly hovers about us. The mother as idea, as something displaced and floating, becomes an object to be controlled again and again by defining it, giving it characteristics, shaping it into something that is recognizable to multilingualism—in other words, translatable in order to be legible/audible. As Derrida notes, “This monolingualism of the other certainly has the threatening face and features of colonial hegemony” (Derrida, 69). The paradox of the mother tongue as always unrecognizable until it is summoned to a situation—that is, used within the context of a phenomenon to talk about that phenomenon—makes us acutely aware of time. Time makes it possible for people to appear and dwell, to establish themselves in the presence of another.

Perhaps their videos are the way for Filipino American videographers to find their route to a Filipino American identity within language and towards their version of Filipinoness. And the only way to summon language is through “gathering its difference with itself,” (Derrida 68) what I understand to be its own alienation—in this case, these videographers’ alienation from the language of their elders, their differences in experience, culture and practice of ethnicity.
Despite how English has captured the imagination of Filipinos and erased their history, inscribed the beginning of another one from which all subsequent histories would be referenced, and molded identities into an unrecognizable image of the colonial master, the “assimilated” monolingual will find that the language that seeks to homogenize has yet to be spoken; likewise the language that can identify them is possible only through the Other. As Derrida says, “it is not to be opposed to the other, nor even distinguished from the other. It is the monolanguage of the other. The of signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other” (Derrida, 68). The absence of a Filipino language in their daily lives forces them to negotiate an in-between moment of reaching back and forth to bridge the apparent division they feel within themselves (Derrida), with their elders, and with a culture they observe but cannot join. This movement/journey becomes a “home” for them. Caught between islands of language—one that is foreign but part of their heritage and one that is vernacular but not their own—these Filipino Americans are displaced in their reckoning of their selves and their positions in society. There is a sense of loss in both locales of language, and the loss unhinges, throwing them out of a secure dwelling. Ferrying back and forth between the isles, these videographers are exposed to the elements, and are exposed to themselves as not-belonging anywhere. As forgotten colonials, and colonials who have forgotten about their status, the question Franz Fanon asked
in *Wretched of the Earth* continues to float: “Who am I, really?” Filipino Americans’ Filipinoness then lies in wait, until the other for which and of which their affectations of Filipino English and linguistic stereotypes, the puns and plosives, arrives. A Filipino American Filipinoness will become possible in their encounter with the Other.
Chapter 3 | Nostalgic Reflections

“For him, whose father is from the Philippines, it is the place he has never been, filled with hillsides of rice and fish, different dialects, a family he wants to touch, though something about it all is untouchable.”

--Jon Pineda, “Birthmark”

One thing vernacular videos made by second-generation Filipino Americans have to their advantage is the availability of a ready-made script. The vernacular videos they produce are guided by a nostalgic list of symbolic artifacts, traditions, and images that represent the idea of “authentic” Filipino identity. The list is either read or enumerated to the audience in vlogs, or they guide the re-enactments in dramatized videos. Some videos focus on particular items that are themselves represented through more lists. Depending on the number of items in a particular videographer’s list, the video lengths vary according to listed items—some videos might run for three minutes, and others close to ten. Some items appear in the list regularly, and these become popular and commonplace ways of “knowing you are Filipino.”

“You know you’re Filipino when your lampshade still has plastic covers on them,” says Missy Elumba, seen reading aloud to her grandparents in her video from a list she pulled up on her laptop. “Oh no, I took them off,” her Lola (grandmother) replies. Missy laughs. Off camera, a male voice asks, “How long
were they on there?” Lola replies, “One of the boys told me, ‘Ma, take off the plastic cover!”

![Figure 3.1. Missy Elumba. "You took the [plastic covering] off!" Web.](image)

Elumba represents her lola and lolo’s (grandfather) house as a place in which the artifacts of Filipinoness dwell. They point to items such as a karaoke machine, the tabo (a bucket found in the bathroom), a framed reproduction of the Last Supper, foil covering the interior of the oven and toaster-ovens, plastic plants inside the house and rose bushes in their gardens. The correspondence between her list and the actual things found in her grandparents’ house is fascinating, and it elicits an honest and infectious humor—as much from the fact of actually finding all of those things existing in a single site, as the realization that someone or some group has accurately tagged the artifacts that define a whole race and culture. As artifacts, these are reminders of life back in the Philippines for Lolo and Lola, replicas and repetitions of habits that were developed and experienced in the islands.
For second-generation Filipino-Americans like Elumba, these artifacts are symbolic of a past they have no access to, and one that is alien to them. The only way to capture a sense of that past is to record images of the artifacts on video, and have someone else explain to her the functions and the reasons behind their existence. Elumba exemplifies the easy and comfortable relationship she has with her grandparents, which is evident in the way that they play along in her “little game.” Elumba’s father, acting as cameraperson, contributes humorous side comments and questions about the ordinariness of the things his parents talk about—perhaps never realizing what they were when he was growing up and living with them. And although some of the things they describe reveal stories about their “Filipino habits,” there is little to no context about how these came to be considered authentically Filipino.

Filipino immigrants who have had to build a new life in a totally different country recognize the need to survive and assimilate yet cannot help but retain
habits, traditions, and values from the homeland. And why wouldn’t they? It’s what gives them an identity, and keeps them connected to a time and place they consider home. It’s a time and place they recreate, to give a sense of familiarity to the newness swirling around them. Like the plastic covering on their new possessions, Filipino immigrants land in America in their “original packaging,” and they try to keep it on for as long as they can to preserve the Filipinoness that has been geographically displaced and relocated to a new “home.” Faced with the alien and unfamiliar, they rebuild their world with what they have—rituals, traditions, and memories learned and experienced in the home country—and use these elements as a model for building a new life.

This chapter deals with nostalgia as a mode of estrangement. My claim is that a nostalgic estrangement emerges from the videos of second generation Filipino Americans, especially from images of the quotidian artifacts and rituals that take place in their homes, or in places they consider themselves to be at home. On the one hand these visual projects provide nostalgic images or ideas of Filipinoness that reinforce the identity they were born with or grew up performing. On the other hand, these visual projects try to interrogate that image of home as the origin of that identity. Nostalgia in these videos established on the past (or a mimicking of that past) functions as a guide for how one might negotiate his/her position in the present, and create an ideal model of life in the everyday. That “past” is thought to be a past in which an authentic Filipinoness
lives, a past to which these Filipino American videographers’ immigrant elders belong to, but to which they will only ever be observers. Though the turn to nostalgia has the power to reinforce a sense of connection to an imagined homeland and national identity, it also has the power to stabilize any emerging idea of Filipinoness, forcing memory and creativity to adhere to commonplace and well-worn discourses about identity that avoid any disruption of existing stereotypes. Nostalgia is usually located in the past, through memory or an “affected, imagined, or manufactured” sense of longing (Day). Nostalgia necessarily displaces us psychologically and emotionally, rendering us home-less, or not-at-home in the present and certainly not-at-home in the past.

In this chapter I engage and extend two conceptual types of nostalgia. I work with Svetlana Boym’s typologies of nostalgia, restorative and reflective nostalgia, found in her book The Future of Nostalgia. Through Boym’s concepts, I wish to tease out my own ideas of control and containment that seems crucial to nostalgia. Nostalgia triggers our need to hold on to what we remember or feel. Therefore, assigning certain characteristics that identify a manufactured nostalgia also means containing any perception of difference in order for that nostalgia to be a uniform experience. In other words, while nostalgia is a type of homesickness, it allows us to imagine a time and place better than today. That imagination can either be generative of new positions, or it may devolve into stereotypes. I argue that these stereotypes are sometimes cloaked in the
nostalgia for a colonialist past and is a problematic way of viewing oneself, especially when one considers the influence of a colonialist gaze (Said). As containers, lists can impose some degree of control on perception through a subject-object framework. And while nostalgia provides a mode of estrangement that invites us to reflect on the everyday, it also presents the conditions for stereotypes to flourish.

Restorative and reflective nostalgia can be triggered by the most everyday things. A single item or event can be at the center of our nostalgia, yet tell a different story each time (Boym). In a sense both types of nostalgia are linked to one another and can unfold either way. In this chapter I use the mundane and everyday artifact of lists. And these in turn are lists of the mundane and everyday things in a Filipino’s life. Elumba’s video and all the videos studied in this project contain a nostalgic checklist of what defines Filipinoness. As Elumba mentions in the description section of her video: “The list I had found, 'You know You're filipino when...' was not made up but found online” (Elumba, YouTube). No one is really sure how this list was constituted or from whom it originated. However, in her book Building Diaspora: Filipino Community Formation on the Internet, Emily Ignacio culled a list of jokes that developed from interactions in a Filipino American news group in the mid-1990s. According to Ignacio, the list was generated through jokes between members of the newsgroup, as a way to talk about or establish common experiences; however Ignacio also found that though
the list attempted to document Filipino traits, values, and cultural characteristics, it was often deployed as a way to define Filipino in opposition to what the members considered American, in an effort to “strengthen Filipino nationalism” (80).

Emily Ignacio’s list is titled “Are You Really Filipino?” According to Ignacio, members of the newsgroup she studied referred to newbies as conversation starters, to dispel arguments among members, or engaged with as a pastime by adding more items to the list. The list was a humorous project that grew organically from interactions online. However, a deeper sentiment about how these quotidian items connect to ethnicity emphasizes the need for Filipino Americans “to ground their identity on something” (117), even if these have to be “jokes” or extremely specific and private aspects of everyday life. The list contains no references to national symbols or even to regions or provinces where their ancestors might be from as proof of belonging. Instead, the list assumes that an authentic and original sense of Filipinoness exists in these mundane and

26 It’s not unlikely that the “list” used by Filipino American videographers to guide the content of their videos is an offshoot of the 111-item list that Ignacio put together (152). However, it’s also possible that other lists found on various websites (such as the one Elumba indicated she was working with) were also developed out of a similar goal of connecting to other Filipino Americans. What the newsgroups were to online diasporic Filipinos and Filipino Americans nearly two decades ago is what these videos are for a new generation of diasporic Filipinos and Filipino Americans today.

27 Going through the list we find sections that pertain to language, personality traits, food, family, and yes, home furnishings. Item number 64 reads: “Your lamp shades still have the plastic coverings on them” (154).

28 The items in the list aimed to establish our racial or cultural membership by comparing any habits, idiosyncrasies, or practices that we did in our life, someone related to them, or someone they knew. One scored three points if these were things they did themselves, two points for relatives, and a point for someone they knew. Scoring 259 points and above means, “There’s no doubt what your ethnic identity is! You’re a Filipino, through and through!” (156).
quotidian practices, and this Filipinoness is an identity to which all those with some Filipino ancestry should aspire.29

Ironically, the vernacular videos of second generation Filipino Americans are projects that demonstrate nostalgia for a home and a culture that they’ve only ever experienced as second hand observers. It is an imagined and invented time and place to which these second generation Filipino Americans think they could and should belong, an ideal homecoming that will never materialize. Writing about Filipino American novelist Carlos Bulosan, literary critic E. San Juan says, “Of all Asian American groups, the Filipino community is perhaps the only one obsessed with the impossible desire of returning to the homeland, whether in reality or fantasy” (123). Unfortunately, according to San Juan, “the authentic homeland doesn’t exist except as a simulacrum of Hollywood, or a nascent dream of jouissance still to be won by a national-democratic struggle” (San Juan qtd in Libretti 141). It is a collective myth on which communities attempt to build and solidify a national (or even transnational) identity.

According to Boym, nostalgia emerges after major historical upheavals such as wars or mass emigration from totalitarian regimes. I suggest that for Filipinos, especially diasporic Filipinos, nostalgia is not only an occasional

29 Unfortunately, the list was generated at a time when cultural and political divisiveness was rife among Filipinos from the motherland, Filipinos abroad, and those of mixed heritage, particularly Filipino. According to Ignacio, the list tends to define Filipinoness against American-ness, and sorts out those who can understand the jokes in the list from those who can’t, identifying the latter as American. “You’re white, aren’t you?” is the criteria given to those who score 50 points and below. The list then also functions as a method of organizing and identifying “otherness,” and is an exercise in separating/demarcating a “community” of Filipinos to which one either wholeheartedly belongs or does not.
affliction—algia means sickness, nostos means home in Greek (Boym)—but is practically a way of life. From the loss of one’s native language, to the dispersed number of Filipinos all over the world living and working in countries not their own in order to survive, Filipinos seem to have been born “nostalgics,” always longing for something they don’t know they’ve lost or are about to lose. Filipino identity and language are all but stories told from a colonizer’s point of view (San Juan), such as the culture is “damaged” (Fallows), and the homeland encourages its people to leave its shores as overseas workers (Rafael). In other words, nostalgia seems to write Filipino history, and the idea of a Filipino national identity is always contingent: either as a goal to constantly work towards in the future, or something that is repeatedly called up from the past through universal symbols that stand in for more specific experiences of authentic Filipinoness. An authentic Filipinoness then only ever exists as a specter, a ghost that haunts the Filipino being precisely because the search for home, for an identity to feel at home in, is only ever constituted by the imperfection of memory and history.

I suggest that through the nostalgia that emerges from their video projects, these videographers attempt to bridge memory and history in the everydayness of vernacular video as a medium, and the quotidianness of everyday life as racialized second generation immigrants, enacting a process of self-authoring that proposes a continuously altered identity and sense of Filipinoness. The medium acts as a transition that dips in and out of memory and history, and
moves “sideways” in the present to interrogate their own relationship to the stereotypes that nostalgia itself has imposed. The videos suggest a demonstration of the videographers’ own self-consciousness as estranged beings from history, collective memory, and (an imagined) culture and homeland, as well as the awareness that the nostalgic “longing for something idealized…has been lost” and the acknowledgement that “this idealized something can never be retrieved in actuality and can only be accessed through images” (Cook 4). These images become a starting point for a discourse on history, identity, and of imagining an alternative idea of Filipinoness. It suggests maybe not a new home, but rather a new way to think of oneself as at-home.

NOSTALGIA’S HOME

Nostalgia is an intense and painful longing for home. The word “nostalgia” derives its origins from two Greek words: nostos, which means “return home,” and algia, which means pain or longing. According to Boym, the word nostalgia didn’t appear in ancient Greek. It is merely “nostalgically Greek” (3). Coined by a doctor named Johannes Hofer in 1688, the word “came through medicine and not through poetics or politics” (3).
Nostalgia was diagnosed as homesickness and was considered a dangerous and even contagious condition as early as the 1700s (Boym, Cook, Lowenthal, Day). In his book The Past is a Foreign Country, David Lowenthal says Russian army generals would order live burials of those infected with the disease to keep it from ballooning to epidemic proportions. Nostalgia continued to be classified as a “psycho-physiological” disease late into the twentieth century, especially among those serving in the military. It was “demilitarized and de-medicalized” only in the 1950s, and it was then that the word entered everyday speech and conversation, specifically in the United States. Nostalgia, once decoupled from its military and medical roots, came to be known as just another emotion. In her dissertation on “The Rhetoric of Nostalgia: The Reconstructions of Landscape, Community, and Race in the United States’ South,” Stacy Lyn Day argues that nostalgia “moved into popular speech primarily as a reaction to modernity” (18). According to Day the twentieth century ushered in a “‘diminished existential salience to home in its concrete locational sense,’ and an evaporating sense of loyalty to location, region, or even national identity,” which were characteristic of an emerging culture of fragmentation (Day 18). In other words, a heightened sense of nostalgia accompanied modernity (Boym, Day). According to Day, the growing mobility of persons in their everyday spheres of work, residence, or even leisure encouraged movement within the country, and awakened a desire to constantly look back and consider certain spaces homely
and reassuring in some way—spaces that were obviously not the homes of their childhood. “Therefore with an increase in mobility and movement, attachments and allegiances were dislodged and nostalgia became the term used to describe this modern American homelessness” (19). For Day, nostalgia is primarily tied to geography, or some physical structure that houses a person’s memories of important life events. The journey away from these places makes us desire to take the journey back home, whether in memory to the home of our childhood, or simply in our recollection of what home once was.

But nostalgia is also about lost time, the ultimate journey back that can never happen. Boym claims that,

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. (xv)

This is true for rituals and traditions, which according to Mircea Eliade exist outside of time and history. Commenting on religious traditions of Polynesian tribes, Eliade sees the performance of rituals as a freezing of time so that men
enter into the concept of time and become “gods”: the beings who control the sacred are in a godly space by virtue of the rituals, separated from the everyday. The everyday is considered the profane mode of existence among mortals, busy with the tedious details of production and reproduction for survival. Mortal life is constituted by a lack. That lack is caused by the constant march of time, and the irretrievability of the past, a constant loss to which humans are enslaved.

“Temporality is profane. Rituals are an escape from the realities of the everyday, of home-making in real time that aspires to the sublime status of ritual-making, where that space and time of its performance are ‘indefinitely recoverable’” (Eliade 89). The sublime in this formulation is a sense of immeasurable and quantifiable greatness and defies the touch of reason or calculation, but which touches us repeatedly by its intellectual, spiritual, or aesthetic qualities. Nostalgia is similar to ritual in that it is constituted by fantasy about the sublime, and the knowledge that it is unattainable, yet can be revisited through memory (past) and imagination (future).

“Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym xiii). Nostalgia exists outside of time

30 According to Boym (who is herself a Russian exile), nostalgia was diagnosed in the seventeenth century by medical doctor Johannes Hofer as a disease of the mind that afflicted Swedish soldiers and students studying away from home, as well as French and German domestic workers. It was characterized by an intense desire to return home, an indifference to what was happening around them, and even the sensation of hearing the voice of loved ones in a conversation. Nostalgia was said to be contagious and it was soon seen as an epidemic. According to one account, a Russian army general ordered anyone with the disease to be buried alive. Two
but is triggered by the profanity of the everyday, encouraging us to dream of the past as the ideal model of existence in the present, and shapes how we should look to our future. We can think of home as located not only in space but in time, both in the past, and as Boym intimates, in the future. Home then is a concept or idea we only come to recognize when we are estranged from it: there’s the familiar adage, we don’t know that we are home unless we are away from it, and we don’t know what we long for until we don’t have it. Home is a time long gone, but is also a time that has not yet arrived. In other words, nostalgia ironically makes us acutely aware of our present, so much so that we desire an escape through memory or fantasy; it is an escape without a real destination, and for many displaced, diasporic, and marginalized people all over the world, it is the “impossibility of homecoming” (Boym xvii).

Housed in the everyday, and in everyday artifacts, nostalgia can exist anywhere for anyone. In the videos studied here, videographers reveal a nostalgia in the artifacts they capture on video. What is obvious at first glance are the clichés of Filipinoness that are presented through the kitschy and stereotyped depictions of a generation of Filipino immigrants—usually the videographers’ parents and grandparents—and the artifacts and rituals that they perform in the home. These snippets of cultural performance and remembrance are nostalgic...
because they attempt to rebuild what was left behind in the motherland to allow the immigrants to operate “normally” in the present everyday. As such it reinforces dominant narratives of authenticity and the importance of origins to define one’s identity.

Typologies of Nostalgia

According to Boym’s typology, nostalgia appears in two types: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia focuses on nostos “and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” while reflective nostalgia dwells on algia or the pain of longing and displacement, “the imperfect process of remembrance” (41). According to Boym, the frames of both types may overlap but end up telling different stories; both may be triggered by the same Proustian madeleine, but each will have a different narrative trajectory (49). For Boym, 

[Restorative nostalgia] characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping of conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins,
the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time (41).

Restorative nostalgia recreates home by representing it with physical replicas and invented narratives and traditions\(^{31}\) that fix the old world in the present. In other words, restorative nostalgia deals with symbols as a way to reconnect with a past/memory. In the case of diasporic and displaced people, the reiteration of customs and traditions and the reproduction of symbols about a culture present the possibility of unity and identity that helps them navigate a strange and foreign everyday abroad. The attempt to infuse the present everyday with a bygone everyday, means building on the common experience of loss, with the goal to somehow forget the pain of that loss. Moreover restorative nostalgia emphasizes a truth about origins: their immutability and authenticity, a sacred space and time to which a dispersed people can claim a connection. Thinking about Heidegger, this is one instance of falling back into the everydayness that we try to escape in the first place, and getting stuck once more in the path away from the current everyday that we create. In short, it tends to “spatialize” nostalgia, and focuses on assigning a position, and arranging things/memories/symbols as they “should” be.

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\(^{31}\) According to Boym, “[i]nvented tradition does not mean a creation ex nihilo or a pure act of social constructivism; rather, it builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing. There is a perception that as a result of society’s industrialization and secularization in the nineteenth century, a certain void of social and spiritual meaning had opened up. What was needed was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” (42).
Restorative nostalgia operates through static representations. In the case of immigrants, and second generation immigrants, these representations of identity may refer back to colonialism. Spatializing time through frameworks that fix information in an ordered way is reminiscent of the colonial motivation to freeze time in the colony, and to freeze the native’s identity (into a specimen), so that both may be dissected and studied, documented and accounted for as possessions of the colonial empire. Ironically, anthropologists have theorized that colonial officials themselves feel nostalgic for the lost “innocence” of the places they conquer. Imperialist nostalgia, coined by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, refers to a longing and “innocent yearning” for that which one has altered or destroyed. This is true of colonialists who wish to keep the colonized as they were “traditionally” but paradoxically subject them to the modernization and industrialization that their sense of mission commands them to do. The “white man’s burden” becomes particularly salient here, especially for Filipinos, in light of the colonial relationship with the United States. In imperialist nostalgia, the “putative static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity” (70).

“We” (who believe in progress) valorize innovation, and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When
the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents
of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they
were personal losses. (70)

One danger then of restorative nostalgia is its referent. Is there a static position
being reified? Is the nostalgia experienced through the representations of static
identities and symbols that were imposed by an imperialist nostalgia? Romantic
notions of the past as an ideal time, and the homeland as an ideal place for
building one’s identity, can unwittingly conceal the implications of resurrecting
certain symbols that construct a single continuous history as authentic, and
therefore “true.” Other stories and other perspectives are therefore marginalized
and almost always buried or forgotten.

Reflective nostalgia focuses on the pain of loss itself, and “defers
homecoming” (Boym 49). This type of nostalgia is more flexible, in that it does
not believe in teleological origins, but in the mutability of history and memory. It
thrives on the details that make up individual and cultural memory and
encourages conversations that trace threads of common experience that create a
living, organic narrative. Therefore the stories of reflective nostalgia are always
unfinished: the distance between the nostalgic person and the referent motivates
the storytelling and (re)creation. As such, stories that exhibit a reflective nostalgia
are potentially “ironic and humorous” because they recognize “the gaps in
memory, identity, and resemblance” (Boym 50). They take on the form of
fragments, shards of detail from individual memory, that open up potential to tell alternate/parallel histories. Where restorative nostalgia tends to “spatialize time, reflective nostalgia temporalizes space” (Boym 49), opening up opportunities for various stories about a particular space, time, or experience to emerge. It embraces the fluidity and the “irrevocability of the past and human finitude” (Boym 49), allowing multiple interpretations to exist alongside one another.

Reflective nostalgia opens up unpopular and often controversial subject matter. Because they exist as fragments, connecting to their thought is difficult, and as stated, painful. There are no resolutions, just more questions. And because these perspectives are not easy to link to they remain unanchored and at risk of being forgotten and even unheeded. An urgency emerges: how can these fragments of thought continue to circulate, and how might others connect? How can the discourse continue, without diluting or tamping down on the sharpness or honesty of the message?

Restorative nostalgia tends to provide the conditions for creating stereotypes; reflective nostalgia seeks a way out of those stereotypes. Stereotypes exist as images in the mind and that image is one that humans try to map onto others to make sense of their origin, language, race, ethnicity. Because they are easy to understand, stereotypes are easily reproduced and transmitted, perpetuating the myths that push groups of people into spaces that make it difficult for them to move in, or in which to express variety. Reflective nostalgia
sees the stereotypes and reinterprets them; it reflects the stereotypes back onto themselves to make them face the uncanniness of their existence. In the self-authoring efforts of the vernacular videos under study, the videos refract these stereotypical images and attempt to distort them, knocking them off the path that they think will take them back to some authentic origin. It makes the stereotype look back at itself and feel the discomfort of unrecognizability and strangeness.

Using these concepts in nostalgia, I interrogate visual representations of the quotidian and their relationship to identity. Restorative and reflective nostalgia, demonstrated in the vernacular videos of second generation Filipino Americans, present an interesting relationship. On the one hand, the videos operate under a restorative framework, going by a list of characteristics and criteria that is supposed to ensure the authenticity of one’s ethnicity. In this sense, nostalgia contains and controls the stories and identities one is supposed to have. On the other hand, a trace of reflective nostalgia escapes through the “gaps” in their stories, especially those gaps in communicating specific personal experiences. Because they are demonstrating nostalgia for a place and time they’ve never known, and which never existed for them, the videographers tend to draw from their own daily, mundane encounters for details to connect to the larger restorative narrative. There is a desire to see themselves and their lives mirrored in the larger narrative. Taking the list of criteria that they are expected to aspire to, I suggest that the videographers take control of the narrative of authenticity by
making it their own: they show up in the videos, mimic the personalities, and insert their own details into the story and incrementally challenge the idea of “authenticity.”

I wish to argue, however, that this list logic reveals a colonialist mindset in terms of representing identity. Lists that organize characteristics, features, routines, locations (and other specifics that attempt to define a race’s comprehensibility and conspicuousness according to one way of seeing) mimic anthropological and ethnographic processes of knowing, classifying, cataloguing. In the next section, I turn to Philippine history and American intervention in the representation of the Filipino body through ethnographic and selected American magazine images at the turn of the twentieth century. This culminates in the “living exhibits” at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair in Missouri where more than 1,000 Filipinos were transported and forced to demonstrate their “daily life” for the American public in what were dubbed “human zoos.” Imperialist and restorative nostalgia intersect in these events, and reflect the manner in which Filipino identity continues to be perceived through the fetishization of symbols that authenticate ethnicity and identity, albeit through a colonialist gaze.
In “True Life of a Filipino Fob,” Filipino immigrant Stephen is shown adjusting to life in America, and shows his struggle making friends, communicating, and trying to practice his culture in his new environment. The video is filled with the stereotypes of Filipinos (and also most immigrant Asians) as being unsophisticated, unintelligible, and clueless. Looking disheveled and unkempt, Stephen spends most of his time by himself, frequenting the Filipino fast food restaurant on his own and claiming the restaurant’s statue as his one true friend. Isolated and alone, Stephen connects with only one other person, Forest, who tries to help him assimilate. But Forest is not convinced he will succeed. “I’m gonna try and help him” he says unenthusiastically, recoiling at the smell of his hands when he touches his face. He and Stephen have just had
dinner. Stephen taught him how to eat with his hands, the way they do it “back home.” “It’s gonna be a lot of work you know.”

Filipinoness is demonstrated here as a negative: not Western, not American, and therefore not permitted in his adoptive society. This is a common trope played out in Filipino American vernacular videos. Attempting to make the amorphous, and unknowable-ness of Filipinoness known to themselves and to others through characteristics in checklists, they unwittingly reify the stereotype of Filipinos as “savage, subhuman, inferior” (Choy 37). In her article, “Salvaging the Savage,” Catherine Ceniza Choy argues for the political imperative of “rescuing the representation of the Filipino as savage from contemporary historical amnesia about America’s violent imperialism in the Philippines” (37). Through the unpleasant task of unveiling these disturbing images, we gain a language that identifies the racism embedded in imperialist ideology with which to critique contemporary images (Choy). Unfortunately some media and content, such as the video mentioned above, merely reproduce these racist stereotypes: from the fetishization of one’s physical appearance, to one’s rituals, to everyday life symbols, the Filipino Americans view aspects of Filipinoness from the standpoint of a Western gaze.

In an attempt to associate themselves with a cultural and national identity, they turn to an Orientalist, imperialist rhetoric as a tool to navigate that foreignness. Just as colonial and anthropological lists fixed the West’s knowledge
of the savage—and the savage her/himself—into legible figures for colonial administration, the Filipino American lists fix “knowledge” of Filipinos in time and space, like a specimen to be studied in a museum. Restorative nostalgia expressed in the reproduction of the identity checklist creates stereotypes of Filipinoess that get passed on, similar to the stereotypes that were produced by colonialists.

Ethnographies of Filipino Difference

In 1906, Dean C. Worcester, then Secretary of the Interior of the Philippine Islands, published a 176-page article in the Philippine Journal of Science, arguing for a streamlined classification of the non-Christian tribes of the Philippines. Based on a previous proposal by Dr. David Barrows regarding ethnological and ethnographic surveys of races, Worcester argued that classification by physical attributes rather than linguistic or cultural practices made the task of the ethnographer more efficient and less cumbersome (Brody). The article is an impressive and massive collection of details, and brags about the sacrifice and

32 Dr. Ferdinand Blumentritt, German ethnographer and close friend to the Philippines’s national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, originally classified Philippine tribes into 87 distinct groups. Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines classified them into 67. Both efforts considered language and dialects in their groupings. Barrow and Worcester did not.
hard work invested in it by the scientists and anthropologists who have traveled through the islands to document its people. In the article, he endeavors to list all the synonyms for the names of the tribes that exist or have existed, the tribe’s habitat, and finally,

A brief description of the physical characteristics of its members; of their dress and ornaments, including ornamentation of the skin by scarring or tattooing, of their buildings and settlements; of their hunting, fishing, agriculture and manufactures of their methods of warfare and head-hunting; of their arms of their music and dancing; of their marriage customs, and of their customs relative to the burial of the dead. (805)

Trained as a zoologist, Worcester’s narrative boasts of an imprimatur of authenticity, claiming to have seen, and interacted with these tribes himself (Worcester). This paper, published just five years after the United States occupied the Philippine Islands, implies the rewriting and representation of the Filipino according to a system that allows the American public and scholars to visualize the Filipinos on their terms. Worcester dismisses previous studies on the tribes of the Philippines, claiming that Dr. Ferdinand Blumentritt, the German ethnographer who first classified the Filipinos into 87 distinct linguistic groups, “has never visited the Philippine Islands. He is a compiler, pure and simple, and when preparing his list of Philippine tribes has been compelled to follow, more or
less blindly, the persons from whom he has derived his information” (798). He also dismisses the Jesuit project of ethnography, saying “the Jesuits had never occupied missions in northern Luzon, and no explorations had been made by the Americans in that part of the island, so that they were forced to digest, as best they could the miscellaneous mass of information prepared for them by Blumentritt and other writers” (798). He goes on to list all the American officers and servicemen who travelled the island of northern Luzon, devoting almost three pages to their names and accounts of their visits to the tribes. It speaks to a well-orchestrated and systematic effort to define, redefine, and represent the Filipino to the West, and eventually to the Filipino himself.

In her book *The Rhetoric of English India*, Sara Suleri Goodyear analyzes the speeches of Edmunde Burke in defense of the colonial government in India, and the rhetoric of lists that the empire employed to make Indian culture visible to the West. “To reduce experience to a list, or itinerary becomes the driving desire of a fiction unwilling to decode experience into an act of cultural reading, content instead to remain within the named parameters of a catalog” (30). Similarly, the lists that Worcester employed were meant to do the same thing: make the Filipino native visible. Lists are the quintessential tool to prove knowledge; to “know” through a systematic, logical arrangement of ideas, and less as a

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33 Dr. Blumentritt collaborated in scholarly work with Dr. Jose Rizal to document the different languages in the Philippines. He published the book, *Versuch einer Ethnographie der Philippinen* (An attempt at writing a Philippine Ethnography) in 1882.
“knowledge as acting” (O'Banion 12). In Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialectic of List and Story, John D. O'Banion argues that lists dominate Western society, and exist as the primary form of writing that successfully transmits knowledge by freezing ideas in time and space in a “complete divorce of relations with contextual impurities” (Burke qtd in O'Banion 120). Lists, taxonomies, catalogs, bills, forms, tables, etc., are the graphic and literate forms of knowledge introduced by the West as a method of accounting for possessions, transactions, and events (O'Banion). Descriptions through itemization present a record of things perceived and apprehended, not necessarily as things experienced. Although lists and records are the mark of a literate society, it is not a “neutral” activity (O'Banion). According to Goodyear, the practice of creating lists by British colonists preserved the “Indian sublime”—a flavor of an exoticized, Orientalized something that defies descriptions, and was translated instead into images through pictorial descriptions, or in many cases into photographs and films. These visual records expressed not the richness of an indigenous culture, but reproduced the correspondence between written lists and the material reality that was present to them. It was a way of verifying the “truth” of existence. This instituted a rhetoric of “authentic” anthropological encounters with the natives and their “culture,” a mystification that influenced a fear of otherness and an imperialist fascination with an unknowable race, yet always positioned the natives as inferior savages, in need of “civilizing” by the colonial masters.
Setting the stage

A project of representation that was used by colonialists to make the other “legible” to colonial authority (Vostral, Brody, Goodyear, Rafael), the “colonial gaze” emerged as a complex system of references that Edward Said alludes to in his books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. It requires a structure, and colonialists put a “stage” together that would frame how the colonial is seen (Said, Merican). An Orientalist stage is the culmination of ideas and notions circulated about the Orient, or primarily the Islamic, non-European lands and people, that eventually reached beyond these borders to include all those non-White, non-Christian places and groups. According to Said, since the Renaissance, various elements formed the precondition for the proliferation of “modern Orientalist structures” (*Orientalism* 119). “Travel literature, imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus,” cultivating beliefs from various Western philosophers and scholars that unknown spaces could be understood through rhetorical, philosophical, and anthropological methods—i.e., explaining a culture through binaries or in opposition to the West, or through a “sympathetic identification” with cultural and religious beliefs of the other (117-118). One of the most effective elements for Orientalist structures “was the whole impulse to classify nature and man into types” and transform the Oriental’s body through the “intellectual process” from
“mere spectacle to the precise measurement of characteristic elements” and vice-versa (119).

On a stage, framed accordingly, and assigned a position, the whole Orientalist image structure is ordered and arranged in the mind. The list of characteristics and the description of physical attributes articulate the presence of the image, fortified by the systematic exclusion of any other information that might complicate the view of the Oriental as a historical being. In The Order of Things, Michel Foucault argues that from the Classical Age to the Renaissance, the privileging of sight and observation as the primary way of knowing created the need for “scientific” documentation through catalogs and taxonomies, through a “series of systematically negative conditions” (144). What was described by the observer constituted the history of that which was being observed—it's presentness in a particular time and space defined its history and its fixedness. Foucault also uses the metaphor of the stage when he discusses the process of observation and classification.

What had changed was the space in which it was possible to see them and from which it was possible to describe them. To the Renaissance, the strangeness of animals was a spectacle: it was featured in fairs, in tournaments, in fictitious or real combats…What came surreptitiously into being between the age of the theatre and that of the catalogue was not the desire for knowledge but a new
way of connecting things to both the eye and to discourse. A new way of making history (143).

What was available for seeing then defined the history of what was being observed. From this “area of visibility” (Foucault 145) emanated a power that imposed a disciplined ordering on the mind, mapping things, beings, and events in a “refindable place” (Said, *Orientalism*, 53) so that boundaries may be drawn between the “us” and the “them,” locate what was familiar from what was foreign, and mark the point/s in time where the Other stopped developing and the colonialist stepped in to intervene in the name of progress to bring them out of their dark existence and into the age of enlightenment.

Such were the lists and taxonomies that Worcester drew up. By cutting down Blumentritt’s 87 linguistic groups and the Jesuit missionaries’ 67 tribes to his seven, all based on the tribes’ physical attributes, appearance, and ornamentation, as well the observable rituals (which were conceptually familiar to the West anyway), he set up the stage from which information was retrievable for his purposes.

The area of visibility in which observation is able to assume its powers is thus only what is left after these exclusions: a visibility freed from all other sensory burdens and restricted, moreover to black and white. This area, much more than the receptivity and
attention at last being granted to things themselves, defines natural history’s condition of possibility, and the appearance of its screened objects: lines, surfaces, forms, reliefs (Foucault 145).

The “scientific” approach that Worcester employs inscribes onto the natives a naturally-occurring set of attributes that aim to standardize a view of them (usually as primitive, savage, uneducated, unhygienic), and confirm their existence based on the correspondences on a list of descriptions that identify them as one of the seven non-Christian tribes. The natives then exist as mere images, like objects arranged in a flat space, similar to the lists used to document their equally flat identities. Devoid of voice and history, they are frozen in time, and live in the mind of the observer as the vulgar savage the West was destined to save. This is evident in Worcester’s own words, when he says, “I shall not discuss folklore, or religious beliefs, other ceremonials, except in so far as they are directly related to the subjects (the classifications and types of descriptions) above mentioned” (Worcester 805). The natives exist as objects of empire and eternal symbols of the civilizing mission of the West.

The technologies that the Americans introduced in the Philippines documented the natives but also impressed on them the transformation required to be admitted into the space of civilization. Filipinos were represented as being in one of three stages: low-status, dangerous, and uneducatable; as works-in-progress; and as disciplined and assimilable (Rafael, Fojas, Kramer, Brody, Rice).
These “stages” of progress were articulated and romanticized through a host of publications about the Philippines to satisfy the American public’s curiosity. Children’s books and educational textbooks (Fil and Filippa 1917; The Story of the Philippines: For Use in the Schools of the Philippine Islands 1902), albums and narratives documenting the lives of the natives (An observer in the Philippines; or, Life in our new possessions 1905; The Campaign of the Jungle 1900) and commission reports were only a few of the materials available.  

These publications employed the rhetoric and logic of the list to prove the existence of the inhabitants of the islands and the benefits of imperialism. They contained descriptions of the landscape, the people, American encounters with the natives, and the progress gained through the intervention of the American government (Vostral, Constantino). Descriptions of the islands ranged from terrifying and savage to exotic and mysterious paradise; the people were described as primitive and violent to be disciplined and educated (Rafael, Brody, Kramer, Capozzola, Rice). In his book Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines, David Brody argues that it was accounts of travels and sketches from journalists and artists in Mindanao (the southernmost island of the Philippines, which is also predominantly Muslim) that ushered in an “American orientalism” in depictions of the region’s art as well as in

34 These were published at a time when debates about the benefits of colonization were erupting. Concerns about what the war between Spain and America, and then between the Philippines and America cost the country and the sudden acquisition of “more mouths to feed” (Benjamin Tillman, “Address to the US Senate, February 7, 1899”).
representations of what the Philippines should look like to an uninitiated public. Brody presents the way list-like interpretations were used to compare the evolved white man and the savage Filipino, implying that appearances were indicative of intellectual and cultural aptitude. Official reports would read like an anthropological comparison between Filipinos’ inferiority against the white man, and how ethnographic renderings and the rhetoric of lists always placed Filipinos in a subaltern position, deploying descriptions that created stereotypes through the presentation of the subject’s appearance (62).

35 Revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo’s features were compared against those of Fred Funston’s, the military general who arrested him. American newspaper the Evening Journal dissected Aguinaldo’s image on its front page and interpreted each body part against that of Funston’s.

36 Where photography presented Filipinos as subaltern, it represented something different for American soldiers. “Photographs depicting the amusing and domestic aspects of military life reassured family members back home—and presumably the soldiers themselves—that tropical conquest had not sapped young American men’s civilizational vigor. And second, photographs allowed Americans to document unfamiliar surroundings and cultural practices” (Cappozola, n.p.).
Images were a powerful way to illustrate the stages of civilization.

Magazines like *Judge* and *Puck*, popular propaganda magazines in the 1900s, were notorious for producing sketches of Filipinos, casting them as infantilized and inferior. In several of these images, the Filipino is depicted with thick lips, wooly hair, dark skin, and often with a blank but hopeful stare trained on then-President William McKinley, Uncle Sam or the personification of Columbia, as if awaiting reward for their obsequiousness, or instruction on how to carry on in the new regime. Half-naked bodies of men and women, some with shell necklaces and others in grass skirts sitting on a beach reinforce the idea of paradise. The rustic, jungle-like backdrop reified the idea of the dangerous and mysterious...
jungle. The landscape was always represented as a place to be mined for its resources, farmed and fertilized to produce goods to sell and trade. American authorities would always be depicted as benevolent, understanding parents, contributing progress through infrastructure, education, and public health systems. These government missions were driven by the idea that the Philippines was a tabula rasa on which the United States could re-write a people’s history by remaking the landscape and architecture, substitute native languages for English, and “cure” the natives of “primitive” diseases (Vostral, Brody, Fojas).

Figure 3.5. Judge Magazine, December 3, 1902. Library of Congress. Web.
Photographic images, however, exuded a different kind of power. This was a stage, in the sense discussed above, that authenticated presence and indexed “reality” in a portable, reproducible form that created a direct line of power from the overarching ideologies of empire to the personal beliefs of superiority and sophistication that underpinned the imperial project. According to Said, the US brand of imperialism is “impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination,” where words and ideas such as “inferior or subject races, subordinate peoples, dependency, expansion, and authority” set up not just the stage, but the script that the imperialist followed in their day to day tasks of transforming the people and their culture to fit into the civilized world (Culture and Imperialism 9). Those words and the overall vocabulary of America as the “righter of wrongs…defend[er] of freedoms” (5) could be easily conveyed in the photographic image. Photographs of the Philippines at the turn of the century, taken from the point of view of the white man, ranged from the mugshots of so-called Filipino “insurgents” to anthropological and ethnographic photographs depicting the “everyday native” of the island against the figure of the white man. Among Americans themselves, however, the photographic image documented their victories against their “enemies.” Finally, “photographs allowed Americans to document unfamiliar surroundings and cultural practices” (Cappozola, np) in the islands and among the Filipinos.
One may argue that the images that made the strongest case for American presence in the Pacific were the ethnographic photographs of Frank Crone and Dean Worcester. Their images were proof not only of their proximity and interaction with the natives, but also of the need for US intervention in progress. Images of the natives and tribes of the Philippines may have been personal projects of fascination and fantasy (Rice) for Crone and Worcester, but on a political level their images were proof of US imperial power, and in many cases contributed to that power, not just mirrored it (Cappozola, Rice, Kramer). One of the most powerful ways of representing empire and the subordinate status of Filipinos was through the backwardness of their everyday life.

*Immortalizing the native*

Images of the civilizing progress achieved in the Philippines were prolific (Filipino subjects in neat rows and lines, playing American sports, donning uniforms of the Philippine Constabulary). Frank L. Crone, the first Director of Education of the Philippines (via the First Philippine Commission) was also a photographer when not implementing American educational policies in Philippine schools (Patino). Unlike the sketches in *Judge* and *Puck* magazines, Crone was obsessed with documenting the progress of the native as he moved from the
savage to civilized state. According to Bernadette Patino, his insistence on English-only instruction, the erasure of local dialects in basic education and higher-level curricula, and the introduction of more American and Western texts fueled the “cultural transformation that the American colonizers considered to be the centerpiece of their imperialist project” (Patino n.p.). Photography then was the proof of that transformation, and in Crone’s images, Filipinos were shown engaging in everyday activities that the average American would recognize.

Figure 3.6. Frank L. Crone. Batobalani Negrito/Ragay Negrito. Web
Crone often deployed the trope of the parent-child relationship to justify the United States’ continued presence in the islands, as well as to strengthen his position as the educator of a whole race of people. His rhetoric, along with many other officials at that time, infantilized the Filipino, thus fortifying the notion that America was needed for the natives to progress. His photographs reflected this rhetoric, and bumped up his credibility. His photographs of disciplined Igorot children, “before and after” education mug shots (popularized by Dean Worcester) (Patino), and of Filipinos attending school were a testament to his success as an administrator as well. And the more the images looked familiar to American audiences, the less resistant they would be to the idea of possessing and supporting the imperial project in the Pacific. Likewise, the familiarity of the scenes of American life overlaid on the landscape of the tropics and brown bodies made the public less afraid of these foreigners. The more correspondence
there was between the images of, according to the First Philippine Commission head Jacob Schurman, an “indistinctiveness of American life” and the alien everydays of Filipinos, the more homogenous it was, the more acceptable it was to a collective society. It tamped down the shock of difference and the fear of contamination of that difference.

Curiously, many images of American soldiers in the homesteads of the natives proliferated, as if to prove the safety of the place and the docility of the inhabitants. Entering the home space of the indigenous groups was a major show of superiority, implying the control and in a way, the domestication of their imagined “savageness.” According to Vicente Rafael, benevolent assimilation “amounted to a sentimental reworking of manifest destiny. Instead of annihilation, it called for the domestication of native populations and their reconstruction into recognizably modern political subjects” (54). Infantilized and racialized, Filipinos became the objects of a “sentimental affiliation between colonizer and colonized—the bond between parent and child rather than master and slave…imperialism as a form of good housekeeping” (54). Stabilizing a moment of foreignness through photographs means the ability to visit that moment repeatedly and eventually control and contain what is alien. Control is afforded the viewer or the owner of the photograph, and containment is the fate of the photographic subject. In other words—and in the context of US imperialism in the
Philippines—domestication of the savage Filipino became one of America’s most powerful weapons of subjugation (Fojas, Rice, Brody, Rafael).

If Crone took images of progress, Worcester was fascinated by images of savageness and exoticized these in many of his photographs. Worcester capitalized on his expertise in zoology to practice anthropology and ethnography on Filipino non-Christian tribes, focusing on the difference between brown bodies and white bodies, emphasizing the racial differences and superiority of the American over the tribal Filipino.

Figure 3.8. D. Worcester. Two Negritos. Web.
In *Worcester’s Fantasy Islands*, Mark Rice claims that these comparisons mirrored the segregation against black Americans in the southern United States, extending the space of oppression from the south to the Pacific, and the “domestic conversations about race” (45) to include Filipinos. Worcester used his own body as the measure against which the Negrito tribes and the Igorot tribes were photographed. In many of his photographs he is shown standing next to members of the tribe, towering over them.

![Manobo Woman](Figures/Worcester-Manobo-Woman.jpg)

Figure 3.9. D. Worcester. Manobo Woman. Web.

He was also obsessed with clothing, and the native’s physical ornamentations—tattoos, jewelry, hair—and made detailed descriptions of what he saw (Rice). He considered one’s garments a mark of civility: the less you had on, the more savage and primitive you were; or, what you wore was to be decided by Worcester whether it was actually clothing or not. “In order to reveal
the dress of people on the one hand and their ornamentation on the other, he
variously had to dress or undress individuals for the camera. Their bodies, for this
purpose, were sometimes little more than the armature for what he wanted to
show his Western readers" (Rice 52). He regularly shot these photographs
against a plain white sheet, presumably to highlight the details of the ornaments.
However, the brown Filipino body, set against a white sheet, veiled the contexts
in which they were found. This created a pristine, sanitized surface on which the
Filipino was laid as a specimen to be poked and ogled.

During one of his first visits to the Negrito tribes, he found that many of
them either wore Western-style pants or shirts—likely donated from previous
visitors. In his own journal he admitted to making them remove these articles of
clothing before he took his famous photograph (with the Negrito man, Ybag). This
practice was a particularly disturbing trope when he began photographing tribal
women; these women, by tradition, did not wear any shirts or tops and thus
exposed their breasts. Worcester, however, seemed to fetishize this fact of their
daily lives and dismissed the protocols their cultures established when bare-
breasted women (who were usually married women) were in the company of the
men. Rice reminds us that Worcester had many different audiences for his
photographs, and a nuanced reading should be afforded his images, yet his
archive features troubling images of women in erotic poses, others in visibly
uncomfortable situations, none of them exactly pleased to be photographed.37 And throughout his collection, the white anthropological sheet erased any context to which one might attribute some agency to these individuals. Instead, it emphasized the racialization of the photographic subjects, their treatment as specimens and objects of observation. The brown bodies of the non-Christian tribes became a space to read and interpret the necessity of fulfilling the “manifest destiny,” and women’s “bare brown bosoms the markers of savagery and colonial desire” (Balce qtd. in Rice 189). Worcester felt it was his duty to document the Filipino indigenous tribes and their “disappearing ways” but supported the civilizing mission of the United States. One the one hand Worcester coveted the idea of himself as being the “discoverer” of these people, but on the other hand, his sense of mission to “help” these savages was but an expression of manifest destiny. The curious paradox saw him defending the preservation of their culture from the march of “progress” but declaring to the head of the Philippine commission that the natives needed the United States to civilize them.38 Renato Rosaldo’s concept of imperialist nostalgia expressed itself in his photographs, and was soon taken up in perhaps one of the biggest and most controversial displays of imperialism in modern history: the World’s Fairs.

37 It was Dean Worcester’s photograph of the bare-breasted Tinguianes women of Abra province that created a change in National Geographic’s policies on featuring nudity. Because of his photograph, the magazine began printing similar photographic essays and anthropological stories. Worcester went on to helm National Geographic after his stint in the Philippines.

38 See for instance Mark Rice’s book on the Worcester archives, and Bernadette Patino’s online article about Croné’s work.
Many of Worcester’s images were commissioned to promote the Philippine Village that was being prepared for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair in Missouri. As Secretary of the Interior, he supported and approved the project (Rice, Vostral). Perhaps unbeknownst to Worcester or Crone, the ultimate image of the Filipino would be cemented at this massive event, where more than 1,000 individuals\(^{39}\) from different tribes were transported to St. Louis for the World’s Fair, and their “everyday” was put on display.

In this exhibit the people live just as they do at home. Every day are shown [sic] blacksmithing, weaving, metal working and copper and ore reduction, also dancing every hour of the native dance of the three tribes: Bontoc, Suyoc and Tinguiane. At intervals spear throwing and native ceremonies are to be seen (Report of the Philippine Exposition Board 36).

Whereas previous images were on a faraway archipelago, the actual savages were brought onto American soil. Forty-seven acres of land adjacent to

\(^{39}\) The Filipino Reservation was one of the most expensive projects of the Fair, costing almost 2 million dollars. It was spread over 47 acres and covered with nearly 100 structures. The Reservation was reported to have 75,000 cataloged exhibits and 1,100 representatives of the different peoples of the archipelago consisting specifically, of “18 Tinguians, 30 Bagobos, 70 Bontoc Igorots, 20 Suyoc Igorots, 38 Negritos and Mangyans, 79 Visayans, and 80 Moros” (Vergara, 1995; Sit, 2008).
Arrowhead Lake on the southeast entrance to the fair grounds (of what is present-day Clayton, Missouri) became “home” for these Filipinos for several months. Despite the presence of the Christianized Tagalogs and Visayans (the so-called civilized and cultured race) it was the presence of the “least civilized” Negritos and Igorots, and the “semi-civilized” Bagobos and Moros that were spotlighted. According to the Report of the Philippine Exposition Board to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Filipino tribes were given “natural materials” from the Philippines with which to build their homes. Artifacts such as looms, wood, and other indigenous materials for them to demonstrate the process of

![Figure 3.10. Igorots in a native dance, 1904. Library of Congress. Web.](image-url)
their craftwork, and “tools” they needed to perform traditional rituals were available to them. Separated from the spectators through pen-like structures, the Filipinos were ordered to live as they would if they were back in the islands, going about their business and interactions as if no one was watching. They were made to dress (or undress) as was normal for them (despite the frigid cold weather in Missouri). But millions were watching. As visitors gawked, the Filipinos were forced to stage hunting rituals, marriage rituals, dances for special and sacred occasions and even burials. The ritual cooking and consuming of dogmeat by the Igorots—performed only when an enemy tribe had been defeated—became the most sensationalized aspect of the Philippine Village, and arguably the whole fair. This particular aspect of Igorot culture became one of the
representative images of the Filipinos at the World's Fair, marking their identities as the ultimate savages.


Figure 3.13. Moro Village, 1904. Library of Congress. Web.
Within the Filipino contingent then, there was a hierarchy of “races” and the most primitive of these races was tasked to perform that supposed primitiveness, forsaking any meaning that their actions once held. They and their culture were taken out of time, transforming what was once sacred into the profane, insisting on the everydayness of customs that were historically and culturally tied to their specific environments (Eliade). The white sheet against which some of their members were photographed and whose images were inspected, accounted for and catalogued, was no longer just a piece of cloth; it was now the white gaze, mobile and actively exchanging analyses, that pulled them out of even their make-believe contexts. Their brown bodies, performing an everyday that was all but meaningless, also served as the image of the Philippine islands themselves, staged as objects of desire for their investment potential because of the rich and “virgin” resources available to enterprising capitalists.

The present government invites all honest, intelligent and thrifty men of whatever nationality to assist in restoring to the islands all that they have lost in the past…We have highways to build, railways to construct, forests and mines to exploit, plantations to cultivate, inexhaustible water power to harness, manufactories to establish, modern methods of agriculture to inaugurate, and many
other fields of endeavor are open to capital and industry (Souvenir of the Philippine Exposition” 4).

This call for progress and the “uplifting” of the lives of Filipinos through civilizing missions of education, infrastructure, industry, and others, belied the images that Crone and Worcester collected. Treating Filipinos like children who depended on a “strict” parent, and immortalizing them as people untouched by modernity, reflects Renato and Michelle Rosaldo’s concept of “imperialist nostalgia,” or the longing for what one has already destroyed. According to Renato Rosaldo, this was typical of colonial and imperial authorities who romanticized their exotic “discoveries” as well as their own roles as discoverers of places and people left behind by the march of time. The tribespeople’s innocence and openness, as well as their quaint and primitive ways, became things to preserve. Officials like Crone and Worcester were staunch supporters of efforts to keep the Philippines as a colony of the United States, but they also wanted to keep the markers of progress away from their photographic subjects (Brody, Rice, Fojas).

If one aspect of imperialist desire was to acquire and dominate the savage and its environment, to give it a name and proper place in the hierarchy of civilization, I suggest that the flipside of that longing was the complicated desire to keep things as they were through the same technologies that the colonizers used to speak and justify domination. Both aspects interact in a system of
placing, staging, and scripting that can turn into ideologies for ethnic and cultural identity, as well as for nationalist identity. The nostalgia expressed by the photographs of Crone and Worcester, and the textual and photographic documentation of the 1904 St. Louis Exposition have survived as markers of a whole race’s identity. The everyd...
There is a real fear that we have become merely objects assembled together based memories that may not even be ours.

REFLECTING ON NOSTALGIA

Have Orientalist images from the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century affected current images and ideas of Filipinoness? And do videos by Filipino Americans reify or refute these images? Some videos, like Missy Elumba’s, exude a playful and sensitive approach to the nostalgia by laughing at the clichés. Others, like OoeyGooey Media’s video, tend to emphasize the damaging images about Filipinos. We may go on to compare the messages and impressions both types of videos convey, but we must also acknowledge the fact that they exist at all. The very existence and act of creating vernacular videos provides a way of sorting through the stereotypes created by these visual lists and the list logic that I have examined. After pointing out the colonialist stereotypes that have survived through various structures and modes of representation, we should acknowledge the fact that individuals took the time to create videos and respond to these identity checklists. In fact I argue that the act of creating vernacular videos hints at a sense of reflective nostalgia that could liberate the idea of Filipinoness from a colonialist gaze.
Videographers recognize a distance (estrangement) between themselves and the checklist: these are things that are symbolic to a culture they’ve never known but which they use as a bridge to their elders’ pasts in their collective present. According to Boym, “It is precisely this defamiliarization and sense of distance that drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future” (50). Witnessing the unfamiliar customs and traditions, they know that they are outside of a deeper engagement with it. On this level, they simply observe. However the videos suggest another level of estrangement: that of actually taking the estranging situation and putting themselves inside the scene being observed. Re-enacting the estranging situation from their point of view puts them in proximity to a moment that allows them to reimagine their position in the estranging situation itself. On the other hand, it echoes the ideas of a double estrangement: a doubleness (Du Bois) of existence; a mutability (Said) of identity that renders them unheimlich. In a desire to find a place for themselves mirrored in the situations represented in the videos, they rewrite the scripts and acknowledge their otherness. This acknowledgement of their otherness in turn indicates an awareness of their racial difference, questioning their belonging through the way the outside world might perceive them. They expose the ways in which a view of Filipinoness has been influenced (all this time) by a Western construction of the Filipino. This implies that perhaps they are aware that a true sense of authenticity is irresolvably, irretrievably lost, or is non-
existent. Reflective nostalgia suggests that the work of realizing Filipinoness, then, is not the aspiration for/to an imagined homeland or origin, but a process of deciphering or peeling back the layers of the orientalist conceptualizations of Filipinoness that has generally been accepted as “true.” It’s not about acquiring the position or status of “real” Filipino, but rather a process of working through what that means in the first place (culturally suspended/culturally exiled).

Videographers recognize the need for the lists and symbols for them to begin thinking about their own experiences with Filipinoness. In his video, “Shit People Say to Filipinos (Part 1)” and “Shit People Say to Filipinos (Part 2),” Michael Harley Cruz rattles off a list of comments that he often gets about his ethnicity. “Oh you’re Asian; you didn’t sound like that on the phone. I have to say, out of all the Asians I know Filipinos are the easiest to understand. You’re so hard to understand!” (Cruz, YouTube). The tight editing and barely-visible cuts in the video—in video production parlance, jump cuts—mimic the action of saying all these in one breath, symbolizing perhaps the pervasiveness, frequency and even the simultaneity with which he experiences these comments. Later in the video, the comments turn to stereotypes, and these comments attempt to make him fit certain perceptions of what Filipinos are. “Lea Salonga is such a good singer. You should totally become a famous singer like Charice (Pempengco). For a Filipino, you can’t really sing well. Does your family do karaoke all the time?” (Cruz, YouTube). It becomes evident that there is a tendency to categorize and
label him different things at the same time, sometimes in contradicting ways. The comments suggest the perception that the only Filipinos who are successful are the popular ones who make a name for themselves in the entertainment industry. It’s as if this might be the one place that Filipinos may be recognized and respected.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 3.14. Michael Harley Cruz. "What are you?" Web.

The comments suggest to Cruz that he should consider a career in entertainment for a sure shot at success; but again in the same breath, another comment criticizes him for not being good enough, despite having a karaoke machine in their home—as if all one needs to succeed as a singer is a machine: never mind the talent, hard work, or sacrifice that was put into honing the gift. Just as the jump cuts might suggest the pervasiveness of such comments, it may also indicate the speed with which perceptions towards Asians/Filipino Americans change. These perceptions, it should be noted, are ones that merely move within the sphere of stereotypes and turn to actions of labeling,
categorization, and distancing that effectively and efficiently file away the
difference that messes up the surface of order in the everyday. The complexity of
Cruz’s subjectivity, his history, and by extension that of the Philippines are
comfortably couched in the all-encompassing term “Asian,” or conflated with
being Chinese (“You’re so chinky”). Not only is a doubleness experienced in this
event, it implies that Cruz and all that may be connected to him and his identity
are erased.

And yet, I don’t think he is “erased.” In the video, he stands in front of a
plain white wall, reminiscent of the anthropological sheet used by Dean
Worcester when photographing the natives. The white sheet in Worcester’s
photographs accentuated the natives’ appearances (skin tone, nakedness) and
separated the natives from their contexts. They were turned into objects, silent
and inanimate, specimens to be observed, measured, and catalogued. In Cruz’s
video, his presence in front of the white wall is disrupting. It takes Worcester’s
anthropological visual trope and animates the individual in front of the white
background. There is sound—his voice displaces the silence that the clinical and
sanitized anthropological photograph imposes on the native’s body. There is
movement. Cruz displays a subtle incredulousness with his facial expressions,
and at some point chuckles at the lines he delivers. Some of the items in the list
of “shit things” he enumerates pertain to his appearance, the very thing
Worcester fetishized in his images: “Why do you have a flat nose? Filipinos are
so short. (pointing to his face) Is that a mole?” (YouTube, Shit people say to Filipinos part 1). At one point, Cruz holds both his pointer fingers to the outside of his eyes and says, “Are you this kind of Asian?” mocking the stereotype that all if not most Asians are Chinese, as well as the “physical slur” that identifies the Oriental from other races.

Figure 3.15. Michael Harley Cruz. "Are you this kind of Asian?" Web.

Videographers see stories in these checklists, specifically their personal experiences of trying to understand and live through these strange everyday artifacts and rituals identified as “Filipino.” According to O'Banion, while lists do provide organized knowledge, meaning can be attained through narration, or a story of those details. "List records scientific truth, with logic providing tests of a List's accuracy and universality. Story embodies aesthetic ‘truth’ (meaning), with narration providing guidance in revealing and discovering such situationally bound meaning" (15). Narrating details through the lenses of racialized experiences, micropolitics in everyday encounters with other marginalized groups,
and personal histories in the private spheres of family life, personal relationships, etc., provide lists with a rhetorical dimension.

On the surface, the checklists appear as clichés and the images are reduced to stereotypes. The checklists then provide an image or a map towards the performance of a true Filipino identity; however, the only real destination is the cliché of Filipinoess itself, suspended in digital audio-visual form, endlessly reproduced. The checklists in vernacular videos are conducive to commonplace subject matter. The cliché in general exists as either a harmless stereotype, or as an artifact of abstraction, organization, or objectification. When the videographers point to a plastic bucket as representative of a culture, this is a cliché on one level, especially for the culture that “owns” it. However, it has the potential to become a rubber stamp that those outside of the culture attribute to a whole cultural group. And it would be easy to do so: the cliché is everyday. “Cliché” is a word that grew out of a 19th century tool for photographic processing. In her article, “Snapshots: Visual Culture’s Clichés,” Lynn Berger traces the relationship of the word to the artifact, which served the function of making endless reproductions of printed materials. “Before long, the cliché migrated out of the realm of the strictly mechanical. Doing so, it shed its originally technical connotation and obtained a more pejorative one: that of a phrase that had been reproduced so often it was now trite and hackneyed” (176). The travel snapshot, food shots, selfies, etc., are the modern day digital clichés that allegedly do
nothing to enrich the visual landscape, regarded as the “antithesis of romantic originality and creativity, and…a loss of individuality” (182). And yet the cliché, argues Berger, is also a container of histories, especially of specific, personal experiences in the everyday.⁴⁰ “The practice and experience of everyday photography have become more important than the pictures themselves…[a practice/form that is] alive, immediate, and often transitory” (183, author’s emphasis). In Skin of Film, Laura Marks declares that visual clichés “[call] on a habitual recognition without reflection” (46). Visual clichés obfuscate the object behind the image, compared to estranged and jarring images that encourage the viewer to create links in her memory to make sense of unfamiliar images and create alternate narratives. I agree with Marks’s assertion about a cliché’s obfuscating nature. However I also believe clichés establish the existence and presence of an idea (identity, in other words)—a ground, but a ground that is also contingent. Clichés emerge out of a need for an organizing tool and a signpost that orients understanding in the midst of a chaotic jumble of concepts. Clichés can indeed take on representative functions and latch on to the mind as a mnemonic for making sense of chaos and difference, providing a form or frame for ideas that allow us to begin a discourse. They do not spring up unexpectedly—they are made, both by a history of conflict and encounters with

⁴⁰ In 1888, Kodak began introducing affordable cameras for the mass market, and the meaning of cliché in literature and art “coincided” with the invention of the snapshot (Berger). The snapshot allowed the capture of the most commonplace scenes of the common man, and the images repeat the visual compositions that circulate among friends or family members, including those that nestled in photographic albums (Berger).
beings in daily life. But just as they are made they can also be broken or dissolved—not easily or instantly, but through nuanced uses and perhaps a return to the history of their development.

History after all “is an imaginative and transformative act, one in which fiction and fact endlessly flow in and out of each other” (Zimmerman 16). Writing about home movies in her book *Mining the Home Movie*, Patricia Zimmerman argues that home movies are living archives that are constantly “activated” through various “historiographic and artistic” re-interpretations and readings. They “condense” the political, economic, aesthetic, cultural milieu of the people who created them and the very worlds in which they were created; they are visual representations of an “intimate authorship” of personal and collective memory; and they are “reflexive constructions inflected by both deliberate and unconscious social, political, and psychic dynamics, symptoms of the contradictions between everyday and popular culture” (19). And because people of color were traditionally denied the privilege of writing *their own* histories, the commonplace experiences became a mnemonic for them to “rewrite the body of difference into the text to sustain larger contexts” (17). Zimmerman suggests that home movies, and by extension vernacular video, are auto-ethnographies that capture the individual’s struggle with unresolved longing, and longing for belonging in a particular time period and place. These auto-ethnographic longings reveal the reflective nostalgia that Boym says “does not pretend to
rebuild the mythical place called home; it is ‘enamored of distance, not of the referent itself’” (50). Through the clichés that are reproduced in these videos the videographers find a means to anchor their own personal experiences and stories, animating the information and stereotypes with their own encounters with an estranged culture in the everyday.

The resulting videos express a reflective nostalgia through the specificities of their personal stories. The video’s fragmentary form and unresolved plots express the rather continuous and unending repetition of the situations and stories they produce, mimicking the destination-less longing for an authentic Filipinoness that is unattainable. Mostly told from moments pulled from their personal memories, the videos are acted out through parody and humor, using those as a buffer against the pain of recognizing that the longing and belonging are futile. In *White Love*, Vicente Rafael describes a genre of “episodic narratives” as a possible genre of historical storytelling in Filipino history; they are the marginalized stories of the oppressed and suppressed colonials, everyday stories that are silenced by the voices of those in authority. According to Rafael, the episodic narrative …treats in a more condensed and concise manner clusters of historical details the reflections that do not easily fit into a larger whole. The usefulness of such a form of writing lies in its ability to attend to the play of contradictions and moments of non heroic
hesitation, thereby dwelling on the tenuous, or we might say ironic, constitution of Philippine history…Episodic histories linger on the thresholds of meanings (4).

The “episodic” walks through the recurrent themes in the particularity of experiences of Filipinos coming to terms with fragments of stories meant to build a history to which they can attach their own identities. Drawn from memories of past experience, disjointed and decontextualized practices of tradition and ritual, or the stuttering, twisting articulation of words in a language to which one is alien, episodic histories respond to the unfolding of quotidian micro events, ones according to Rafael do not fit any general heroic narrative, or a national identity narrative, and in this case, ones that also do not seem to fit a cultural narrative.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF REMEMBERING

In the video “Stuff Filipino Parents say,” Abby Ulanimo reenacts her parents’ habits and heavy accents, depicting a typical day in their living room: her mother sobs at the unfolding Filipino telenovela on tv or sings karaoke. Meanwhile her dad absentmindedly digs into a can of nuts after being disappointed by his daughter’s failure to rank first honor at school. The impersonation reflects the same items on the templated Filipino identity checklist,
especially Asian American tropes of model minority, strict parenting, and the unsophisticated foreigner. The scenes are cut together without any special effects. Abby appears in the same sweater as both her mother and father, except when she impersonates her father, a beard is drawn on her face and she wears a cap. The video is shot in the same spot, edited through simple cuts, and the scenes follow one after the other without pause. It is similar in production values to Michael Harley Cruz’s video: minimal editing, the absence of musical scoring, and the single actor performing on camera. In one scene, Abby’s “father” goes on a tirade about how children today are so privileged and take for granted their personal gadgets and their access to technology. “We did not have this technology…we had to play with what he have [sic].” Then he turns nostalgic and talks about his childhood, presumably in the Philippines where they played hopscotch with stones found on the street, calling out to neighborhood friends to play, and actually writing letters. “We don’t have this cellphone where you text, text, text. We write letter, you know. We take the pen and we write a long letter, you know. You say ‘I love you, I miss you,’ and that is more valuable than the text: ‘I C U. Jejejeje’ (Ulanimo, YouTube).
According to Svetlana Boym, reflective nostalgia is “ironic, fragmentary, and inconclusive… aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has just been renovated and gentrified beyond recognition” (50). Reflective nostalgia is opposed to restorative nostalgia’s urge to reconstruct the home as it once was, and avoids association with symbols that insist on authentic representations of a culture and national identity. Yet reflective nostalgia acknowledges links with those symbols in terms of their function as ruins of “home.” They mark the contours of a time and place that are inaccessible to them in their present everyday. In other words, where restorative nostalgia builds the list that organizes the knowledge and definition of a culture’s symbols, reflective nostalgia emphasizes the gaps between items in the checklist, and lives in the contemplation of those gaps. The spaces between items in the checklist are not an indication of a lack, but gaps and openings for
alternate versions of the same events, episodes that revolve around the same objects enumerated by restorative nostalgia. The stories only materialize between breaths taken when reading through the list, pauses that call up fragments of personal memory. The cuts in the videos may lead from one listed item to another, yet they also provide time and space to reveal personal stories that are closer to their identities than the established symbols of restorative nostalgia.

In these vernacular videos, the ironic, fragmentary and inconclusive nature of the episodes and fragments of stories that express reflective nostalgia circulate around the arrangement of Filipino symbols that exist in the physical home, and the videographers take it upon themselves to work through their relationships to them. In this section I identify the ways the three main characteristics of reflective nostalgia are manifested in these vernacular videos. In many instances they overlap, and in others, they may not always be prominent. However, in their very existence as episodic, unfinished parodies of everyday life, many of these videos successfully take the stereotypes enumerated in the identity checklists and insert personal stories that animate the outdated images and impressions of Filipinoness.

One of the nodes of intersection with which the videographers connect is through their parents’ memories. Because these are personal and contextualized events, the second generation finds it difficult to relate; but they try. They step
into their elders’ shoes and try to connect to the past by trying to “be” them. Though “Dad” in Abby Ulanimo’s video laments the loss of the activities of his childhood, he also tries to convey to them the value of communicating through letter writing in the present. He emphasizes taking the trouble and time to work on creating a thoughtful letter, even writing in long hand. He emphasizes the materiality of the pen and paper, and makes the actions of writing heartfelt words, properly spelled. He contrasts the sincerity of writing out “I love you” and “I miss you” to mobile text short cuts like “I c u (I’ll see you)” implying that the less time it takes to type out a note through a machine means the sentiment is less sincere than an actual letter. “Dad” expresses a desire to restore the activities and artifacts of his childhood. But we have to remember it really isn’t Abby’s dad speaking but Abby herself, reinterpreting the moment her father said those words. In the “present” of the video’s creation, both generations intersect, where the elder’s restorative nostalgia for his childhood meets the younger’s reflective nostalgia for imagining a similar childhood, and recognizing alongside it the reality that such a childhood experience is one with which Abby herself will never be able to associate with.

Food is also associated and intertwined with family. Many vernacular videos feature some aspect of family interactions that relate to food, but alongside these representations are an unspoken confusion in the apparent obsession with feeding one another, and being fed by others. In mianicole05’s
video, she displays the unbelievable amount of food set out in preparation for her cousin’s birthday party. Actors in the video by Fobkids Comedy shows a parent schooling the child on the imperative that adobo (touted as the Philippines’ iconic dish) and kanin (rice) must go together, no matter what. Vlogger GJAce likewise accurately recounts how relatives make food an issue in your appearance.

According to GJAce, relatives see you at one gathering and say, “‘Why so skinny?’ Then they feed you a lot and then comment on your weight: huy, why so fat?” In the video, “You know you’re Filipino when” by the group ManilaPhilippines, a young Filipino American observes his Lolo (grandfather, played by the same videographer, this time in costume) peel a balut egg.\(^1\) The young man’s shock and mild disgust is captured as he watches his grandfather consume the egg—duck embryo and all. These representations tend to exoticize practices of immigrant elders and reinforce the stereotype of the primitive Filipino.

One of the enduring stereotypes of Filipinoness is that Filipinos are a race that eats dog meat as a daily staple, thanks to the Igorot display at the St. Louis Exposition. The rituals that accompany the preparation and partaking of food inform the elder generation’s identity; but because the younger generation is removed from that context, the elements of Filipino cuisine are fetishized, the rituals are forgotten, and meaning is lost.

\(^1\) Balut is a fermented duck egg that is eaten as a delicacy in the Philippines. The fetus of the duck is fully formed and swallowed whole. One can have it as a snack or mixed into main dishes. It is so common that one can buy it off street carts or restaurants at any time of the day, or from street vendors at night. Balut has been featured on countless American travel and cooking shows as an exoticized, sensationalized delicacy.
Yet a number of videos seem to rescue those meanings by inserting their own personal experiences with Filipino dishes. For Filipino Americans, food is a connection to the unknown pasts of their elders, even if only symbolically through get-togethers with others members of the Filipino community, and in their own homes (Espiritu, “The Intersections of race, ethnicity, and class”). LazyRon talks fondly about his fondness for staple Filipino dishes and how he personally likes to enjoy them. “I love being Filipino,” declares Lazyron in his video. “You get to have some amazing, and I mean amazing food! I love tocino, longaniza, adobo—Oh my god. And you give me a side bowl of rice and you’ve got yourself a deal!” Chris Raeburn talks about rice in his video, specifying that “You know you’re Filipino when you eat rice for like, breakfast, lunch and dinner. You eat rice with weird-ass food like, you have rice with like, KFC, McDonald’s, pizza, fried chicken, spaghetti.” The pairings sound similarly exotic as eating balut or stewed dog. However, animating the conversation on Filipino food by showing how elements of the cuisine insert themselves into their everyday life rescues the cultural and historical artifact from becoming an ossified item in the identity checklist. Where a simple bowl of rice might provide intense nostalgic responses for the first generation, it opens up multiple possibilities for the Filipino American videographers to imagine the ways that Filipinoness might be reinterpreted in terms of one’s everyday.
The videographers take the ordered symbols of Filipino identity and allow them “to slide away from their original moorings” and prove they are “detachable from any single appropriation in the present” (Rafael 101). Vernacular video as a medium is itself a detached thing, malleable and easily connectible to other discourses and images. It moves and travels in the present, just as its content immortalizes events that have taken place. The past does not die in the past but is instead reanimated in the present, through sound and motion. Where the symbols of the primitive served to freeze the Filipino in this definition, so too do the checklists tend to arrest any new ways of viewing Filipino identity. Immigrant
restorative nostalgia allows one to travel back in time and place and escape the truth of a person’s painful separation from the milieu that formed his/her identity. Those travels back in imagination compel one to gather souvenirs in the form of symbols and symbolic actions and treat them like novelties that “prove” one’s authenticity. In a bid to retain the “aura” of the “authentic native” (Chow qtd. in Nakamura 6) that novelty is reproduced through the digital archive, expressed through lists similar to ethnographic records that admits the primitive into the colonial structure of government, but is categorized separately, at a distance, as “different” or alien. On the one hand, vernacular video may indeed reproduce the structure and theater that frames colonialist gazing, fetishizing a discourse of novelty and presenting it as the origins of identity and spinning it into a rhetoric of nationalist identity.

On the other hand, the same medium allows videographers to defy the categories in the checklist by reflecting on the distance imposed by the definition of those colonialist categories from the everyday realities of their taken-for-granted racialization. Rather than looking away from difference, the videos highlight it. Using sound and motion to literally animate the previously frozen image of the native, the Filipino American videographers return the nostalgic imperialist gaze, fling the words used to categorize and archive difference at those who perpetuated them in the first place. Videos like Michael Harley Cruz’s demonstrate just how ridiculous and demeaning those words are. In creating the
videos, they inject humor and parody to deflect the “seriousness” of keeping to the traditions and revering the symbols of the Filipino as desirable colonial object. Though they don’t necessarily displace the items in the list, they extend the spaces in between the items. They demonstrate that very distance by taking the stereotype not to fetishize difference, but to fetishize the colonial concept of what is alien and foreign. It temporarily dislodges the understanding of Filipinoness as a subjected construct of colonial objectification and appropriation, and reinterprets it as a Filipinoness (re)defined by their own sense of separation from an imagined origin. It infuses meaning into the concept of “Filipino” by situating it within the context of living in a predominantly white society—the society which, ironically, colonized the “authentic native” in the first place. Working within the frame of a reflective nostalgia, the vernacular videos invite a view “beyond the mimetic image” of the video and instead see through it, “[evoking identification] not with the mimetic image, but with an absent person or past event” (Sobchiak 247). Where the anthropological images of the Filipino native implied an opacity in terms of defining Filipino identity, vernacular videos imply an unfinished and ongoing project of uncovering multiple meanings and images of what it means to be Filipino.
Filipinoness happens

In challenging the colonialist fetishization of Filipino identity, vernacular videos use the very symbols deployed by the colonial gaze to challenge the construction of a static, “authentic” Filipino identity. Reflective nostalgia provides a way to think of identity, or one’s identity-as-home, as something dynamic, something that happens, and is not housed in a fixed object or symbol that guarantees a badge of authentic Filipino identity. “The very act of addressing audiences as nostalgic spectators and encouraging them to become involved in re-presenting the past,” the videos invite an “exploration and interrogation of the limits of its engagement with history. Where authentic histories claim to educate us about the past itself, imposing narrative order on chaotic reality, these modern-day reconstructions tell us more about our relationship to the past, about the connections between past and present, and our affective responses. They can also inspire viewers to seek further knowledge and understanding” (Cook 2).

Nostalgia moves us to travel through memory and affect, and inspires opportunities to re-build identity. One path turns toward what easily escapes the everyday, and another turns to that which is informed by the very struggles that force travel in the first place. A person can decide to travel through memory that mimics a “historical tourism,” where she gathers souvenirs to define a collective identity used to push a nationalist identity. Or she can choose to travel and
recognize her displacement and estrangement from a prescribed narrative of identity that fails to address the struggles of her position as a marginalized and racialized subject. It should inspire a desire to challenge mainstream “historical” notions of identity and seek the fragmented and unrecognized stories of those previously defined as alien, different, primitive, and in need of Western intervention. If she is less enamored of the souvenirs to be collected, then perhaps she might pay more attention to the impossibility of rebuilding identity based on outdated reproductions of images and concepts, and recognize the hilarity of forcing these concepts and constructs on her present, her everyday.

In “Native Life in the Philippines,” a rare film fragment that Dean Worcester captured of the Igorot tribes in the Philippines, he fetishizes the everyday lives of this highly cultured and evolved indigenous group. He points his camera toward their “primitive” ways, from their architecture to food preparation, their traditional clothing (focusing on the absence of women’s top garments) to their use of native tools for their everyday chores. Many of the scenes are choreographed, especially the ritual dances performed during celebratory occasions. In one scene, three Igorot men are shown smithing some basic metal tools. Instead of pretending to go about his work as if the camera were absent, the older of the two men, sitting directly in Worcester’s view, looks directly into the camera, a barely perceptible smile on his face. His subtle actions seem to indicate that he was waiting for a cue from Worcester, and suggesting to the viewer that this was
a staged scene that served to provide visual proof to the assertion of the Igorot’s backwardness in light of American colonial technology. The subtle glances seem to rearrange the stage from which he is supposed to be viewed as object. Acknowledging the camera’s presence, as well as Worcester’s, disrupts the colonial mission of capturing and archiving the native, of fetishizing the primitive, and of safely gazing at the scantily-clad brown body from a distance. Instead, the Igorot looks back bemusedly, pulling the viewer in with him, so that one is co-present in that moment of revealing the contrived scene of “everyday life”. Acknowledging the presence of that distance, the native reclaims his mobility, and his ability to move back and forth across it, and to challenge the terms with which he is described and the lens with which he is seen. The look of the Igorot challenges Worcester’s, and our view of him: is he savage, or is he Igorot? Is this Filipinoness or is Filipinoness a construct of identity imposed by the technology of the camera and the colonial project?

These vernacular videos become a starting point for a discourse on history, identity, and of imagining an alternative idea of Filipinoness. Identity is not a matter of finding a static definition of one’s home—geographically or temporally—but rather a way to think of home as a dynamic state of always becoming. Restorative and reflective nostalgia can exist alongside each other, and in this instance one type enables the other. Just as the concept of Heidegger’s authentic everyday needs the inauthentic to reveal itself, the interplay of the
video form and the content in the quotidian environment of “home” reveals situations we don’t see and are only suggested by the presence of the medium. Ironically, the checklist’s naming of things Filipino Americans should possess and feel is likewise silent about what they are currently going through as Filipino Americans. While the checklist is thought to drive the making and content of the video, the existence of the project—its coming into being—exposes the gaps and calls into question the checklist’s validity and assertion of an original and authentic homeliness in Filipinoness. The very act of performance and parody, the acknowledgement of the misunderstandings, and the genuine, honest bewilderment at the strangeness of the “everyday” artifacts of Filipinoness inspires a double estrangement, and a layered nostalgia that allows them to see themselves seeing themselves through constructs that were imposed on them. This encourages a venture into a homelessness that reveals a process of interrogating not just the notion of Filipinoness as a home for their identity, but the very notion of homelessness as a process of revealing identity.
Chapter 4 | Transitions: An/Other Beginning

“All at once it is our transience and impermanence that our visibility expresses, for we can be seen as figures forced to push on to another house, village, or region.”

--Edward Said, After the Last Sky

“To survive the Borderlands/you must live sin fronteras/be a crossroads.”

--Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera

“ay manong/your old brown hands/hold life, many lives/within each crack/a story.”

--Virginia Cereño, “You Lovely People”

Whether they are aware of it or not, the videographers mention hybridity quite often, and demonstrate a liminality through positions they have identified as being half of one ethnicity and that of another. Some videographers explain their cultural hybridity as a result of being transplanted from the Philippines to the United States and/or Canada (ThatLinguistic, Jboy). Vlogger ThatLinguistic says she’s “pretty whitewashed,” having lived away from the Philippines since she was very young and not being able to speak her native language well. Others begin their videos by explaining their racial hybridity. Cousins Mia Nicole and Sadie Marie introduce themselves to the YouTube audience at the beginning of their video.
“(Mia Nicole) Both of us are Filipino.

(Sadie Marie) I am half Filipino.

(N) And I am half Filipino as well.

(S) And I am American Filipino.

(N) And I am Italian-Filipino” (mianicole05, YouTube).

Lazyron provides a single word to describe himself: “I am half-Filipino. Half of me is Filipino and the other half is Caucasian. So I am what you know as a halfbreed [sic]. Halfbreeds are awesome. You get the best of both worlds” (Lazyron, YouTube). These claims to hybridity offer Filipino American videographers an identity. Not “purely” American or “purely Filipino” they inhabit a space in-between, where they claim to “get the best of both worlds.” Yet what are featured in these videos are the peculiarities of the Filipino “half” of themselves and not the other half of the hybrid term (American). For GJ Ace, who is also of mixed ethnicity, a common ground he finds is in the marginalization of those ethnicities. “You all know I’ve already expressed my ghetto side in two vlogs,” says GJ Ace. “So I feel I need to express my other side, my Asian side. Yes, I am half Asian… my mom was born and raised in the Philippines so you know she’s fob” (GJAceTV, YouTube). To authenticate his ethnicity, GJ Ace uses the word
“FOB,”* to emphasize the fact that his mother is an immigrant, and the word “ghetto” to signify that his father is black. These terms point to spaces that have been traditionally regarded as marginalized, and suggest positions of exclusion. However GJ Ace redeploys these terms from a position that puts him in neither of those spaces.

Figure 4.1. Lazyron. “I’m what you call a halfbreed.” Web.

They talk about being Filipino or the idea of Filipinoness, but not “Filipino Americanness.” What does it mean to claim this in-between space and yet focus on the world that seems to be farthest from them, but is also closest in terms of marking their identities? It marks their skin, their look, the spaces of their everyday home lives. Does hybridity indeed allow them to inhabit both worlds at the same time, or does it function as a vehicle that allows them to transition from one world to another at different times?

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* “Fresh Off the Boat,” a derogatory term used to describe immigrants as being uncultured, clueless, unsanitary.
The previous chapters on translation and nostalgia discussed the ways Filipino Americans, through their vernacular videos, moved between languages, and worked through the in-between spaces of their elders’ memories, the absence of their own, and the way they attempt to move beyond them (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). The constant shifts in perspectives speak to a duality of locales that is referred to as “home,” as well as the hybrid position of the Filipino American politically, culturally, and racially. In translation, one identifies the languages s/he moves into and out of, and ultimately a language that is most comfortable is chosen. Meanwhile, nostalgia sees an image and acknowledges the emotions it evokes, and works towards emulating both. Whether it is an ideal or problematic image is a different discussion, but what pervades the nostalgia is the sense of a homecoming in some form: whether it’s the reincarnation of a “lost” home, or the creation of a different home to respond to the loss. A transition on the other hand is the recognition of the movement itself, the awareness of the in-between-ness of travel, of being nowhere and somewhere at the same time. As Edward Said intimates in the epigraph of this chapter, it is through movement that his people—the refugee and exiled Palestinians—are seen at all. This mobility may be construed as a desire to move away from what is painful (loss, fear of the unfamiliar), or to move toward an unknown end, away from what is familiar. It is, in Heidegger’s terms, a “venture” into the Open, or the unknown, overwhelming sway. A constant movement pervades the identity of the Filipino American, but
the videographers formulate their hybridity by making the abject “half” of themselves mobile thus animating a static identity labeled “Filipino American.” If we think of “Filipino American” as a fixed identity, a destination, I suggest that these videographers actually identify themselves by their ability to switch and shift between being American at one time, Filipino at another, Filipino American at another opportunity, or something else they may only encounter at a specific moment. In other words, Filipino American identity is always transitioning.

I work through the idea of Filipino Americans’ experiences of hybridity as a mode of estrangement. Filipino American videographers demonstrate a transitionality—a dynamic state of being in constant motion that inscribes their presence through their projects. To paraphrase danah boyd, they write themselves into being through the shifting, hybrid personalities, characters, situations, and objects encountered in their vernacular videos. I suggest that they use their hybridity strategically as a tool, and their videos are the space in which we witness them work through story fragments of their everyday life in an effort to form an image of themselves. I extend the post-colonial notion of hybridity posited by Homi Bhabha interchangeably with transitionality. For Bhabha, hybridity is informed by a “beyond”: a space and time yet to be defined, but one we witness acquiring some form as it is emerging from the constant movement/s of those similarly undefined, ambiguous, or those recognized as strange. “A hybridity [is] a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’
reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive ‘image’ at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world” (13).

Hybridity, as Bhabha proposes it, is an empowered state or identity that allows diasporic populations—migrants, refugees, exiles, especially from former colonies—to travel to the “center” of the metropole and engage in exchange that enriches culture, language, politics, nationalism. I wish to interpret hybridity not only as an identity that marks the individual, but as a tool that explores possibilities beyond hybridity. I propose a focus on the notion of hybridity as mobility itself—a strategic hybridity—that emphasizes the transitionality/transitional nature of identity that emerges in encounters in everyday life.

The transitionality of strategic hybridity in everyday life gives Filipino Americans a tool to write different versions of themselves that also have an effect on the conditions in which they are embedded. These versions shore up forgotten stories, histories, and presences—fragments that didn’t “fit” into larger narratives of belonging. I discuss the lives of the Filipino farmworkers and laborers who arrived in America at the turn of the 20th century, and their forgotten struggles for equality and their contribution to the civil rights movements. Their stories now only exist in fragments, and the threat of erasure looms over their inclusion in American history. In the same way, I see these Filipino American
videographers piece together the fragments of their Filipinoness through the creation of their vernacular videos as a movement against invisibility. Through the videos, they reinscribe themselves as more than a hybrid inassimilable Asian/Asian American model minority stereotype.

The Filipino farm workers’ stories demonstrate the transient and fragmented existence of Filipinos/Filipino Americans in American history, encourage us to reorient our attention towards the Filipino diaspora, and in the process reveal the motivation for second generation Filipino Americans to figure out their Filipinoness through improvisations of Filipino culture encountered in their homes. If Filipinoness happens, what happens next? This is the question that guides this chapter. This chapter suggests different ways of responding to the question, inspired by the improvisation presented in these vernacular videos, their engagement with everyday artifacts, and the habit of questioning any stabilized notions of hybrid identities. Far from resisting the roots of heritage, the act of questioning keeps the idea of what Filipinoness is, or what Filipinoness can be, open.
Extricating their Filipino heritage as the topic for discussion, the videographers call attention to the elements that make them half-American, or what we might say “makes them different.” This frame presumes there is a prevailing idea of what is commonplace, normalized, and indistinguishable. There is generally one acceptable way of being, and to be different is a risk that threatens one with the label “outsider.” However the videos suggest that hybridity is a struggle against invisibility. Displacing themselves from what is considered “normal” is the Filipino American’s method for being seen, and the videographers create recesses in the smooth surface of homogenized identities, emphasizing and creating gaps they can extend to allow themselves to “write” other ways of being, and experiment with other methods of writing. Bhabha refers to the emergence of these gaps as interstices, moments and spaces of the “representation of difference…a complex, on-going negotiation” (2) that seeks the acknowledgement of the hybrid presence, an attunement to the cultural comingling, and the overlapping meanings and nuances of words and concepts produced by colonialism and imperialism. The hybrid though, belonging wholly to neither one nor the other “original” culture, is largely unseen. In terms of space,

[43] In this relationship, the hybrid remains in a subordinate position, wanting to be “hailed” (Ahmed, Althusser) as someone recognizable.
the hybrid does not completely belong to any geographically-identified group that grants a definite identity. The absence of a physical or material relationship to a place lessens one’s claim to that identity. “With the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is estranged from that identity, place or regime” (Dillon qtd in Ahmed 25). Without the experience of being identified with any place, one is easily construed as a stranger, who, according to Sara Ahmed is recognized precisely because of his recognizability as being “not one of us.” This leaves the person in a more abject position: devoid of origin, history, and agency. In The Location of Culture, Bhabha links the hybrid presence to “art as a historical haunting” that desires to be heard and understood, indeed to be recognized as a being dwelling in the in-between but also “beyond” the poles of the oppressor and the oppressed. He refers to a hybrid presence as “being not defined” (13) and therefore homeless from any sort of definitive identity. This liminal existence sees the hybrid dwelling on borders, between recognition and disavowal, and faces the constant threat of erasure.

And yet, according to Bhabha, the hybrid position presents an opportunity for empowerment: a third space emerges from their position on the borders, in which the embodiment of colonial power and subaltern resistance produces an ambivalent location where a new culture emerges. Here, activities that articulate the confluence of history, language, personal experiences, etc., re-present the
image of the colonial authority in a disjointed mimetic figure that is “almost the same but not white” (89), dislocating and disrupting the position of the colonial master and exposing its instability. The hybrid, says Bhabha, re-presents itself through a metonymy of presence, or the recognition of the partiality of their existence where “its peculiar ‘replication terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition…its mockery” (115). In the articulation of their ambiguity and their not-belonging wholly to any one space, they are able to move between multiple interstices, juxtaposing previously-ignored concepts, linking spaces and locations, connecting with times past and present. This is obvious in the way GJAce pulls the abject spaces of his parents’ “origins” together. In using the terms “ghetto” and “FOB” he expresses the way in which these spaces and identities are relegated to the margins, outside of traditionally white centers. The black and brown bodies inhabiting these spaces are considered outsiders, abject others identified as inferior to the white Western body running the cultural, intellectual, and economic centers. However, as racially and culturally hybrid and belonging to neither of these experiences, GJAce “disturbs” the surface by foregrounding his Asian side (after he explains that he previously presented his “ghetto” side), shifting the interstices to make room for his own dual experience. He does this from a third space: the space created by his presence.

Hybridity is a position and identity that Bhabha believes offers oppressed others a voice, and resists dominant, homogenizing narratives of imperial and
colonial powers. Hybridity subverts the ordered and controlled surface of colonial power, on which the colonizer wishes to see the native reflected. Disrupted by the hybrid’s presence—or his insistence—on joining the mainstream discourse, s/he “contaminates” the environment with the impurities of a hybrid’s counter-narratives (Beya np). However, there are scholars who believe hybridity “is a risky notion. It comes without guarantees” (Kraidy iv). Although hybridity resists homogenization by a dominant culture, scholars claim that hybridity has a tendency to homogenize as well.

According to Marwan Kraidy, uncritical use of hybrid terms (mestizaje, creolization, metissage, syncretism) in discourse has made the concept vulnerable to globalization, glorifying hybridity as an all-inclusive term that welcomes notions of multiculturalism and diversity. It also covers over the imbalances in power, privilege, and differences in struggle that some mixed race populations experience over others (Gilroy, Clifford, Beya, Kraidy). The case of Asian Americans is complex because many Asian immigrants identify with ethnic backgrounds more than the region (Asia itself being an ethnically and linguistically diverse continent). And while countries like the Philippines experience some advantages in terms of acculturation (because English is a second language, and familiarity with the American way of life gives them some

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44 In other words, the hybridity-acclaimers want to suggest first, that the colonialist discourse’s ambivalence is a conspicuous illustration of its uncertainty; and second, that the migration of yesterday’s “savages” from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their “masters” underlies a blessing invasion that, by “Third-Worlding” the center, creates “fissures” within the very structures that sustain it (Beya, np).
knowledge on how to relate with Americans), other immigrants from the region go through more challenges because of the language barrier, religious and cultural differences, and access to opportunities for better work and education. This imbalance carries on to the second generation, those who identify as Asian Americans born and/or raised in the United States (Wolf and Espiritu). These struggles go unnoticed as everyone gets lumped under the hybrid term Asian American, and stereotypes become the mnemonic with which they are identified. Model minority, robot Asian, and the perpetual foreigner (Guo and Lee; Espiritu) become stabilized identities and categories that normalize the differences among Asian Americans. Victor Villanueva underscores this notion among persons of color when he says “we are the victims of racism in being regarded as all alike” (42).

Recently though, and quite disturbingly, lumping Asian Americans with whites has become an emerging trend. In an article for Aljazeera America about an Asian American character in the television program, Orange is the New Black, Carrie Wong writes,

Being Asian and being white are becoming less and less mutually exclusive and the boundary between them (particularly in arenas such as work and education) increasingly porous. But the induction of Asian-Americans into whiteness doesn’t alter the meaning of whiteness; rather, it’s a reminder that whiteness has never been
defined by a person’s country of origin or genetic makeup. It’s simply a tool, one that can continue to operate even with the inclusion of certain minority groups. (n.p.)

Asian Americans are categorized alongside whites because of their “traditional quiescence,” their high rate of acculturation, and their hard work that has allowed them to “make it”—a painful paradox that forces Asian Americans to conform to the myth of the American Dream, and fulfill the stereotype of the model minority (Zhou). The danger lies in the fact that ‘white’ is deployed as an umbrella term for “success” (Volokh, Kristof), effectively erasing the differences in cultures and struggles that different Asian groups experience. The argument that all Asians are successful crumbles when demographics of Asians who are in America as refugees of war are less likely to conform to the “successful Asian” stereotype (Liu, Zhou). Asians become invisible again, and disappear into the discourses of post-colonialism as proof of the overcoming of racial divisions in America (Kristof, Nakagawa). Hybridity merges into an identity that subtly erases differentiated histories, experiences, languages, as it projects the “unpredictability of its presence” (Bhabha 114) as a fused and undifferentiated figure of a new other (Bhabha).

Writing about the impossibility of grasping post-coloniality in the present, Sara Ahmed argues that taking post-coloniality as the context in which history occurs serves to cover over the complexities of the effects of colonialism in
different places, times, and among different people. In her book *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed argues that defining a “post-colonial” time and place, and hence, a post-colonial subject of that time, is a conservative move that fails to address the assymetrical power relations that shape a colonial encounter and ultimately a post-colonial “other.”

There is an intimate relationship between colonial encounters, dislocation and hybridity. Colonial encounters disrupt the identity of the ‘two’ cultures who meet through the very process of hybridization—the meeting of the ‘two’ that transforms each ‘one’.

But just as the conditions of meeting are not equal, so too hybridization involves differentiation (the two do not co-mingle to produce one). How others are constituted and transformed through such encounters is dependent upon relationships of force. (12)

In this formulation, hybridization is a process that is meant to reveal an assymetrical distribution of power between two entities, and not the process of identifying someone or something as mixed. What I appreciate in Ahmed’s definition is the attention to power relations/conditions of production of that hybridization. It reveals that in the process of hybridization, one entity is subsumed or co-opted by another in the goal of trying to make oneself visible. One becomes visible under the terms of the dominant power’s framework for being seen: in Ahmed’s work, it is the figure of the stranger that is identified
precisely because it is identified as not belonging, and therefore threatening and dangerous. In a way, then, the hybrid is not only conceptualized as an other, but as a stranger as well. This is true especially of migrants who enter national borders and allegedly contaminate the center of power: in defining the limits of the city and its inhabitants, Ahmed says, one necessarily defines the outsider/foreigner as stranger.45

Counter arguments to the concept of the hybrid and the ambivalent third space contend that its existence is framed within the terms of the colonizer (Severini), and is thus limited to one of three possibilities of “being” (Majumdar). An imbalance still exists in the third space, in which the hybrid and his/her culture is “permitted to freely flow, intersect and influence,” but in a way that does “not necessarily … transcend colonial hierarchy” (Severini np). A tendency to prescribe the hybrid as a model for “true forms of resistance and oppositionality” (Lavie and Swedenburg 162) merely inscribes the hybrid back into the terms of a dominant culture through popular forms of mass media, and even “high artistic forms.” In their paper, "Between and Among the Boundaries of Culture: Bridging Text and Lived Experience in the Third Timespace," Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg claim:

45 What becomes strange is the non-white half of Asian Americans, and it is this half that I associate with “strangerness” in the sense that it is the part of them that they separate out of experiences of not-belonging; not as a racial signified. As the strange Filipino half, their presence on the land is deemed a transgression and efforts to subsume them into a term that allows them accommodation defeats the purpose of the effort to be seen.
A new hierarchy of cultural practices has emerged, and the old category of the exotic is now occupied by the hybrid. Once again, the Other, now hybrid, is reinscribed by the Eurocenter. The hybrid appears out-landish and weirdly funny to the White Western audiences that consume these textual productions and the theoretical readings of them. This is because of the persistence of our primordial notions of culture as forever fixed and impermeable.

(162)

The notion of the hybrid-as-the-new-Other challenges Bhabha’s representation of a space of resistance, and (based on the videos mentioned above) seems to reinforce itself as an aberrant-though-entertaining artifact of difference that essentializes itself in a space deemed democratized, emancipatory, and collaborative (Burgess and Green, Jenkins, Arroyo). Lavie and Swedenburg’s argument calls out how the spaces in Bhabha’s formulation turn into fixed spaces and how hybridity turns into a unified identity as the “New Other.” In other words, the spaces that hybridity creates are easily co-opted by the dominant culture as a novel artifact. They become contained spaces of entertainment where the hybrid, perceived as still foreign and strange, can be approached without fear of consequence or contamination.
Strategic Hybridity as a tool

Despite these scholars’ critiques on the limitations of the hybrid and third space model, I cannot discount hybridity’s value in initiating the discussion on liminality, race, and resistance. Though the above counterarguments are persuasive, Bhabha’s concepts of in-betweenness can be extended beyond the triangle of colonized-colonizer-hybrid. Therefore, I wish to explore the possibility of a multiplicity of positions that stretches the hybrid’s reach. Paul Meredith, writing about hybridity in Maori culture, proposes using hybridity as a “lubricant” to move in and through the liminal spaces and interstices created by the spatialization of articulated identities. “The hybrid’s potential is with their innate knowledge of ‘transculturation,’ their ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion” (3). In other words, how might these vernacular videos and videographers activate their hybridity as a tool that allows them to shift their position and reorient the conditions that install them into that position? If Wong, in her article about an Orange is the New Black character, refers to whiteness as a tool, then perhaps race—defined by the differences of color in opposition to whiteness—can be conceptualized in a similar way to challenge invisibility. The fusion of two conflicting “knowledges” and “worlds” in the hybrid is not without its own particular struggle. Hybridity produces a
subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking. It singularizes the ‘totality’ of authority by suggesting that agency requires a grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it requires movement and maneuver, but it does not require a temporality of continuity or accumulation; it requires direction and contingent closure but no teleology and holism. (Bhabha 184-185)

There is a power dynamic that agitates the position of the hybrid, where one is constantly struggling for dominance against the other at different moments and in different spaces. When one seeks identification with certain groups or one needs to differentiate against certain stereotypes, the parts of the hybrid self that can pass as members of a group or digress from the discourse of fetishized difference begin to surface. These are the moments that I believe the videographers capture when the identification with Filipinoness occurs. Borrowing Gayatri Spivak’s idea of “strategic essentialism,” I propose a notion of “strategic hybridity”\(^46\) to highlight these moments of prominence where a subaltern identification holds the mirror up to reflect a haunting presence against the

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\(^{46}\) After this final chapter was drafted, I came across the article, “Strategic Hybridity: Some Pacific Takes on Postcolonial Theory” by Paul Sharrad. Sharrad uses similar concepts as I do in his articulation of strategic hybridity and likewise advocates a reading of hybridity as a dislocation from a static identity, which he then applies as a lens to analyze Pacific Islander texts and literary works. Unfortunately I did not have time to include his ideas in this project. His work and his formulation of strategic hybridity are worth exploring in future projects and studies, thus offering richer dimensions to both our ideas of strategic hybridity.
dominant culture. The hybrid inspires agency through the activation of the metonymic fragments of him/herself as tools that allow him/her to move, to transition beyond the spaces that contain hybridity as an identity.

In her essay, “Race as Technology,” Beth Coleman makes the controversial proposal of denaturing and decoupling race from its biological roots and proposing it as an immaterial phenomenon. She reasons that race has long been thought of as a frame/framework, giving its implementors power by engaging discourses against it with the same terms used to establish it. Hence, those racialized and marginalized are robbed of their agency and are stuck in systemic racist oppression. Her proposal is to unmoor the idea of race from its function as a historical and biological determinant and to think of it as a tool or “technology.” Coleman suggests moving beyond the cultural predisposition of naturalizing “racial difference as lack” and aspire to disinterest, dislocating race’s status as a “de facto biological object. Creating a distance from the inherited logic of race…enables an aesthetics and an ethics of race: an agent can judge the strategic value of one mode of representation over another (182).” She proposes

A notion of race as technology…moves toward an aesthetic category of human being, where mutability of identity, reach of individual agency, and conditions of culture all influence each other. As a tool, race can be used for ill as well as for good; it may become a trap or a trapdoor. I base this turn from tool of terror to
mechanism of agency not on magical thinking, but rather on the ethical choices that one may make every day. (181, my emphasis)

Using the metaphors of tools such as a cane (prosthesis), the lubricating cup invented by Elijah McCoy for steam engines, and a levered mechanism, Coleman provides instances when using race as a tool granted agency, mobility, and a reorientation of rhetorical situations and material conditions. If one thinks of race, and in this case, hybridity, as a tool, certain characteristics attend: its use becomes contingent, therefore always within the dictates of the moment, and according to one’s agency to use it; like a levered mechanism, it is not connected to the body but allows one to manipulate it (the tool) to point the body in a specific direction; it is a prosthesis that in addition to granting the body a degree of mobility and the ability to remain “unstuck,” it “helps form location and provides information” (194); it exposes the multiplicity of uses, and hence a multiplicity of positions and identities. Although displaced from biological and historical structures, Coleman maintains the material effects of using race and its ability to challenge power structures depends on who possesses and wields the tools of race, and who organizes the patterns. “Race as technology recognizes the proper place of race not as trait but as tool…to reconceptualize how race fits into a larger pattern of meaning and power” (185). Race continues to be a fundamental aspect of hybridity. If we can think of race as a tool or mechanism, this could be a way that hybridity is moved out of the limitations of a post-colonial
framework. Thinking of race as a tool suggests that we think of hybridity as a tool as well, one that lubricates, directs, mobilizes, and multiplies. It is a tool that shapes and is constantly reshaped according to its uses at different times and by different individuals.

Hybridity then can be conceptualized less as an identity as a position, and more as something one wears occasionally, strategically. Kristin Arola uses the artifact of regalia as a way to articulate the strategic use of mixed blood Native Americans in their online personas on social media. Arguing that regalia exists in an “ecology of meaning tied up in [the] representation” of “one’s ongoing life,” Arola claims that mixed blood Native Americans’ “online regalia” is an expression of the Native American’s life as intimately tied to embodied everyday experience. “Regalia firmly positions one within a shifting continuum of embodied identities” (219). Like Arola, I conceptualize hybridity’s tool-ness like regalia; a garment one slips into to move out of an absolute state of being. Strategic hybridity is an expression of transitionality that highlights the estranging performance of hybrid identification and its emergence at the intersections of everyday life. It doesn’t seek instant resolutions or stabilization, but responds and takes shape at the moment of conflict or collision. Writing about migration as a form of estrangement, Sara Ahmed picks up on transitions and transitionality as a condition for being.

[A] process of transition [is] a movement from one register to another. To become estranged from each other, for example, is to
move from being friends to strangers, from familiarity to strangeness. The term is suggestive precisely because it names the process of moving from one to the other, *rather than referring to different states of being*. The process of moving away or estrangement involves a reliving of the home itself: the process of moving is a movement in the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home. (92, author’s emphasis)

Transitional movement is an estranging action. If movement is the means through which the other is perceived in relation to space, then it is also how her subjectivity and agency is constituted. A migrant subject who will inhabit a “new” home *has to move/induce movement* towards the action of being at-home, but the condition of her being there in relation to the space remains an estranging relationship. Similarly, I propose that strategic hybridity and transitionality, as expressions of each other, are demonstrated in different, though as-yet undetermined forms or actions, but are always activated contingently in the lives of persons of color. Strategic hybridity is a response to transitionality yet I conceptualize strategic hybridity as an instance of transitionality as well. Transitionality is the confluence of estranged conditions in which we find ourselves, the decisions we make that allow us to move through and alongside the overlapping political, economic, racial, gendered moments that influence our choice of self-identification.
Before discussing strategic hybridity in relation to Filipino American history and vernacular videos, I feel an explanation is needed in my conceptualization and use of transitions as a metaphor for the kind of movement I envision in strategic hybridity. In his brilliantly illustrated book, *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud discusses the spaces between panes of a comic strip as performing the work of transitions, and compares the work it is doing in Western and Eastern (Japanese) comics. Calling it an act of “closure,” McCloud asserts that audiences participate in the storytelling by filling in the gutters—the blank spaces between panes—by “writing in” the invisible or unseen actions that lead from one illustrated image to the next. The act creates a “continuous, unified reality” (67) that completes a narrative in the reader’s mind. “The reader’s deliberate, voluntary closure is comics’ primary means of simulating time and motion” (69). The process of closure, at least in Western comics, is meant to get the reader somewhere or sometime by a logical progression of moments, actions, subjects, and scenes, assembled through segmented illustrated panes. This demonstrates a logical unfolding of time or the proper sequencing of movement through space, using the gutters as a bridge to connect separate moments or actions (McCloud).
However, the work done by gutters in Japanese comics is different. According to McCloud, Japanese comics connect aspects of a single scene, forcing the reader to “assemble a single moment using scattered fragments” (79, my emphasis). Comparing the effect of a one-panel kitchen scene to establish a particular space and time, to the same scene cut up in multiple panels focusing on different elements of that scene—a boiling pot, a piece of vegetable being chopped, a face—evokes a different place and mood. McCloud suggests that this use of transitions demonstrates Western cultures’ goal-orientedness to Eastern cultures’ “rich and labyrinthine” approach to art (81). Japanese comics—itself considered an art—“often emphasize being there over getting there,” (81, author’s emphasis). This speaks to the Eastern approach of embracing negative space, the role of silence, minimalism, and the fragmentation of foregrounded subjects and tones to reveal the picture plane. In other words, it reveals the “emptiness” and alternate potentials beneath the sounds and figures that primarily catch our attention.

“The reader is released—like a trapeze artist—into the open air of imagination then caught by the outstretched arms of the ever-present next panel...But is it possible that closure can be managed in some cases that the reader might learn to fly?” (90). Transitions reveal a creativity and meaningfulness inspired by the act of closure between gutters, drawn from our understanding and experiences of everyday life. However, the suggestion of
movement beyond the two panels, the contingency and ambiguity of what goes on at the moment of transition, is the point I wish to emphasize. The use of the gutter by Japanese artists draws attention to the existence of the multiplicity of versions of a single event. Each version exists in a single representation and is unfolded by the different ways a particular reader’s experiences inform their reading. The transitions clue us into those possibilities, and make us aware of how it functions differently for different readers at different times.

Like comics, video montages are disparate scenes and figures joined together by transitions, which can be cuts between moving images, music, sound effects, or special effects. The simplest transition is the cut, and mimics the way we blink our eyes as our sight takes in a shot and then focuses on a specific object in the scene. Transitions also happen through sound: sneaking-in or cross-fading natural sound on tape, and music, projects or directs the viewer or listener towards a new scene or idea. Dissolving images mimics memory or the way one calls up memory in the present; superimposing one onto the other connotes disorientation. Fancier video effects of course exist—such as wipes or flips, or more recently, three-dimensional shifts. Transitions hold the scene’s elements together, the sequences of events, and the suspension of the audience’s disbelief. Transitions assist in keeping the audience in the “space”

47 While these may serve some aesthetic or technical function, I consider these more "manufactured" and programmed. Some of these are used in a number of the vernacular videos, perhaps as a way to add style or break the monotony of scenes. However, the simpler the transitions, the less cluttered and confused the narrative is.
that the montage sets out to create; transitions that are too fancy tend to break audience attention and disrupt their immersion in the story. As much as possible then, transitions work to make themselves invisible as they hold together the project of moving the story forward.

During editing, the cut isolates a particular scene and removes all extraneous elements, and connects a scene to another scene to form a sequence that contributes to a narrative.\(^\text{46}\) This small term shifts in meaning when one “cuts out” superfluous elements, and when one “cuts into” a scene to highlight objects, moments, reactions, or actions. The act of cutting activates both effects at the same time and opens possibilities for the cut scene; the scene remains a floating fragment that tells its own story, it connects or joins different fragments, it connects to itself through repetition, or it is appended at the end of a sequence as the sequence ending. A scene may be complete after a cut, or it may be a point of connection to move things forward—the way the cars of a train detach and connect and pull one another forward on the train tracks.

Most vernacular videos use montage to tell their story. The montage works well for reenactment-style videos as well as the interview-style videos, where cuts as transitions connote a shift in spatial perspective and the “breaking up” of time. In Missy Elumba’s video, as well as mianicole05’s video, the montage allows them to move through the home as they accomplish everything on the

\(^{46}\) See Sergei Eisenstein’s narrative theory of montage.
identity checklist. The video reenactments of Take220, Abby Ulanimo, and Sexcyanip13 use montage to connote time passing or time shrinking, if we interpret the quick succession of events occurring within the time it took to view the video as time unfolding. Even vlogs make use of cuts that produce incremental shifts in the video frame, and the video seems to jump—this happens when the vlogger’s unnecessary words are cut out and the fragments are reconnected, but the images in the scene remain static. These jump cuts imply time passing in the same space.

A dialectical relationship results from the juxtaposition of the scenes, and the ways that the cuts function. This echoes the montage theories developed by Russian filmmakers at the beginning of the 20th century. Practitioners such as Les Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Dziga Vertov theorized various approaches to montage. Where Eisenstein developed montage theory through his five principles/types of montage, Vertov developed a counterpoint, anti-formalist approach he called the montage of the “everyday unaware.” Eisenstein believed the collision of shots in a scene delivered maximum impact and meaning. By juxtaposing two different and conflicting shots, new meaning emerges, and thus change can be achieved (Nelmes). Vertov thought that Eisenstein’s approaches masked the function of the camera as a human eye. Vertov believed that the camera should be capturing everyday life in an unadulterated way, and he called this the kino-pravda, or “film truth.” Both approaches resonate some similarities
with the transitions discussed by McCloud: where one approach focuses on a logical progression of events, the other immerses itself in the moment or scene, opening up different possibilities for the unseen to be interpreted by the viewer.

In the discipline of anthropology, ethnographic film has been the topic of much conversation, especially in the use of the observational long shot and montage films. Observational long shots, were first used by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, and quickly became the standard form of visual ethnography. According to Paul Henley, observational cinema allows for an “unprivileged point of view,” allowing activities and actions to unfold on film (114). As a field production technique, the decision to keep the cameras rolling for long takes are perhaps the least obtrusive, technically convenient method of capturing life on film. Margaret Mead, believed that a camera positioned in one place will capture all activity while remaining “invisible,” requiring less intervention from the anthropologist (Mead).

The counterpoint presented to the observational long shot is “montage cinema” or “montagescapes” (Kiener 394). According to visual ethnographer Wilma Kiener, the montage approach lends itself to the present-day ethos of perpetually displaced and migratory individuals and societies, where situatedness as an observable subject is no longer possible (Kiener). Where the use of an

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49 Suhr and Willerslev quoting Grimshaw and Ravetz, argue further that observational cinema favors a 360-degree view that welcomes a wholeness of perspective rather than a fragmented presentation of the subject. The image, according to MacDougall, transcends the "strangeness of cultures" to unite all through the presentation of commonalities embedded in humanness (as cited in Surh & Willerslev, 2012).
observational approach to ethnographic filmmaking was suitable for rooted, indigenous communities, the current movement of human living across borders, cultures, and even identities seems to be better articulated through the highly-edited and involved style of montage.

Within this discourse, a growing interest in the invisible has surfaced. Anthropology and visual anthropology (from which ethnographic film branches out), deals with the empirical and knowable, and anthropologists are tasked to (re)construct, for better understanding, the meaning structures inherent in a culture. However, where observational cinema more or less captures the filmmaker’s lived experience through the “humanized” lens of the camera (Suhr & Willerslev), and enhancement edits are kept to a bare minimum, montage cinema may have the capacity to “reveal the unsaid” (Barbosa 300). In a self-reflexive study of her production process in the film, *Ixok-Woman*, Kiener describes how she brought the absent elements from her main character’s life into the film by juxtaposing certain shots at the appropriate times. A story about a Guatemalan activist-artist living in Paris, the reasons for her melancholy yet determined fight to express the military’s atrocities, permeated the film. These events happened in the past, and it was important for Kiener to approximate the conditions that led to her character’s flight. By juxtaposing scenes of her hometown in Guatemala – spaces where she grew up and forged relationships, came to knowledge about the state of affairs – with her character’s stories of the disappearance of activist
friends and the threat of capture, the displaced and dislocated sensation that her character tried to express through her art was revealed (Kiener). The montage technique allowed Kiener to manipulate space and time to make the invisible visible. The montage approach likewise foregrounds affect that emerges from the simultaneous forming, sundering, and intertwining of relationships with the environment and with the self in a moment of experience (Barbosa). Montage cinema allows practitioners to theorize new ways of seeing and representing felt experience, rather than stick to a particular method of doing (Tabachnick, Banks, M.).

I want to pick up on the insight that montage is a medium for the marginalized to “reveal the unsaid” in their daily experiences, and the processes that tumble into each other and blur the “cut marks” or the video image’s join. The need to create a logical, seamless, and empirically-based argument about the participants’ slice of life in an anthropological study is not that different from the compulsion for a unified and homogenous history that excludes or occludes the alternate histories of the marginalized—arguably a symptom of the Western desire to integrate difference under one universal grand narrative. Aware of the possible implications their shot arrangements may cause, visual anthropologists (the ones surveyed above anyway) attune themselves to what emerges from the gaps, or what I consider transitions. While the actualities and visual data become a measurable artifact, they turn to the “invisible” that questions, rather than
resolves, the issues around the manner and mode of connection: why this shot and not the other? What does it mean to have a certain sequence flanked by others? Why the use of a dissolve or a cross fade and not a cut? The surface formed by the facts and visual elements recede in importance as attention turns to the splits and cuts of the video: it is in the join that manifold possibilities emerge.

*Cultures and Transitions*

If we think of the join in the audio-visual project as space, it provides not just a surface on which one can move between shots or scenes, but also a depth. Vernacular video reaches us through surface—screens on tablets, phones, mobile devices—and in some ways take on the characteristic of surface. It is smooth. It wants us to see ourselves reflected. It wants to reach out and cover the things we see and hear in the everyday (I use the word “cover” the way television broadcasters say they “cover the news”). Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein reminds us that the everyday/quotidian creates a surface that allows us to function as human beings on the one hand, but also holds the key that allows us to recognize that the everyday veils the truth of our existence—that ultimately what holds us together is the imminent and ultimate cut: death. In the
same way, the surface of audio-visual projects appear seamless, we forget that, paradoxically, these projects are formed by cuts, fissures, breaks, and silences.

In the semi-autoethnographic documentary, *Bontoc Eulogy*, Filipino American filmmaker Marlon Fuentes explores the silences that pervade his memories of “home”: the Philippines as his birthplace, as a descendant of one of the Igorots at the St. Louis World’s Fair, and the gaping holes in his own history and identity. He faces the future’s relentless advance as “flickering images of the place I once called home” recede. “Home is what you try to remember, not what you try to forget. What is the source of this talent of forgetting? In the Philippines there is a saying: *ang hindi lumilingon sa pinaggalingan ay hindi makararating sa patutunguhan*. He who does not look back from when [sic] he came from will never ever reach his destination” (Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy*). The musical score extends the silences in the scenes. The visuals linger. Long, slow, panoramic shots of the Bontoc region in Northern Philippines flicker—evidence of deterioration that occurs when images are transferred from one medium to another, especially from ethnographic films taken over a hundred years ago. In his attempt to call up the little that he knows of Markod, his grandfather (who never returned to the Philippines from St. Louis), he loads the voice over track with Igorot prayers and snippets of conversation that match quick cuts of ambiguous and unidentified figures, mimicking the flickering and fading images of home. Montages that cut back and forth between reenactments and actualities.
blur the boundaries between his fantasies, history, family stories, and everyday life in America. The cuts allow Fuentes to travel in time and space, through memory and imagination and back to the present. In the final shot, we see him in some concrete park where chairs are arranged in curves, and the ground is tiled with an infinite number of squares. There does not seem to be a clear starting point for him as he walks into the shot. He looks at the camera once, and then walks off, and we are not certain where he has decided to go. This echoes his idea of the future: it is uncertain. And just as he wonders if his children will ever “find” their great-great grandfather and recognize him, one can’t help but ask if Fuentes wonders the same for himself. Will he recognize himself? Or will this be the “death” of his previously forgotten identity, the permanent death of himself as Filipino?

This cutting suggests that transitions allow for the possibility of movement not just across surfaces but underneath or even beyond them. Movement beyond familiar spaces—in Fuentes’ case, beyond the frame—implies the interplay of time. He can’t stay in his reveries forever; the everyday marches on and he has to march along with it. But for how long and to where, he doesn’t say. Instead, he continues to struggle: calling up fading memories and desperately trying to connect it to everyday life is a struggle to see oneself reflected in the events that form an identity. This allows Fuentes to imagine what everyday life was like for Markod, where his travels through the United States took him, how the proud
blood of an Igorot warrior urged him to plan an escape from the freezing human zoos. The transitions—cuts, audio silences and fades, dissolves and cross fades—afforded Fuentes the mobility and ability to be somewhere else, and as time unfolded in his film, to be someone else. And those times, it seems, was when he felt most like a Filipino.

But as the cuts, silences, and fades to black in the documentary insinuate, the effort to create one narrative that reflects Fuentes’ grandfather’s, and his own internal ones, fails. Like most immigrants, he says, they are forced to forget in order to assimilate into the everyday life of their new “home.” To forget is to silence the pain of homesickness.

We Filipinos wear this cloak of silence to render us invisible from one another, yet it is the very thing that makes us recognize each other. After all, in this act of hiding, we are
united; we are invisible except to one another. To survive in this new land we had to forget. The stream changes course, and slowly our ghost catches up. Now we must remember in order to survive (Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy*).

One had let Filipinoness “die” in order to cope with their new everyday. It seems then that Filipinoness reveals itself just before its total demise as a distant experience. That previous life will only exist as fragments of memory, half-told stories, and factoids that try to constantly find a way to stay relevant in everyday life.

As a subject position “moves,” that movement affects the current state of affairs, where structures, relationships, utterances, etc. are temporarily unmoored from their situatedness. This reveals the ability to shift the balance of power temporarily. Using their hybridity as a tool, hybrid persons of color reorient prevailing conditions and empower themselves. There is no definite shape or form to this “tool”; and just like closures between comics panels and the cuts in a montage, there is no definite image for strategic hybridity. Instead, its coming into being is contingent on the circumstances in which it finds itself and how it is to be “used” for that specialized purpose. It becomes recognizable alongside/with/in relation to the elements that make up the situation in which it is deployed.

Thinking about the Filipino as culturally hybrid, and many Filipino Americans as racially hybrid as well, suggests a motivation to “use” strategic hybridity to
respond to the everyday conditions in which they encounter borders, blocks, containment, categorization, objectification, and exclusion. Enacting strategic hybridity creates motion, disruption, and transgression in the status quo, yet simultaneously initiates mobility by bridging, creating paths, and lubricating the movement and exchange of ideas. It multiplies sites and opportunities in order to emerge.

“Our characteristic mode, then, is not a narrative, in which scenes take place seriatum,” writes Edward Said in _After the Last Sky_. “[B]ut rather broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, and its limitations” (38). Devoid of a unified narrative that would explain their existence, people of color, migrants, refugees, and hybrids, become collectors of cultural and historical artifacts that hope to inform their fragmented sense of self. Their stories exist in pieces and are picked out of the remains of memory, everyday experiences, and tales from their elders. Alternately experiencing moments of closure in connecting the pieces, and the opening up of possibilities in a single moment of assembly, the montage of scenes and the transitions attune one acutely to the present: the everyday in which the reveries, the questions, and the insistence of a subduing surface unfold and enfold each other. One is intensely estranged, as past, future, and present converge in the moment of realization that a cut, a silence, or a repetitive flickering image is what holds it all together.
However, just as Beth Coleman warns that the dislocation, instability and unpredictability effected by using race as a tool are temporary, so is the disruption caused by strategic hybridity. Systems tend to recoup and generate new situations that cause new instances of exclusion in the effort to counterbalance the temporary shifts in power. Strategic hybridity’s effects are temporary. However this characteristic also allows strategic hybridity to reinvent itself to be relevant to new situations, thus making strategic hybridity itself a work-in-progress, and the work it does always evolving and transitioning as well. Like the transitions in composition, in film, or video production, which are always already temporary and unknown until the specific paragraph or scene dictates how it (transition) should appear and be used, strategic hybridity’s form and manner of emergence is itself constantly reinvented, dependent on the elements it wishes to connect, reveal, and make mobile. Therefore strategic hybridity is always working to estrange the status quo, estrange even itself to itself: like a strange form approaching the familiar and transforming that space with its presence. Always working and evolving, moving forward towards a homeliness and belongingness but knowing it will always be unsettled, strategic hybridity’s transitionality ensures that identity is always a work in progress.
FRAGMENTS OF BEING: TOOLS OF BECOMING

In the “episodic narratives” (Rafael) that follow I wish to show how, despite the suppression and oppression of civil rights, immigration bans, and anti-miscegenation policies, Filipinos created modes of movement by deploying their version of strategic hybridity. Using race as a technology activates varying “degrees of agency (freedom of choice, action and self-direction)” (Coleman 183). I choose to focus on how Filipinos and the early generation of Filipino Americans demonstrated strategic hybridity to challenge the oppressive systems and rhetoric that hampered the everydayness of belonging and homeliness. Hybridity was intimately tied to the body, and notions of impurity, “invasion” of non-white races from “a different shore” (Takaki), and the threat of corruption and contamination of the white race was inscribed and read by white nativists and supremacists on the brown Filipino body. The ambiguity of the Filipino’s US National status was an opportunity for exploitation, intensified through dangerous rhetoric that constructed Filipinos as “exceeding” the borders and boundaries set up by the American government. These blockages, boundaries, and categories of exclusion inspired different modes and methods of movement and moments of strategic hybridity.
At the beginning of the 20th century, waves of Filipino migrant workers crossed the Pacific on boats that would take them to the sugar plantations of Hawai‘i, and later to the orchards, vineyards, and vegetable farms in California, all the way up to the salmon canneries in Alaska. For Filipinos, the transpacific journey would not only provide the livelihood that would move their families out of poverty in the rural areas of the Philippines; it would also give them the chance to finally be part of the American dream. As a colony of the United States, Filipinos were entitled to work and live in America as US Nationals, endowing them a hybrid status: Filipinos by birth, US nationals through colonization.50 There was also a very high expectation among US-bound Pinoys (slang for “Filipino” which Filipinos abroad first used to describe themselves) that they would be afforded the same recognition and benefits as native-born Americans. “Filipinos of the early twentieth century were exposed to notions of U.S. democracy and freedom, thus nurturing the hope that annexation would ‘make these things a reality’ for them” (Stranjord, np). In a sense, Filipinos felt they were moving from one home to another, a painful, though manageable transition because of the familiarity with and allegiance to American culture and values.

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The educational system established by the Thomasites, the proliferation of various media, and the English language allowed American educators to paint the United States as a welcoming land of opportunity (see chapter 2), and convinced unskilled members of the lower class in the Philippines that work in the United States would help their families out of poverty.
The first group of farm laborers arrived in Hawai‘i on December 20, 1906 to work on the sugar plantations (Baldoz, Takaki, Mabalon). They became known as the manongs—the Ilocano word for “older man” or “older brother” (Ilocano is one of the major languages spoken in the Philippines). Their US National status exempted them from the ban imposed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that barred future Asiatics from entering America.\(^\text{51}\) Primarily brought to Hawai‘i as cheap labor,\(^\text{52}\) Filipinos were used as an ethnic buffer against the Chinese and Japanese already working on the plantations. In *The Third Asiatic Invasion*, Rick Baldoz claims that plantation managers and owners wanted an alternative pool of workers who would be used primarily to “break up the race solidarity of the Japanese and simplify the problem of plantation discipline and plantation management” (50). For those running the plantations, “the perfect workforce would be a population accustomed to subordination and holding modest expectations in regard to livelihood. They believed that Filipinos, with their extended history of colonial subjection and economic privation, might be the answer to their prayers” (50). Plantation managers played workers against each

\(^{\text{51}}\) The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first federal law to target a specific nationality and ethnicity. The act restricted the immigration of Chinese laborers after the Angell Treaty of 1880, which contained revisions to the 1868 US-China Burlingame Treaty, outlined the rules for suspending Chinese immigration to the US.

\(^{\text{52}}\) In a way, Filipinos always remained transitional, even in the eyes of Westerners. They were a rather ambiguous lot. Neither Chinese, or Japanese, or Korean, their brown bodies and Asian origins were puzzling. They spoke a fair amount of English and had some education, complicating the general notion that they were primitive savages (see previous chapter’s section on the 1904 World’s Fair). Once admitted into the United States, they were pushed into the labor scene, and used as a third, in-between “option” for plantation owners to mediate the racial and political tensions on the Hawaiian plantations. Though visible for their hybridity, they were classified again as objects (and not as colonial subjects) to serve the economic needs of the colonial center. Framed and contained once again, the Filipinos became invisible as persons with agency and histories, but conspicuous as bodies for cheap labor, and later on as the “flash point for sexual resentment” (Stranjord, np) among white nativists.
other. Filipinos were seen as the perfect bodies to “offset the growing political organization of Japanese workers” (50) who were beginning to speak out against the abuses and inhumane conditions on the plantations. They preferred illiterate Filipinos as well, folks who would not be able to complain or negotiate their pay and their working conditions.

From 1909 through the next two decades, more workers began to arrive. By 1920, close to 40,000 Filipino migrants were working in Hawai‘i. Tens of thousands more began heading to the mainland, this time to the farms in California, and the canneries in Seattle and Alaska. “It was like coming home after a long voyage, although as yet I had no home in this city,” writes Carlos Bulosan in America is in the Heart. “Everything seemed familiar and kind…With a sudden surge of joy, I knew that I must find a home in this new land” (99). A number of towns along the train routes became important spaces for Filipinos to converge, and some of the most important of these were Stockton in Northern California, the Yakima Valley in Seattle, and San Diego and Los Angeles in Southern California.

Filipino laborers were assigned to the most labor-intensive tasks: “planting, cane cutting, hoeing, fertilizing, hauling, and fluming” (Baldoz 52). Because of their “overrepresentation in these types of jobs,” Baldoz says the stereotype that Filipinos were content with low-paying jobs and stoop labor became prevalent. This fueled the notion that Filipinos were so subordinate that they would not dare challenge the power and authority of their employers (Baldoz). The myth of the Filipino as “model workers” became a favorable notion that opened opportunities for succeeding waves of migrant labor.

Aside from agriculture work, in which the majority of immigrant laborers were involved, thousands also moved to the interior of the Midwest and the East coast. They worked in metropolitan areas as busboys, servers, elevator attendants in commercial establishments, and in private homes as servants and maintenance men.

When strikes in Hawai‘i turned violent, many laborers traveled to the West Coast to look for work. The exodus from the islands upped the number of laborers settling in the West Coast (Baldoz, Takaki).
Figure 4.3. Dorothea Lange. Filipinos cutting lettuce, Salinas, California. Web

Figure 4.4. Dorothea Lange. Near Westmorland, Imperial Valley, Filipinos cutting lettuce. Web.

But it would be difficult to make a home because of the need to follow the harvest season on a monthly basis (Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives*), the
abusively low wages (Takaki, Baldoz), and the oppressive living conditions in the labor camps\textsuperscript{56} (Bulosan; Takaki, Baldoz, Espiritu). These brown bodies seemed doomed to never rest, and their only choice was to keep moving in order to survive. In addition to stoop labor they also harvested grapes which injured the harvesters. They would lacerate their hands while tying the grape vines (Agtang, qtd. in Marcum) to the trellis to help the plants flourish. Up in the canneries in Seattle and Alaska, limbs would be lost as machines sliced cleanly through flesh in the dimly-lit, ammonia-reeking factories\textsuperscript{57} (Bulosan). In his chapter on “Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile” Oscar Campomanes claims “history is inscribed in, is an imprint on, the appropriated Pinoy body” (69). The cracks and gashes in the brown skin that held the tired, deformed body of the Filipino farmworker together are the ways in which their struggle and stories were written, later to be interpreted by those who enslaved them and by those who would rediscover their contributions.

\textsuperscript{56} For a description of the inhumane conditions of these laborers, see Espiritu; also Baldoz and Takaki (319-320).

\textsuperscript{57} Larry Itliong, Filipino labor leader who initiated the Delano Grape Strike, lost three fingers in the canneries.
Most of the laborers who came to America were single men, aged between 16 to 30 years (Baldoz). Immigration officials, and plantation and farm owners specified that to get passage to work in the US one had to be single. This, according to authorities, made it “less expensive” to maintain living quarters for Filipinos (Baldoz, Takaki). According to scholars (Karthikeyan and Chin, Baldoz), the real reason was to keep the race from multiplying in America. It was obvious that Asiatics and Orientals were strangers the American government felt would devalue and corrupt the white race.

Under Statute 2169 of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Filipinos were automatically classified as Asian and non-white simply because they were foreign-born, assuming the same prohibitions as the Chinese. Their racialization, based on their foreignness, superseded their status as US Nationals and they were automatically subject to prohibitive and oppressive conditions simply

58 "The fourteenth amendment declared all persons born within the United States to be U.S. citizens and worked to bestow citizenship on freedmen. Congress went further by amending naturalization requirements in 1870 and extending naturalization eligibility to ‘aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent.’ The 1870 revision of §2169, U.S. Revised Statutes, laid the foundation for future confusion over racial eligibility to citizenship. The rule did not state that white persons and black persons may naturalize, nor did it limit naturalization to those of European or African nativity or descent. Rather, the 1870 rule appeared to apply a color test— white persons and those with African origins (i.e., black)— but did so by reference to geography. After extending naturalization to blacks (as Africans) in 1870, Congress banned the naturalization of Chinese in 1882. The Chinese Exclusion Act of that year included a section directing that "hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed." The 1882 law clearly directed the courts not to naturalize any Chinese, but it did not explain whether "Chinese" indicated race or nationality (Smith, n.p.)
because they were different.\textsuperscript{59} Under a series of laws and statutes, Filipinos were barred from naturalization, subject to confusing legal statutes regarding their racial category, and anti-miscegenation laws.\textsuperscript{61}

In their paper, “Preserving Racial Identity: Population Patterns and the Application of Anti-Miscegenation Statutes to Asian Americans, 1910-1950,” Hrishi Karthikeyan and Gabriel J. Chin identify the adherence of state Supreme Courts in the Jim Crow era to the prevailing racial paradigm proposed by anthropologist Keith Sealing. Among its tenets were the natural and immutable hierarchy of races, where whites were at the top, and all other races were ranked in decreasing order below them. Because of the superiority of the white race, the paradigm asserted that miscegenation merely brings the better race (white) to the

\textsuperscript{59} The prohibition was enacted not only between white women and Filipino men, but also Filipino men with Mexican women, and women with mixed ancestry. Of the handful of Filipina women who were later admitted to the United States, the law maintained that despite being married to a native-born white man, the Filipina would still remain an alien and still be ineligible for naturalization.

\textsuperscript{60} VA 1924 (Racial Integrity Act) included Malays and Mongolians as ineligible to marry whites. “White person” pertains to the Caucasian race (Sohoni 354). The Naturalization Act of 1875 was open only to free white persons, those of African descent, and aliens of African nativity (355). “The use of existing racial classification systems that distinguished between “yellow” Asians (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and “brown” Asians (i.e., Filipinos) and viewed those from West Asia and Southeast Asia as “white” made it difficult to create an overarching racial category such as “Asiatic” or “Oriental” to exclude all Asian ethnic groups.” (356) It became difficult for the American government to define “white” and nonwhite because of the fact that various Asian ethnicities were not perceived as wholly white or non white.

\textsuperscript{61} According to Sohoni,

“...That state and federal courts overwhelmingly upheld the legitimacy of state anti-miscegenation laws as unconstitutional meant that their status as ‘nonwhites’ overrode their legal status as US citizens. In addition, by linking U.S.-born Asians with their more numerous foreign-born counterparts, these laws helped reinforce the presumption that their racial identities included a foreign component. Asians became ‘racialized’ as Asians not because they were recognized as racially similar, but instead because they were members of the same category of aliens ineligible for citizenship. Anti-miscegenation laws were used to group together US-born and foreign-born Asians, within their distinctive racial and ethnic categories. For Asians it privileged their status as racially distinct—whether that was yellow, brown, or white—over their native status. This, despite being citizens, US-born Asians were legally viewed as ‘un-assimilable,’ and grouped with their foreign-born brethren as ‘foreign’ and fundamentally ‘un-American’” (357-358).
level of the lower, thus “polluting” white America with mixed blood (Racial Integrity Act 1924, qtd. in Karthikeyan and Chin). The use of policies such as the one-drop rule, eugenics, and the notion of white supremacy ensured the dominance of the white majority socially and economically in the Jim Crow era (Karthikeyan and Chin). “The proliferation of anti-miscegenation statutes growing out of these elements helped protect whites against the threat of usurpation by a ‘degraded class of colored’ people of their vast and valuable system of property rights” (22). They quote legal scholar Eva Saks, who introduces the notion of "property-in-race" where just as "corporation was treated by law as a person... a person [was] treated as property through the legal regime of blood, fractional holdings, and inheritance."

To the law, a black person was not represented by a perceptible physical phenomenon like black skin, but instead consisted in black blood...Legal race, as determined by legal blood, perpetuated the prewar economy of the human body, in which the body could be alienated because it was potentially another form of property... the new property of race (Saks, qtd. in Karthikeyan and Chin 23).

This system, according to Saks, ensured that an established system and mechanism for “the transmission of property” was imposed through the marriage
contract (Karthikeyan and Chin). These principles were extended to Asians, seen along with blacks as “the blood clots” in a conceptually “white national body”

(26).

The anti-miscegenation laws were the most crippling to the manongs. For them to be married (to white women or naturalized US citizens) meant they would be able to own property, which white nativists were violently against. The most pressing concern for nativists, and even US authorities was that if Filipinos (along with other non-white races) could marry, their offspring would be considered American citizens, tainting the American goal of keeping the lineage of white persons pristine and unblemished (Smith, Baldoz; Karthikeyan and Chin). The irrational fear of a “mongrel” and hybrid race taking over the country was, in my opinion, simply the white person’s fear of losing ownership of “their property”—resources, laborers, the profits to be gained from the exploitation of that labor,

62 A more detailed and in depth discussion, along with a survey of the 1910 census, and a brief historiography of the implementation of anti-miscegenation statutes across the United States, are available in Kathikeyan and Chin’s well-researched paper.

63 Karthikeyan and Chin make an interesting point about white women who were also perceived by the white patriarchy as property. “Arguably the most powerful symbol of property-in-race in the Jim Crow South, however, and the one most warranting protection against usurpation, was that of ‘white womanhood’. The white woman was regarded as both an object of property herself, as well as a means through which blacks could erode the system of white social dominance. In reality, Southern whites may not have been as concerned with “free and unrestrained social intercourse” as they were with “loss of sexual control over white women, and loss of economic and political power to African Americans” (25) James Davis argues that “[w]hite womanhood was the highly emotional symbol, but the system protected white economic, political, legal, educational, and other institutional advantages ...not just the sexual and racial purity of white women” (25).

64 “A provision from the 1890 Mississippi Constitution still in effect in 1950 declared that ‘[s]eparate schools shall be maintained for the children of the white and colored races, and the Mississippi Supreme Court in the 1925 case, Rice v. Gong Lum, determined that the term ‘colored’ applied to a native born child of Chinese descent. Specifically, the court held that ‘the word ‘white,’ when used in describing race, is limited strictly to the Caucasian race, while the word ‘colored’ is not strictly limited to negroes or persons having negro blood.’ The case was ultimately affirmed by the United States Supreme Court, which found the law consistent with the Fourteenth Amendment on authority of Plessy v. Ferguson” (Karthikeyan and Chin, 31-32).
and the privilege of acquiring more property to maintain their status. If Asians/Filipinos were to be given the right to own property, and to have a family, the government would be forced to recognize them as humans and not objects, endowing them with agency and identity.

“That’s why the Filipinos have a lost generation…the Filipinos remained single, and bachelors until they died,” says Andy Imutan, a Filipino farm laborer and activist interviewed in Marissa Aroy’s documentary, *Delano Manongs: Forgotten Heroes of the United Farm Workers Movement*. Without anything and anyone to ground them, the manongs drifted through farms and states. Travelling as stowaways in boxcars on the trains that operated throughout the West Coast, Filipinos were always moving towards work, or away from harassment, on one-way trips. “I…found a camp of Filipino migratory workers. I decided to live and work with them, hoping to put my life in order. I had been fleeing from state to state…Was there no end to this flight?” (149) says Bulosan, as he recounts the familiarity of a life of constant flight that weighed heavily on the spirit. It had become “normal” for Filipinos to keep moving within delimited spaces: always along the roads, paths, and railroad tracks on the outskirts of the cities, back and forth between labor camps that started looking all to familiar (Takaki, Bulosan, Santos). With lines drawn for and around them, there was little room to move beyond the demarcated spaces and frames. Isolated and cut off, they were lonely islands, a sad version of the archipelagic home they left behind.
Manongs in McIntosh Suits

Expulsion from the center of social, national and cultural life forced Filipinos to create their own spaces to socialize, or at the very least make existing spaces their own. And it would all begin with the way they altered their look. In the documentary Delano Manongs: The Forgotten History of the Filipino Farmworker’s Movement, historian Alex Fabros recalls what it was like living with Pinoy “bachelor men” in the labor camp. “One thing Filipinos liked to do is they liked to dress up. They liked to look good” (Aroy, Delano Manongs). He recounts how they would dress to the nines and get haircuts, spend their money for a night on the town. Stepping out of their filthy work clothes and transforming themselves into radically different persons likewise transformed the way they occupied space. In her fascinating article about the dance halls of 1930s California, Linda N. España-Maram describes the transformations that would take over the lives of Filipino laborers dressed in their McIntosh suits. In “Brown ‘Hordes’ in McIntosh Suits: Filipinos, Taxi Dance Halls, and Performing the Immigrant Body in Los Angeles, 1930s-1940s,” España-Maram writes that Filipinos claimed downtown streets, storefronts, and taxi dance halls as “important site[s] for creating a vibrant subculture” to challenge the racism and abuse against them (119). They
could “create identities that allowed them to be something other than what their ethnicity, class, or national origin dictated” (119).

Prohibited from owning “real” property, Filipinos spent the little earnings they saved up to buy elegantly crafted McIntosh suits. It would be the one important and meaningful thing they could own. The “padded shoulders and wide lapels worn by some of Hollywood’s most famous leading men like William Powell” (119) inspired the sharp and dapper looks they would change into on Saturday nights. Dressed to the nines, Filipinos would flock to the towns, walking down main street, but mostly standing in store fronts that “served as rendezvous points for calling the Filipino community into being” (España-Maram 122). It was at this moment when Filipinos could exchange stories and news.

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Figure 4.5. In front of Manila Pool Hall. James Earl Wood Collection, UC Berkeley. Web.

65 Farm laborers frequented cities like San Francisco, Stockton, Watsonville, Los Angeles, and Monterey in California for the vibrant nightlife and dance halls. In Washington State, they frequented cities in Seattle and the Yakima Valley. In the Midwest, Chicago was the go-to spot for Filipinos.
about each other and people they knew in common, get news of jobs, and basically fortify relationships in the face of the transitory and migratory lifestyle they seemed destined to live.

In their function as farm laborers, Filipinos were akin to machines, stooped in the fields for as much as 12 hours harvesting produce they would process and pack the next day. The leisure time denied Filipinos served to dehumanize them, taking away any and all opportunities for community building and cultural or religious practices that were important aspects of their identity. I agree with España-Maram when she insists that Filipinos “subverted icons of white-middle class American masculinity” (129) and “developed a dynamic subculture” (122) in their transformation from farm workers to elegantly-dressed brown people in expensive American suits. Their visits to the dance hall were an opportunity to create experiences “and formulate a collective memory in addition to those in the work place” (España-Maram 126) alongside their peers. Places like the American Dance Academy, the Lyceum Club, the Lu-Vi-Min Club, and the Rizal Social Club catered to Filipinos and other “inassimilables” (Mabalon, Baldoz), allowing them time for entertainment and socialization, however limited.
Taxi dance halls were large spaces where a man could, for ten cents, dance the length of a song with a white woman, known as a taxi dancer. In one of the first sociological studies of this phenomenon, Paul Goalby Cressey observes the individuals who frequent these dance halls, and the activities that happen in them. In his book, *The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life*, Cressey dedicates a chapter to discuss the presence of Filipino patrons who frequented the dance halls, lumping them in with a crowd he describes as a “variegated assortment” of the inassimilable members of society.

The brown-skinned Filipino rubs elbows with the stolid European Slav. The Chinese chop-suet waiter comes into his own alongside the Greek from the Mediterranean. The newly industrialized Mexican peon find his place in the same crowd with the “bad boys” of some of Chicago’s first families. The rural visitor seeking a thrill
achieves his purpose in company with the globe-trotter from Australia…Gray-haired, mustached men of sixty…the florid-faced, muscular giant of middle years, uncouth in manner and dress…boisterous youths…Finally, there are a few men, handicapped by physical disabilities, for whom the taxi-dancer’s obligation to accept all-comers makes the establishment a haven of refuge (10).

One can’t help but notice how the racialization of the Filipino begins with his skin, defined against the presence and implied whiteness of the “European slav.” Furthermore, the description of the Slav as “stolid” suggests a contrast to how the Filipino’s temperament might be perceived. This notion, in fact, was one of the reasons why the anti-miscegenation and the Filipino exclusion statutes were leveled against brown bodies: nativists believed that the “purest” Anglo-Saxon stock had to be protected against the Filipinos’ sexual corruption (Tapia).

Filipinos, other non-white races, social undesirables, and (white) women of a lower class all crossed paths in the dance hall. The space was not one of emancipation or empowerment; owners, the dancers themselves were not averse

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66 In Congressional hearings, Filipinos were portrayed as possessing a “sex problem” (Tapia 66). In “Just ten years removed from a bolo and a breech-cloth,” Ruby Tapia recounts Representative Valentine S. McClatchy’s argument for the exclusion laws by quoting Dr. David Barrows, the appointed Chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes of the Philippine Islands. “Their vices are almost entirely based on sexual passion. This passion in the Malay—which includes practically all types of Filipinos—is inordinately strong; and in accordance with native customs it is rarely directed into the right channels or restrained by custom or by individual will” (qtd. in Tapia, 66). Protecting American (white) women from Filipinos was a moral imperative.
to exploiting the patrons and their meager means (Cressey, España-Maram, Tapia). Women were still treated as objects by owners and patrons, especially in the way they were ordered to stand in lines and “display” themselves for paying customers. Black folk were still not admitted to dance halls, and Mexicans and Filipinos were merely tolerated for their business. What I invite the reader to consider, however, is what impoverished, racialized patrons like Filipinos did with their time there, and really, what changes occurred just by showing up. More than just spending on a leisure activity, it was an opportunity for Filipinos to socialize and feel connected to another human being’s body, if only temporarily. According to Philip Vera Cruz, another prominent Filipino American laborer and activist, “We became an entire generation that was forced by society to find love and companionship in dance halls” (Aroy, Delano Manongs). Filipino men breached yet another divide as they danced—suggestively, sexually—with the white women dancers. The activities were then considered immoral, and downright deviant: “Couples dance or whirl about the floor with their bodies pressed tightly together, shaking, moving, and rotating their lower portions to rouse their sex impulses” (Endnote 33 qtd in España-Maram 124). Through practicing sensual and sexual dance moves, Filipinos seized these rare moments when they absolutely owned their bodies, and were not subject to the physical demands of back-breaking farm work, the danger of cannery machinery, or the aimlessness and alienation of another uncertain journey on trains to other states.
Filipinos were hungry for human connection and care, and they invested in that as well. Testimonies from individuals who had experienced dance hall culture said the Filipinos always took great care to look presentable and “classy” (España-Maram), and treated the dancers well. Many of the dancers would compare Filipinos to the Mexican patrons in terms of self-presentation, and to white males who were usually rude. “He (Filipino) has manners. His approach to the girl is habitually marked by a courtesy practically non-existent among the more or less uncouth American white men with whom she has already been or has become accustomed. The girls are by no means indifferent to these qualities” (Bowler qtd. in España-Maram 125). The attention, conversation, and companionship of these taxi dancers allowed the Filipino farmworkers to digress and detour from the lonely routes that were forced on them. According to Alex Fabros, the existence of these dance halls provided an alternate reality where “these guys would be married for a weekend” (Delano Manongs). In these moments Filipinos became at home in their bodies after being alienated from them, and the feeling of that recognition itself arrives as something foreign. They owned their bodies once more, and got to decide what to do with them: they continuously approached the dancers to dance, and to possibly take their temporary intimacy a step further.
Challenging Anti-miscegenation

The Filipinos’ daring resulted in relationships with white women, and many wanted to marry their sweethearts (Baldoz, Tapia). Filipinos decided to cross yet another line by applying for marriage licenses which ultimately challenged anti-miscegenation laws. Several key cases in California and other areas in the West Coast involved Filipinos, their arguments strategically positioning the ambiguity of their status as US Nationals, and the misrecognition of their racial classification, as central to their claims. The statutory language of the law actually placed Filipinos outside of established racial categories (Mongolian, negro; red and brown races referred to American Indians and South Asian Indians respectively), and petitioners used this “invisible” and ambiguous status to subvert the marriage ban. Filipinos were initially thought to belong to the Mongolian race, which applied to Chinese and Japanese immigrants. “Sections 60 and 69 of the California civil code specifically outlawed all marriages between ‘white persons’ and members of the ‘negro’ and ‘Mongolian’ races. Filipinos, however disputed their assignment into the ‘Mongolian’ racial category, asserting instead that prevailing scientific opinion held them to be ‘Malays’” (Baldoz 90). Assigning themselves to the Malay race instantly put the question of their racial origins at the forefront of these applications for marriage licenses, but also demonstrated what Baldoz referred to as the elasticity with which Filipinos considered their
racial and ethnic identities. The strategic play with categories also used the ethnological and anthropological classifications that the government referred to in determining racial categories to subvert the legal rulings. This resulted in exposing the arbitrariness of the government’s views and ideas on race and the conflicting court decisions made in an attempt to uphold the dominance of the white race.

In *The Third Asiatic Invasion*, Rick Baldoz recounts details of an impressively researched list of marriage license applications and the commotion that ensued when legal opinions clashed with prevailing immigration classifications and “common understanding,” when courts in California and across the West Coast were forced to review the statutes on anti-miscegenation law that applied to Orientals and Filipinos. In 1920, Leonardo Antony wanted to marry Luciana Brovencio (a Mexican-American woman, who in California is legally classified as white). Initially denied a license, the case was reviewed by Los Angeles’s county counsel, Edward Bishop, who decided that Filipinos were not meant to be included in the classification “Mongolian” as it was outlined in section 69 of the Angell Treaty of 1880, since the statute pertained to the “Chinese problem” prevalent at that time67 (or what the US considered a surge of Chinese immigrants whom they feared would overrun the white majority).

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67 “At that time the question of the marriage of white persons with members of the brown or Malayan race was not a live one, and there was no call for a solution. We do not believe that members of the Malayan race are ‘Mongolians’ as that word is used in Section 69 of the Civil Code” (Bishop qtd. in Baldoz 91).
Therefore Antony and Brovencio should be granted a license. However, a case in 1925 sought to insert Filipinos back into the Mongolian classification, after Timothy Yatko killed his wife’s extra-marital lover in self-defense. Lola Butler Yatko was present at the scene, became the key witness, and the one who would contradict her husband’s claim of self-defense. Because the defense attorneys argued that Mrs. Yatko could not be compelled to testify against her own husband, the prosecution needed to cast doubt on the validity of the marriage by once again arguing that California law had intended to classify Filipinos as Mongolian. “The real aim of the law, they argued, was to insulate white families from racial contamination, and Filipinos, whatever their ethnological origins, fell within the racist intent of the original statute” (93). This decision was upheld by Judge C.S. Hardy and the Attorney General at that time, Ulysses S. Webb.

In 1933, a precedent-setting case involving Filipino Salvador Roldan and

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68 This opinion led to the consideration of individual judges’ notions of a “common understanding” when it came to race: mostly based on skin color, appearance, or in the case of black and brown people, the one-drop rule, authorities could claim and arbitrarily assign anybody to racial categories as long as they weren’t “obviously” white. “This definitional shift empowered the courts to construe the legal boundaries of race through the popular prejudices of the ‘common man’ (i.e., the white majority), rather than relying on the increasingly unpredictable definitions provided by scientists and scholars” that were evolving and changing as more research was being conducted (Baldoz 94). In the case Robinson v. Los Angeles County, Stella Robinson, mother of Ruby F. Robinson, a white woman, filed for an injunction against her daughter’s application for a license to marry her fiance, Tony V. Moreno, claiming Moreno was racially disqualified because he was Filipino. The courts ruled in favor of Stella Robinson, citing the Yatko case as a precedent, insisting on the three-race theory (black, white, yellow) and the reasoning that the Filipino would have a mix of Negrito (an indigenous tribe in the Philippines) blood and Chinese blood, thus making him definitely not-white. The courts argued that even if they would be proven wrong ethnologically, the decision was “right sociologically” (95). “White Californians’ opposition to intermarriage was motivated not by racist sentiments but by concerns about cultural incompatibility…”It is merely the immutable barrier between East and West” (95).

69 “I am quite satisfied in my own mind…that the Filipino is a Malay and that the Malay is a Mongolian, just as much as the white American is of the Teutonic race…or of the Nordic family, carrying it back to the Aryan family…Hence it is my view that under the code of California as it now exists, intermarriage between a Filipino and a Caucasian would be void” (Judge C.S. Hardy qtd in Baldoz 93).
his British fiancée Marjorie Rogers required the courts to revisit and reevaluate California’s “definition” of Filipinos’ racial status, as well as the intent of the legal language as it pertained to the state’s anti-miscegenation laws. *Roldan v. Los Angeles County and the State of California* established that the racial classification used to include Mongolians in the drafting of the anti-miscegenation statute pertained solely to the Chinese, therefore the interpretation of this particular statute should not apply to Filipinos (Baldoz). Furthermore, referencing the “common understanding approach,” the courts determined that “‘there was no thought of applying the name Mongolian to a Malay’” (Justice Archbald qt. in Baldoz 100) in any of the legal decisions or in commonplace, everyday discourse. The courts then determined that Filipinos were indeed exempt from the interracial marriage ban.70

Roldan and Rogers were finally granted a marriage license in 1933. This case was a victory for the Filipino community in California, and a number of couples were able to apply for marriage licenses. However the victory was short lived as several state lawmakers began drafting amendments to include Malays (pertaining specifically to Filipinos) in the anti-miscegenation statutes, and applications were put on hold until the appeals could be made and heard in court.

70 According to Rick Baldoz: “The justices in the Roldan case were quick to point out that their ruling was in no way an endorsement of interracial unions between Filipinos and whites. Judge Archbald’s ruling reminded all involved that the role of the courts was to interpret the law, not to manufacture it. If California lawmakers wanted to add Filipinos to the state’s intermarriage ban, then they needed to do so explicitly through the legislative process” (Baldoz 100).
But Filipinos had, by then, developed a network of contacts who pooled resources (i.e., cars, accommodations, money) and knowledge that allowed them to subvert these rulings and apply for licenses in adjacent states without interracial marriage bans. California state legislature stepped up their legal game and “implored” other states to stop issuing marriage licenses to members of “non-assimilable aliens” posing as long time residents in their states (Baldoz). “California’s lawmakers’ obtrusive intervention into the civil affairs of another state demonstrates the increasing sense of frustration expressed by western nativity, aggravated by Filipinos’ aptitude for subverting traditional racial checkpoints” (101). At this time, lawmakers began to regroup their efforts and white nativist vigilantes paralleled their efforts via extra-legislative and extra-judicial actions.

“Get rid of all Filipinos”

Growing anti-Filipino sentiment related to immigration and miscegenation that began in the mid-1920s led to verbal threats, physical violence, and even death for Filipinos who were seen speaking to, or were suspected of having relationships with, white women. White men would accuse Filipinos of disrespecting their white women acquaintances, and would shove them off
sidewalks, beat them, or insult them wherever they were seen congregating. Dance halls were considered places of immorality, filth, and contamination because it was believed Filipinos were unsanitary in their ways. The general belief that indecent activities took place in these dance halls was enough for the nearby white communities to demand authorities to shut these venues down (Mabalon, Baldoz). Violence against Filipinos escalated, as gangs of white men would attack Filipinos and authorities would downplay these attacks by describing them as nothing more than “young men desirous of excitement” (Baldoz 136). Filipinos were portrayed in the media, and were considered by authorities, as the cause of disturbances. Authorities made a habit of detaining Filipinos as troublemakers despite being the recipients of bloody beatings by angry white vigilantes.

The anger and violence came to a head in 1929 and 1930 when riots broke out in Exeter, California, and Watsonville, California, respectively: the latter incident was a bigger and more violent offshoot of the former. In Exeter, the riots began when a trio of white men attacked a Filipino, claiming he had insulted their female acquaintance. The Filipino defended himself with a knife and injured one of the attackers. The incident was reported in the local newspaper, and this fired up the community. Hordes of white men raided clubs and residences, attacked Filipino laborers with stones and clubs, and burned down farms and labor camps, forcing almost two hundred Filipino workers to leave Exeter. This incident would
incite white communities in Watsonville a few months later. On the evening of January 19, 1930, cars loaded with armed white vigilantes hunted Filipinos on the streets of the town. They were enraged by Filipinos’ insistence on maintaining The Monterrey Bay Filipino Club, claiming it was a “threat to the community from a moral and sanitary standpoint” (138). Vigilantes drove to bunkhouses they thought housed Filipinos and fired rounds of bullets into the dwelling (at one point they found out they had shot at a Japanese bunkhouse, but instead of stopping, continued firing). The riots lasted for three days. In one of their raids, a laborer, Fermin Tobera, was killed and another was wounded. According to Baldoz, there were widespread arrests in connection with his murder but community sentiment sided with the vigilantes. Judges were lenient when handing down sentences, and none of those who confessed to leading the riots, or killing Tobera ever spent time in jail (Baldoz). The courts and the community blamed Filipinos for the disturbances, citing their desire to be treated equally, their “defiance of local racial conventions” (140), and their arrogance at expecting to marry white girls and contaminate white America with half-breeds.

These events bolstered nativist country and state authorities’ demand to repatriate Filipinos, and convinced Congress to grant the Philippines its independence. Underneath this physical display of exclusion was actually the threat of more Filipino immigrants entering the United States. In 1934, Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act that granted the Philippines a provisionary
independence, simultaneously ending Filipinos’ US National status, and stemming the influx of Filipinos into the United States. The law “placed Filipinos under the most stringent immigration quota allotted to any country in the world” (Baldoz 158), its exclusionist supporters believing that it would finally solve the “Filipino problem” once and for all. However, new legislation had to be drafted to deal with the Filipinos who were already in the country. The solution was voluntary repatriation: the US government would offer a free, one-way ticket back to the Philippines to all those who volunteered. After years of toiling in the sun and dirt, losing body parts in the canneries, and suffering through the racism and loneliness, Filipinos would be sent back to Asia, some never to set foot on US soil again.

**Contours of strategic hybridity**

The manongs survived by activating their hybridity strategically. The clever ways they disrupted racial and social boundaries were simple actions inspired by American policies against them. If they could not own real property, they could at least own McIntosh suits, and those suits were vehicles for them to temporarily transform from abject farm laborers to individuals who called into being the community they were denied. They transformed the “containment” of dance hall
spaces into community spaces, and bridged the racial distance between themselves and white women. Driven by the need for belonging, community, and in several instances, love, they fought isolation by challenging the anti-miscegenation laws and demanded the same rights they believed they were entitled to as US Nationals. Animating their mosaic Asian heritage, they creatively positioned the Malay aspect of their racial identity to expose the inconsistency—and inhumanity—of racial and ethnic segregation.

These episodes in Filipino farm laborers’ lives demonstrate the proposition that strategic hybridity emerges in different forms, modes, and spaces, but is driven by similar motivations: fairness, justice, inclusion, and visibility. It connects conditions previously thought to be isolated incidents of experience and multiplies the powerful effects of combined efforts to reveal the gaps caused by hegemonic rule. Strategic hybridity does not confine itself to specific situations but travels back and forth, appearing, disappearing, and reappearing again as circumstances require. In other words, improvisation is one of the key ingredients of strategic hybridity. Therefore strategic hybridity is always in process of becoming recognizable, just as the response to oppression is always in the process of figuring itself out.
In this section I look at instances of strategic hybridity unfolding in vernacular videos through a layered reading that resonates with the experiences of the Filipino American farm laborers. Referencing the disruption, creativity, and improvisation that demonstrated strategic hybridity in the lives of the manongs, I read for these unfolding narratives in the vernacular videos as interconnected though distinct layers of strategic hybridity, and potential interpretations of an estranging moment in everyday life that frame their encounters with Filipinoness. Reading the three layers as the movement of strategic hybridity in the vernacular videos reveals a process of intertwining narratives that interact and inform the “happening” of Filipinoness via these recorded moments. In *Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger lays out a method of reading the “thingness” of a thing and “work” of an artwork, through a similar layering of characteristics that correspond to the form, underlying substance, and equipmentality or usefulness of a thing or work. According to Heidegger, these layers are not separate categories unto themselves. “The former vibrates in the latter and would be nothing without it” (160), with all their characteristics “always turning up already alongside with the given core and occurs alongside it” (149). I read these distinct layers of disruption, creativity, and improvisation as “manifold aspects of a unity” (151), which provide perspectives for witnessing the ways in which strategic hybridity is enacted in the
mundaneness of the everyday.

Out of the many instances in the preceding section on history, I want to focus on the way the act of wearing the McIntosh suits became a catalyst for the formation of Filipino American presence on US soil—a presence that was articulated by their everyday struggles. The historical moment of their appearance becomes an important element in this analysis because it provides a crucial starting point for considering our interpretative move. This is the pole from where we start, and we venture outward in reading, coming back but never with the same understanding. It will always be moving forward while the meanings deepen. Reading this incident provides us with a framework with which to consider the unfolding of strategic hybridity’s characteristics—disruption, creation, and improvisation—and read the vernacular videos according to strategic hybridity’s emergent framework.

**Disruption**

When the manongs put on their McIntosh suits, they were not only transforming their look for a Saturday night on the town. They were disturbing the expectations and established notions of what a Filipino was. The confidence and agency that radiated from the floating fragment that was the Filipino body, dared
to cross into the spaces that were off-limits to their kind. The script written for them by white America—the stereotyped greedy, sex-crazed, illiterates—was suddenly interrupted by abrupt and unexpected scenes. Brown bodies in “white” suits owning main street and dance halls are unexpected images, possibly more disturbing to the nativists than images of scantily-clad Igorots behind fences or brown men bent over rows of cabbage. In other words, Filipinos disrupted the codes or norms that structured the fragile surface of “propriety” in American society.

The Filipinos thrust themselves into the scene and hold a mirror up to the hegemons, spooking them with mimicry. According to Homi Bhabha, the aspect of mimicry in hybridity constantly threatens normalized knowledges with the “inappropriate” (86). “The ambivalence of mimicry is almost the same, but not quite, does not merely rupture the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty that fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual” (86). This incompleteness becomes a fragment that is repeatable rather than representational (Bhabha). “The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (96). A “displacing gaze of the disciplinary double” (96) splits the image in an uncanny doubling that disturbs the surface of everyday life for those in power.

The McIntosh suit—that ensemble of garments that meant to separate the
white gentleman from the rest of the working-class horde—became the reappropriated symbol of resistance for the brown Filipino farmworker. Unsettling the image of the suit as befitting only the white body, Filipinos transformed a visible symbol of a masculine classed, racialized exclusion into a tool for mobility and used their displacement to amplify *misplacement*—they exaggerated their position as strangers, as bodies out-of-place. When they donned the suits, they activated moments of excess (of their presence) that defied containment, fulfilling the fear of contamination on the one hand, and enabling of the figure on which the fear of containment was constructed on the other hand.

[By] wearing flashy suits and dancing with working-class white women Filipino immigrant laborers dared to challenge the prevailing white supremacist racial ideology that forbade their contact with white women. The dance halls also provided a space where Filipino laborers could forge new identities and cultural practices. They flaunted their sartorial flair, traded gossip and stories, danced, played jazz music, and, most importantly, pursued ‘wine, women, and song’ (Mabalon, “Little Brown Men in Sharp Suits: Understanding Filipino Immigrant Manhood”).

The accompanying actions that spelled the purpose for putting on the suits were also disruptive. Their actions “fought against imposed restrictions on space” (España-Maram 120). This “space” is meant literally and figuratively. Literally,
they broke through the physical spaces that meant to contain them as aliens/foreigners/savages, and crossed over to the spaces that were off-limits to them, ones they could not inhabit. The suits became the tool that allowed them to cross out of one space and into another. “Walkways leading to these leisure centers were strategic meeting points in the Filipinos’ social lives. Indeed, Filipino foot traffic was so brisk that at least one researcher observed how ‘Filipino arrests in Los Angeles for blocking the sidewalk alone run proportionately high. In 1928-1929, 46 of the total arrested under this ordinance were Filipinos’” (122). If on the farms, their bodies were subject to the owner’s rules and conditions, in the towns and dance halls, they owned their subjectivities.

Figuratively, they transgressed the social, cultural, and political spaces that laws and “common understanding” forbade them to cross. The suits provided them a temporary pass into those forbidden spaces and gave them the opportunity to dismantle the abject images perpetuated about them. They were described as “almost always immaculately groomed, well garbed, with a flair for that style of dress described…as classy” (125). España-Maram quotes one of the manongs: “We wore the best clothes in the market and entertained the girls well” (125). These small, mundane actions found their way through and between the gaps overlooked by the structures and institutions that assembled themselves into barriers meant to keep Filipinos and other non-white groups excluded. They exposed gaps that Pinoys could slip through: everyday actions that were
impossible to legislate on a micro level. Filipinos detoured from their mandated paths (that is, from jungle to farm and away from urbanity and civilization), and challenge the perceptions of the Filipino as a wretched figure. The suits became an unwitting symbol of resistance, and the act of wearing them troubled the order that hierarchized the white master over the brown slave.

Just as the manongs did, vernacular videos in this study make disruptive use of stereotypes as figures of mimicry. The strict, unreasonable parent, the clueless grandparent, the FOB cousin, the unintelligible and unsophisticated aunt or uncle, are merely partial and skewed renderings of Filipino immigrants. Videographers deploy stereotypes as a response to the question, “Why are you here?” On the one hand, the stereotypes act as specters of the disavowed American colonial and imperial project (Behdad), justifying the notion of Filipinoness as alien and strange. On the other hand, the stereotypes appear as disruptions and digressions to the “script” of what an assimilable group should “look” or “sound” like. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the asymmetrical nature of assimilation created different conditions for white and non-white immigrants, and myopic perspectives of “total integration” concealed the struggles of immigrant groups against immigration and social policies that privileged some groups over others (Omi and Winant). I suggest that the vernacular videos provide counterpoints to such notions of homogenous and unquestioning frames. The videographers translate the stereotype from an ossified and simplified figure of
homogenization to one that is constantly challenging that homogenization because of the incomplete picture it provides.

The Filipino American videographers use stereotypes to unsettle the taken for grantedness of their presence in American society. In videos like, “Shit That Non-Filipinos say to Filipino Americans,” and “Shit People say to Filipinos,” videographers mock the way non-Asian others try to simplify Filipino American identity by forcing their ways of life into outdated and stereotyped molds. “I bet you know how to dance…Why are you still driving to cars that are like rice rockets? You should be driving American cars…You speak Tagalog, right?” (FSU, Youtube). A mood of “should” underlies these questions. The mocking way in which the videos enumerate the “shoulds” that the inquirers expect to correspond with stereotyped ideas of what Filipinoness is is revealed as a ridiculous and uninformed racist discourse. This exposes the absence of general knowledge about America’s role as an imperial power in the Pacific, and the Philippines’s status as “the first Vietnam” (Francisco); forgetting this chapter in American history conceals the treatment of non-white colonial subjects from which the stereotypes originated.

Stereotypes are revealed as indicators of a surface created through exclusionary discourse, where what is permitted to occupy space are the figures that remain within the intelligible, surveilled sphere for the authorities, and conceals the injustice and suffering of those who are forcibly cloaked in attributes
meant to suppress and contain foreignness. The videographers put on the stereotypes as a *put-on*, like the McIntosh suits, taking the Orientalist clichés and twisting them around to disrupt the surface of the colonial gaze. They do so mockingly, as they echo and repeat the questions and uninformed judgments of what Filipinoness is to those who ask them. They disturb the position of the authoritarian voice by taking the voice and the words and modifying it with a knowing tone. It parallels the gaze the Igorot elder returned to Dean Worcester nearly a hundred years ago in the mountain provinces of Northern Luzon. The ways the manongs in McIntosh suits unsettled the order and privilege that were reserved for white men—including the spaces, the relationships, and the opportunities for forming communities in America—are matched by the videographers in their unwitting portrayals of the stereotypes they were forced to accept as hybrids.

The videographers’ treatment of stereotypes also disturbs notions of what

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71 See my discussion of Michael Harley Cruz’s video in Chapter 2.
an assimilated ethnic or racial group should look, sound, or be like. Videos like “Sh*t My Filipino Dad Says,” “Tita Clarita in the Car,” and “Sh*t Filipino Moms Say” portray first generation immigrants as steadfastly conservative and resistant to “modern” American ways. “I don’t understand these American dances, these Dougie-dougie. That’s not sex, ha? Don’t be doing that” says a dad in “Sh*t My Filipino Dad Says.” In their conservatism they identify non-negotiables, such as education and respect for family. Yet subtle practices such as serving “traditional” food and retaining expressions from their native language fuse into the fabric of American life, creating a permanent, repetitive gesture of resistance. Expressions like “Hay naku (sigh),” “hay Diyos ko (Oh Lord),” and “ano (what)” signal exasperation or warning, the way Tita Clarita complains about her son driving too fast or when “mom” is disappointed by the low grades in a report card (“Tita Clarita in the Car,” “Sh*t Filipino Moms Say”). What is most disruptive is the thick Filipino accent, and the “anomalous” use of words to translate thoughts that find no counterpart in English. When “mom” says “Close the TV” or “Let’s go to Traders Joe and buy some Quacker Oats” (“SHET My Filipino Mom Says”), she upsets the consonance of the language.
The videographers do as the manongs did: dress up to disrupt. Amplifying their Filipinoness by impersonating their elders, they disrupt their everyday as hybrid Filipino Americans. As pointed out in chapter 2 and 3, what I see the videographers disrupt by cladding themselves in these personas is the perceived inassimilability, and the reinforced stereotypes applied to them as belonging to an amorphous group of Asian Americans (everyone eats rice, everyone has strict parents, etc). They disrupt the expectation to assimilate as mere hybrid and ironically amplify the stereotype: the common aspects of what it means to be “Asian” or acknowledge the “little Asian” in everyone. On the other hand, the videographers “own” the stereotype and reappropriate it by amplifying what is Filipino. Reappropriating the stereotype is a dangerous method because some may see it as an endorsement, rather than a parody or satire of, the abject Filipino. This portrayal could backfire and reify Filipinonesss as stranger-ness. Confined to a surface level reading, it conveys an acceptance of inassimilability,
and thus exclusion of those who are not of the place.

But the videographers manipulate stereotypes the same way the manongs do. They make their immigrant elders visible not as strangers, nor as assimilated aliens, but rather as Filipinos struggling in the everyday to define what it means to be “Filipino” in a place that tries to downplay indelible differences, and among a people that once forced them to forget what Filipinoness is. In their reenactments, videographers amplify the personas in a similarly excessive way (their sternness, exaggeration of accents). As marked and identifiable bodies, older relatives shown complaining or scolding younger generations in these vernacular videos clue us into the reasons for their anger or impatience: there is a desire to express the hardship and sacrifice they experienced as immigrants, in an effort to provide the second generation’s seamless integration into American society (Espiritu, Wolfe). “Fueled by Hollywood movies and American-style education, [immigrants] dreamed of starting better lives in places they assumed would afford them greater opportunities. Only on coming over did many of them realize the false promises of democracy and equality, for even those who were able to ‘make it’ saw themselves relegated to ‘second-class citizenship” (Bonus, 150). I see the portrayals less as appropriating the immigrant elder’s figure mockingly, and more as an “owning” of the figure as part of themselves. They don’t talk about the figure as a bent over elder; they become the bent over elder, and assume all the cuts and imperfections of the immigrant. What does this say?
Filipino Americans are cutting through the image of themselves as fully assimilated by revealing the silences and invisibility of their elders. Apropos to Ahmed’s notion of estrangement and transition, the videographers shine the light on the rough edges their elders acquired trying to fit into a present home, having been torn from a previous one.

In a way, these videographers amplify presence to cause disruption. They try to make something else visible that will potentially disrupt the prevailing ideas of Filipinoness and an unquestioning assimilation into an ambiguous Asian Americanness. The Filipino elders’ bodies become nodes on which are read years of culture, tradition, language, on the one hand; on the other hand, their bodies endure as the bearers of private and personal struggles that contribute to Filipino American historical presence. Upholding certain traditions and languages have been equated with a primitive and unsophisticated practice of everyday life. However, as if in response to the “lost generation,” videographers underscore their elders’ presence by highlighting what Western society might deem uncultured, and challenge those standards by playing off these episodes against those Western sensibilities. When Filipinoness starts being defined in opposition to the norms of a “civilized” white society, the videos’ portrayals are held up as a defiance of those norms. Traditions and languages once concealed now inspire ruptures in the surface of the assimilated everyday. After all, “the menace of mimicry,” according to Bhabha, “is its double vision which in disclosing the
ambivalence of colonialist discourse also disrupts its authority” (88, author’s emphasis). That double vision is second nature to the estranged person of color, and it is constantly at work as s/he traverses the “home” she was thrown into, and the “home” for which s/he is searching.

Creativity

The Filipino farm workers strategically activated their hybridity by disrupting the codes of inclusion and exclusion to which they were subjected. Hybridity is cast as the “inevitable result” (Walsh 395) of the intermingling and “codependence” of at least two cultures (or in some cases, two races), yet the intermingling may also involve the resistance of one culture against the assertion of a dominant other. This suggests that in a disruptive action, a simultaneous act of creation emerges in the same space from which a constant displacement, or misplacement of positions occur. The results “projected a fractious difference that posed a threat to the colonizer’s fantasy of discursive, social, and racial monopoly…This destabilization created a discursive space for the colonized to articulate an identity independent of and resistant to the one assigned him/her by the colonizer” (395).

The McIntosh suits gave the manongs the opportunity to “carve niches of
autonomy for self-definition…[that] sought to expand the boundaries of alternative expressions” (España-Maram, 120). Filipinos were admitted into white spaces because they used the tools that allowed them to “transact” with whiteness. Filipinos could assume they were like or equal to the master. On one level, wearing the suits offered them the opportunity to imagine themselves as empowered and in control of their own bodies. I want to point out though that I read this power as agency, and not a need to dominate others. In other words, Filipinos found in these suits a means to reestablish a sense of identity, and though it may be argued that that identity was still based on a cultural artifact owned by the white man, the Filipino re-appropriated it to emancipatory ends.

The McIntosh suit gave Filipinos back control of their time. That emancipated condition was expressed through the ability to plan their weekend for themselves. If the movements of their bodies on the farms were dictated by the time of day as it related to field work, in these towns and streets, they were free to decide their next moves. “[W]orkers, marginalized by class, race, age, or gender, took back what they felt was rightfully theirs: their bodies, their time, and the freedom to construct, affirm, or reject identities in their own fashion and among their own peers… Filipinos went to dance halls because they not only liked to dance, but also to share experiences and formulate a collective memory in addition to those in the work place” (España-Maram 126). They decided the time they should gather and catch up; their appetites decided the time they
should eat; their eagerness decided the time they should head to the dance halls and cut up the dance floors.

One could say that their presence constantly made a scene in the way their brown bodies looked in white suits (España-Maram), the way they danced and conducted themselves in the dance halls (San Pablo-Burns, España-Maram, Mabalon), or the way they blocked sidewalks. I read these scenes as ways Filipinos wrote themselves onto the landscape of white America: writing through resistance, and causing wrinkles on the white surface. “Each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure; each political object is determined in relation to the other, and displaced in that critical act” (Bhabha 26). In a similar way, Filipinos used their cultural hybridity (i.e., their familiarity with American culture and language) to resist their abject representations and rewrite themselves into subject positions. Restrictive codes by which Filipinos were “read” included the need for disciplining like infantilized savages; otherwise, they were controlled and contained for their assertiveness, a result of being “too rapidly assimilated” into American ways (San Pablo-Burns, Cressey). This familiarity threatened the Anglo male sexuality and position. Filipinos deployed these perceptions and codes through the McIntosh suits, fusing these two images into the uncanny figure of a brown man in a white man’s suit. This figure demonstrates how disruption and creation/creativity become

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72 “Filipino arrests in Los Angeles for blocking the sidewalk alone run proportionately high. In 1928-1929, 46 of the total 80 arrested under this ordinance were Filipinos” (James Earl Wood qtd. in España-Maram, 122).
intertwined and interdependent actions, as well as twin responses to any static order that requires conformity and containment.

On another level Filipinos turned the practice of containment into one of community, and the practice of exclusion into one of expression. The reinscription of a homeliness was extracted from the actuality of code switching: being able to inhabit two or more worlds, and taking from these resources what they needed to set up a “homely” environment via spontaneous assemblies. The Filipinos mirrored each others’ current struggles to each other. They echoed to each other the conditions that brought them all to that moment. This network of similar stories and experiences established a sense of belonging. Impromptu assemblies were opportunities to revive an ethnic solidarity that was constantly threatened by alienation and erasure. Rewriting and reworking the codes that prohibited them from expressing themselves, Filipinos defined and demarcated their own spaces and opportunities for belonging—a way for them to be at-home and find a sense of home among their similarly-excluded comrades.

In place of a McIntosh suit, Filipino American videographers use their hybridity as the “suit.” But where the manongs used their suits to pass as white or at the very least, as “colonized” (Coleman), the videographers wear their hybridity to pass through the cracks and gaps overlooked by the imposition of a static identity. Hybridity is treated not as the destination or the space in which one creates. Rather one creates through the use and deployment of hybridity as the
tool to re/write the terms of identification as Filipino, American, or Filipino American. For Ryuko Kubota and Al Lehner, “the notion of hybridity is not without problems… one limitation is in conceptualizing hybridity as a blend of two or more cultures, each of which is perceived as a cohesive whole based on an essentialist definition of culture. It is necessary to bear in mind that postmodern exploration of culture and rhetoric always involves limits, quandaries, and contradictions, forcing us to conceptualize a politics of cultural difference in situated ways” (14). Hybridity, if treated as an identity, risks becoming a stereotype if societal and cultural frameworks assume the existence of an authentic well from which to draw Filipinoness and Americanness, and that their fusion results in a sophisticated individual who can articulate the essential traits of either one. In this case, the videographers turn hybridity inside out and creatively interrogate the ways their passing through can rewrite the codes of visibility, inclusion, and community.

Videographers find creative expression when time allows them to ponder their experiences through the making of vernacular video. In the process of talking themselves through their experiences on camera and reprocessing the material through editing, they get a chance to reckon certain Filipino essentialisms in opposition to their present everyday. In his video, LazyRon professes his passion for Filipino food and culture, such as the custom of having rice with every meal. “Regardless if it was breakfast lunch or dinner, [my mom
always had] rice on the table,” (Lazyron, YouTube). But as a “half-breed,” he has had to negotiate the stereotyped characteristic of “Filipino time.” “Filipino time is when you’re supposed to show up at seven o’clock, but you don’t show up ‘til about seven thirty or eight o’clock because that’s just how it is” (Lazyron, YouTube). He’s grown accustomed to it, he says, but admits to making some adjustments. “I’ve learned…[to set] all my clocks and all my watches and anything that has time on it like ten minutes ahead so it kind of balances out” (Lazyron, YouTube). GJAce, who is half African American and half Asian has a different take on the time issue. “Us black people, we arrive late to a party. But we Asian people we leave late at [sic] a party. I mean, I’m that screwed!” (GJAce, YouTube). Seemingly “trapped” by the dictates of what his ethnicities do with time, GJAce jump-cuts to a related topic: what happens at the party. “And every time you go to a Filipino party, you hear the same thing: ‘Ano, eat, eat!’” Though they may attempt to “balance it out,” both videographers observe the humor in how the “abject” half of themselves seems to escape the conventions of proper “time management.” The way the Filipino half of themselves conceptualizes time is something they cannot control, and though it can lean towards a damaging stereotype and reinforce their static position in time, discussing it and owning the stereotype allows them to animate that position. Discussing the trait as it applies to themselves, they reveal the strategies and rules they use to negotiate a balance (setting their watches ahead), or provide a response that pivots on the
situation (if you’re at the party, you might as well eat).

The honesty with which they discuss how the moments and artifacts in the identity checklist relate to themselves belie a humorous approach that acknowledges an unmistakable and irresolvable gap. In identifying themselves as hybrid they are cognizant of an existing split in themselves that they themselves can only ever attempt to bridge. And though Bhabha renders the act of bridging an “ironic mimicry…where the otherness of identity is the anguished presence within the Self of an existentialist agony,” (48, my emphasis) what the videographers add to the creative act of bridging is the very comicality of the attempt. In other words, they find humor in their enactment of hybridity.

The videos mimic a static idea of Filipinoness, and living with this gap means they recognize the innate incompleteness of their experience as Filipino (indeed even as American). Filipinos are known to deal with loss through...
humor, and perhaps the humor that emerges from Filipino American vernacular videos speaks to the suggestion that Filipinos were displaced and homeless to begin with. Recognizing the fact that they do not belong or cannot “return” to the same Philippines that their parents remember, they seem to be piecing together their own version of Filipinoness based on the acknowledgement that all they have are fragments of it.

Figure 4.10. JRdaFilipino. "I don't understand Tagalog." Web.

Their “inadequacy” then becomes a source of humor and the impetus for a creative project. In his video, JRdaFilipino humorously depicts this lack as he recounts his relationship to the Tagalog language. “I don’t speak Tagalog or understand it all that well but that’s what makes it so great…whatever emotion I’m feeling, I can make it mean whatever I want it to mean” (JRdaFilipino, YouTube). The viewer then sees a montage of JRdaFilipino demonstrating

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73 See footnote 1 in Chapter 1 on Typhoon Haiyan.
happiness, sadness, and romance as he emotes to the same song. To a native Tagalog speaker, the disjointedness of the scene is hilarious, but to the Filipino American it is a way to connect through humor and irony. Instead of lamenting his lack, JRdaFilipino turns it into a comedic object and neutralizes the power that a discourse of authenticity might impose on his own notion of Filipinoness.

Using hybridity as a locus of humor, the videographers appear to poke fun at the strangeness of their elders’ practices and traditions. Ultimately though, what they really laugh at is themselves trying to be their elders, because they can’t be them. In many of these videos, figures of parents and elders, and the portrayal of their personalities are always partial: from the trips in their speech as they mimic the Tagalog accent to even what they wear. In “How to be Filipino” the person playing the character of “Dad” is dressed in an office shirt and gym shorts as he complains about his daughter’s low grades. “Mom” on the other hand forgets her accent when she begins to explain why plastic cups should be saved—and “saves” her character by uttering the ubiquitous Filipino expression “hay naku!” Their video ends with a montage of bloopers, showing them breaking character and cracking up at the silliness of their reenactments. Obviously, surface portrayals of their parents’ reactions to concerns about the daily grind and the future of their family, the complex histories and specificity of struggles of the first generation to “make home” will always be lost on the second generation. The impossibility of that shared experience will only always be approached as an
attempt to bridge the gaps through humorous portrayals, but will never be a complete understanding and overcoming of the foreignness of the other’s journeys. Coming home to a common experience of diasporic estrangement will always result in a disjointed splicing of images, memories, and stories. Therefore, any attempt to conform to an identity checklist that claims to establish membership in an ethnic group is ultimately futile and ridiculous. The videographers reproduce the list of characteristics, if only to point out the futility of trying to be something they are not, and the uselessness of perpetuating a list of characteristics they do not possess. As a “template” it cannot contain their history and experience, their own excess as Filipino Americans, and the hilarity of even expecting themselves to conform and define their Filipinoness as identical to their parents’ ideas of Filipinoness. Instead they use their hybridity to reinterpret their encounters with Filipinoness, situated in their own everyday, write alternative ways of identifying themselves on the one hand as what they are not, to provide them with a space to experiment with what they can be.

This echoes Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification, where he highlights consubstantiality as the act of simultaneously acknowledging the natural division and innate separateness of human beings as Others to one another, and the desire to connect and bridge these divisions through language and communication. The “guilt” that emerges from our recognition of the divisions in our society fuels the need to find commonalities with one another through
attitudes, beliefs, experiences, stories, struggles. These instances of "overlap" make us "consubstantial" with others. We continually seek to be associated with certain individuals or groups (and not others), attain some position in the hierarchy of social relations, and relieve ourselves of the guilt we bear” (Quigley, n.p.).

Thinking about the vernacular videos of Filipino American videographers as a language\textsuperscript{74}, I suggest that making their projects reveals a grammar with which to encode their own version of Filipinoness. In their unapologetic embrace of a lack (instead of guilt) Filipino American videographers reinterpret the identity checklist. While the list may have functioned at some point as a ground on which early immigrants and members of an online community could find some commonality and even test authenticity (see chapter 3), the videos form a response to this method of community building by inscribing it with particularity and specificity. Beyond conforming to the list, I believe they rewrite the list by pulling in their experience of being racially and culturally hybrid persons. Filipino Americans were/are a confusing lot; they are racially Asian but culturally Western/American; they are not Chinese or Japanese or Indian but

\textsuperscript{74} Language, according to Burke, is one of the most fundamental ways by which we act, use symbols, and enact our attitudes to persuade. In identification, one names properties that individuals simultaneously associate and disassociate from, suggesting that persons (and ideas or things) share, or do not share, important qualities in common. Identifying—the state of being consubstantial with others—engenders the rhetorical situations where individuals involved in the scene persuade one another and themselves that there are important qualities they share with each other. These situations arise in the dailiness of language use and human action; conversely, the dailiness of life is likewise constituted by language and human action. One of the most common and taken-for-granted of these situations/states is the desire to belong, the actions individuals take in order to belong, and language that has to be learned in order to learn the discourse of belonging.
Malay, yet curiously possess “Spanish-y sounding” names (FSU, YouTube). The ambiguity is threatening in its excess as a foreign quality. The need to assign it to a category or criteria makes them legible; otherwise they are simply labeled strange.

But it is that strangeness that gives rise to humor, which in turn is amplified through the excess: the videographers disrupt the orderliness of the identity checklists through constant digressions and detours in their presentations. The incidental and accidental moments, and the personal/private anecdotes within the videos reveal the grammar used to communicate belonging and identification. In other words, they are united in their excess as hybrids and write their own community into being with it. These form the rewritten codes of inclusion among Filipino Americans: an embrace of incompleteness, and the ironic embodiment of the white world’s perception of them as inadequate, and even deficient. What this shows is the potentiality of hybridity to remain dynamic, and its function as a tool to constantly lend itself to write and rewrite the conditions in which the Filipino American finds him/herself. It writes against the temptation to homogenize and writes towards the complexity of the Filipino American experience.
Improvisation

We have read the McIntosh suits, alongside vernacular video, as disruptive of the hegemonic order and creatively resisting at the same time. I wish to offer a third reading of these “McIntosh suits moments” as moments of improvisation, and apply it to vernacular videos. “Improvisation” is a term in theories and practices of performance, especially music and dance, where one acts without any prior preparation or previous experience facing a particular situation. One can also improvise by “going off” or discarding a script. S/he is left to pursue an action without any signposts and figures her way out of lost-ness. One invents the script as s/he moves forward. Improvisation in strategic hybridity is read as a spontaneous response to the foreignness or unexpectedness of a situation. If disruption was about deconstructing an existing script and creativity was about revising or rearranging elements of the script, improvisation triggers something unexpected. Based on cues received from one’s surroundings, a person crafts a response; in the process of crafting that response, s/he could be suddenly led into another, his/her actions appearing to always undermine what was attempting to establish itself.

I suggest that Filipino farmworkers demonstrated improvisation by way of the McIntosh suits, which helped them survive the abuse, violence, and
deprivation that made up their everyday. If disruption and creativity reveal positive moves of resistance against the suppression of their identities and the formation of identities in relation to that resistance, improvisation reveals unseen and as-yet unarticulated possibilities that are always on the edge of their responses. In the volatility of their ambiguous status and the racial hostility towards them, improvisation allowed Filipinos to persevere in their daily struggle to make sense of their homeless-ness. Acquiring the McIntosh suit was merely the beginning of an improvisational move.

In the film, *Delano Manongs*, Asian American studies professor Alex Fabros recounts his experience living in a labor camp with Filipino farm workers. He describes the flurry of activity in the hours leading up to a weekend on the town.

“…on Saturday—we finish work around ten o’clock—all the Filipinos, they…went downtown, got haircuts. They’re coming back and you can smell the brylcreem, the pomade: it was going on the hair really thick. And all of the suits were in one closet. You didn’t know who owned which suit. They just grabbed one. (*Delano Manongs*)

The abject condition in the labor camps forced Filipinos to tap into the resources that were available to them: in this case, their housemates, the meager earnings they had, and the limited space in which they lived. Farm laborers literally owned
little more than the shirts on their backs. Impoverishment, but also their constant mobility meant fewer possessions allowed easier travel. In some instances they were forced to leave everything behind in exchange for their lives (Bulosan). To have possessions presupposed one was willing to *make do* with what was available. In the above anecdote, however, the McIntosh suits were afforded a special place, despite the limitations of their living arrangements. Designating a shared closet to hold all their suits seemed to erase any notion of ownership over a single suit. This meant that one person could be wearing a different suit on a different weekend.

This is was an important move in several ways. First, it was economical: because the outfits were expensive, each man could only afford one, which he would have to wear over and over. If the men shared suits, it would seem like they were wearing a new one at least every other week. Second, and related to the first: sharing suits made it seem like they had an extensive wardrobe and several “looks” to wear, thus affording them the confidence to experiment.

According to Paul Cressey, women were impressed with the way Filipinos were always well-dressed and groomed, and many thought that Filipinos made a lot of money because they seemed to be sporting new looks every time they visited the dance halls.⁷⁵ According to Linda España-Maram, wearing the suits inspired a

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⁷⁵ This impression put Filipinos in a precarious position with dance hall girls. According to Cressey, the Filipino’s courtship rituals involved giving gifts and treating the girls to nice dinners, which in turn encouraged the dancers to “exploit” and “play around” with the Filipinos to get more money or presents (156-157).
daring in the Filipinos to approach women, dance closely with them, and in many cases initiate a relationship. Cressey documented stories from women at taxi dance halls about the respectful way Filipinos treated them. These moments of self-presentation are informed by attentiveness to previous events and encounters, but also to the mood and atmosphere in that space, at that time. A spirit of play and experimentation with image encouraged the Filipino to push the envelope in these charged situations—especially when one considers the exclusion, racial prejudice, and surveillance surrounding them.

Judith Butler has described improvisation as a practice or activity that emerges without knowing, without willing, within “conditions of restraint” (2). In *Undoing Gender*, she problematizes gender as constituted by a performance rather than as a stable concept, and how the conditions of possibility, the interactions between oneself and an other (whether real or imaginary), produce identities as contingent and dynamic. For Butler, improvisation involves “taking items that are available and making them work” (96). She says “an imaginary play, and a capacity to transfigure one item into another through a process of improvisation and substitution” indicates “something is being made, something is being made from something else, something is being tried out. And if it is improvisation, it is not fully scripted in advance” (96). In her formulation, improvisation works within constraints, or the status quo, as a space and opportunity from which to project itself as a counterpoint to the structures that
frame current contexts and provide the elements that make up the immediate environment.

Like Butler, Kenneth Burke looks to the interplay of elements in a scene. However I read Burke’s notion of improvisation as dependent on action. Action determines how a rhetorical situation emerges, and reveals how an individual responds to it—a response that is not at all predetermined or “scripted” but is “being made” in the encounter. Burke’s dramatism speaks to the agency of the actor in a scene and the motivations that drive him/her to negotiate a situation through action and purpose. In his theory, Burke describes “scripted” encounters as a means to keep a body in “unthinking” motion. A body demonstrates this when caught in a flow of repetitive activity or routine; unawareness pervades scripted encounters and motions. The unscripted encounter on the other hand, involves an arrest in the unthinking motion. At the moment of arrest or break is potential action and one struggles to figure out what to do next. (The notion of the inauthentic and authentic everyday resonates here: when a break occurs in the smooth surface of everydayness, we are suddenly estranged from all that is around us.) Burke makes a case for “incipient” and “attitudinal” action as a “region of ambiguous possibilities…where ‘inceptive’ verbs are also called ‘inchoatives,’ while ‘inchoate’ in turn means ‘beginning,’ ‘partially but not fully in existence,’ ‘incomplete’” (Burke, Grammar of Motives, 242). He considers incipient and attitudinal action an application of Aristotle’s notion of “potentiality,”
when incompleteness is on the verge of becoming something other than it is or other than what prevailing frameworks normally predict it will become. “Unscriptedness” underscores the agency of the actor in the scene, especially in considering the ambiguity that precedes decision. The decision is the moment of “making” and “trying out.” The scene then not only involves the constraints that Butler describes but the inchoate possibilities and alternate situations that lie dormant at the moment of arrest.

Butler’s and Burke’s theories account for actuality (things already present in the scene) and possibility. However, I wish to extend their thought by highlighting failure as an important aspect of improvisation. How does one talk about failure as a possibility facing a moment of arrest, or an outcome of play and experimentation? Perhaps a third implication of sharing and exchanging McIntosh suits might show us how.

Filipinos sharing expensive suits among themselves implies a sense of reciprocal responsibility for not only one, but all suits. It is perhaps the most literal instance of not just walking in someone else’s shoes; it’s actually about being a being in someone else’s place (the place defined by the space formed by the outfit). One literally inhabits the place of the other. To be clear, this is not necessarily a substitution, which, according to Cynthia Haynes, does violence to an entity by displacing it and turning it into a scapegoat. This implies that the displaced body is uninhabitable and thus dispensable. In her book, The
*Homesick Phone Book*, Haynes describes the way Jewish names were replaced in the 1941 Berlin phonebook when their homes were distributed as “replacement housing” in Nazi Germany’s “Aryanization of Jewish assets as disposable property” (14). In Nazi Germany, Jewish bodies were deported and disposed of as uninhabitable others.

The case of the Filipino laborer is radically different. Unlike Nazi substitution, Filipinos inhabiting the suits of their fellow farmers demonstrates a core value in Philippine culture known as *kapwa* or “the self in other” (De Guia, 8). Kapwa is a fundamental value of kinship, but as scholars of Filipino identity insist, it goes much deeper. Kapwa is a shared sense of identity, an inner self offered to others towards an act of unity or oneness and belonging. “When thinking about the English equivalent of the word kapwa, one of the most common words that come to mind is ‘others.’ However, the true meaning of kapwa is actually the complete opposite of others, because such a term connotes a separation of one’s self from other people. Kapwa is more accurately translated as ‘both’ or ‘fellow being’” (David 130). One’s identity constitutes and is constituted by what is given towards a group’s formation, and what the group gives the individual in return. It is a continuous flowing exchange of being-in-one-another that remakes itself in subsequent encounters. “A person starts having kapwa not so much because of a recognition of status given him by others but more so because of his awareness of shared identity. The *ako* (ego) and the *iba-sa-akin* (others) are one
and the same in [kapwa]” (Enriquez 12). Kapwa recognizes and honors the
dignity in each one, and respects the journey each being is taking.

But for kapwa to emerge, one needs to “feel” her way through to that
connection, and sometimes that mood of sharing or self-offering is not present or
reciprocated. In the Philippines this feeling or mood of “figuring out” is known as
pakikiramdam or a “sizing up” of the environment and the beings within it (De
Guia). In her book Kapwa: The Self In Other, Katrin de Guia describes
pakikiramdam as a “shared inner perception…it is an emotional a priori inherent
in Filipino personhood, a motor that moves motivation…This steering emotion
assures the overall framework that is needed to trigger the voluntary actions that
are part of sharing the self. It is the feeling that initiates deeds” (29). When
aligned with kapwa, pakikiramdam “is a participatory event” that heightens an
awareness and sensitivity to subtlety, nonverbal cues, and a general
attentiveness to “invisible things” that go on within one’s “inner being” (29). These
moments pull two or more people together in potential action; informed internal
impressions and intuition match external sensations such as a heightened
awareness to touch, sound, light, movement, etc. All these sensations converge
in a moment of extreme ambiguity, when one considers how s/he should respond
to these elements in a split second: an instance of unscripted incipient action
preceded by a Burkean arrest. A Filipino would utter the words, “bahala na” or
“come what may” and plunge into the situation despite the “uncertainty and
uncharted" conditions s/he faces. “[The] improvisational character of this value correlates with fields of chaos and complexities rather than with linear prediction and control” (31). In other words, the Filipino improvises in that moment and confronts the risks knowing that failure and success are two sides of every possibility.

The Filipino farmworker, then, puts on the suit aware that though he prepared for an evening of fun, something might go wrong. He proceeds anyway in full knowledge that he is responsible for his friend, and his friend’s property; that he may not dance with his favorite dancer, that he may end up spending all his money. He is aware that if he offers friendship to a white woman, he may be rejected; if his friendship is accepted he is also aware that if seen by a white man he may get beaten up or killed. He spends his whole weekend away from the farm facing the risk that he might not make it in time for work at three o’clock on Monday morning (Imutan, Delano Manongs), but he risks it anyway because decked in the suit, he embraces an identity shared with him through kapwa. For a weekend he recognizes himself, and sees that reflected in others. Dressed to the hilt, he and his kababayan (countrymen) become visible to each other as more than just fellow-laborers, a far cry from the soiled and sweaty creatures hunched over in faded work clothes. Their personalities are uncovered in these moments and their enthusiasm as young men find expression in the dance halls where a new set of conditions alert them to figure out new ways to respond.
Kapwa and pakikiramdam extend Butler’s and Burke’s concepts of improvisation by highlighting an openness to failure as one of its possibilities. The inherent fluidity of Butler’s experimentation and Burke’s focus on the moment of arrest enriches the ambivalent third space afforded the culturally/racially hybrid individual by imagining utterance, form, image, action, or idea not as an end state but a “pre-act” (Burke 245) that leads to the incipience of a new action (Burke). The interdependence of action, motion, and arrest describe the unfinished nature of an improvisational moment. Kapwa and pakikiramdam intensify the unfinishedness by casting it as a repeating, regenerative exchange between self and other, and interpret Burke’s idea of ambiguity and incompleteness as an ability to face the possibility of an act’s failure. Failure is conceptualized as a necessary outcome to incite a new action. In other words, it allows for a conception of alternate beginnings. The Filipino farmworkers were strategically overwriting their identity according to the dictates of the political, social, or economic situation to make room for alternate possibilities. During weekends they were not just farm laborers but young men; when their culture/race was insulted they were Filipinos banding together against nativist rioters; when their applications for marriage licenses were rejected on account of being identified as “Mongolian” they found a way to reason that they were “Malay.” The contingency of their identities in America is reshaped into ironic responses to the ambiguity of
their immigration status as US Nationals. I want to say that these are instances when strategic hybridity emerges.

Many vernacular videos in this study demonstrate actions that can be read as improvisation, from digressions and mistakes in the “script” to a natural unfolding of responses and reactions in the process of storytelling that make it into the final cut of the video. Off-the-cuff remarks and memories that insert themselves in the recitation of the identity checklist endow the video with a sincerity that speaks to the specificity of their situation. In his video, “Being Half Filipino,” vlogger JREKML recounts how his mother pranked him using language. Wanting to impress his Filipina crush, he asked his mother to teach him how to express his admiration in Tagalog. His mother tells him to say the phrase, “natatae ako” with intense emotion. Thinking it was the way to say, “I love you,” he goes up to his crush and bares his soul, only to realize that what he actually said was, “I need to take a shit” (JREKML, YouTube). Labeling it his own personal struggle with language, JREKML’s retelling demonstrates the uncertainty in his clumsy appropriation of the language and the possible rejection from the girl. He laments that his mom “didn’t really teach me Tagalog…[just words] here and there” (JREKML, YouTube). And when he tries to recall those words, he could not even remember them, much less translate them. And yet the whole incident draws laughs and acceptance (JREKML says the girl appreciated the effort and so did her friends), and instead of feeling embarrassed, JREKML
thanks his mother for giving him a “sense of humor” about his inability to speak the language.

Figure 4.11. JREKML. “Natatae ako.” Web.

The extemporaneous retelling of the story—of a memory—opens itself up to digressions, mistakes, and stumbles in the recitation. It speaks to the experience of racially and culturally hybrid Filipino Americans’ practice of figuring out their place in the confluence of these cultural and linguistic elements, and making something out of the moment. They might consider it an inadequacy of being ‘halfbreeds,’ but it is equally possible to read these occurrences as moments of improvisation at work. As actor, JREKML tries to maintain his balance in the encounter with Filipinoness. Throwing himself into the situation, he finds himself toggling positions as actor and responder and back, not knowing if his offer of friendship would be accepted, or if his use of the phrase would be understood. When laughter arrests the action a mutual recognition of each other’s effort to make sense of the moment (the girl probably wondered why
someone would come up to her to say he needed to take a shit) highlights their connection. This initiates new possibilities, which, in JREKML’s case included making new friends (and finding a date!).

This moment of improvisation reads as an instance of strategic hybridity in which JREKML’s awareness of his hybridity—specifically the “incompleteness” of his being Filipino—afforded unarticulated possibilities. These are possibilities that would only emerge from his own decision to plunge into the “uncharted” situation. But what is also interesting is his assumption that he had the “right” tools to handle the situation. His mother’s prank introduces a layer of momentary chaos that thwarts whatever script JREKML might have written for himself. Forcibly pushed off track and inducing an unscripted response opened up the moment to unforeseen methods and possibilities to establish a relationship, all based on the specificities of that first encounter.

However, as I suggested, not all encounters with improvisation succeed. In my research of Filipino Americans’ videos, one stands out and literally disrupts the genre. In “Smoking Sessions: Prideful Filipinos rant” JBoy directs his grievances at “FilAms,” or Filipino Americans born in America, and their exclusionary treatment of newly-arrived Filipino immigrants. JBoy attacks the concept of Filipino Pride or what he claims are FilAms’ selective appreciation of Filipino symbols or traditions. “I’m fed up with this word Filipino pride and it pisses me off…you talk about Filipino Pride but you’ve never been to the
Philippines” (JBoy, YouTube). He attacks the way FilAms ridicule FOBs because of their accented English and the way they look. “Why do you call us FOBs? Because we can’t speak English good [sic]?…[FilAms] would check the tags on my shirts and if that shit wasn’t branded, they’d make fun of me,” JBoy says angrily. “Filipinos made the fucking fun out of me,” he says of his middle school FilAm classmates. Because of this, JBoy says he had more friends who were non-Filipino. “It’s so hard to fit in here. You have to create an image to blend in.” He goes on to critique the Filipino Americans who “dress in hiphop clothing and wear those goofy ass clown hats and they talk in hiphop slang and shit like that…well fuck you.”

![Image](Figure 4.12. JBoy. “I’m fed up.” Web.)

From the manner of presentation to the anecdotes he retells, the video demonstrates improvisation. Like JREKML, JBoy narrates his video without a script, ignoring the identity checklist altogether, and speaking freely based on his life experiences. As he flicks his cigarette at the screen, his frustration tells us
that the humorous representations of other vernacular videos tend to obscure the struggles for acceptance by Filipinos, not just in American society, but within the Filipino American community itself. JBoy’s rants shatter the apparent harmony among Filipino Americans and expectations of what an assimilated Filipino should be. “A message to all those Filipinos coming to America for the first time: just be yourself…you don’t have to copy what you see on TV. You don’t have to copy what that Filipino dude was wearing. And if they make fun of you, just laugh…just let it go” (JBoy, YouTube). JBoy encourages new immigrants and second generation Filipinos to veer from the identity checklists and scripts that lay the framework for acceptance. He rejects the use of the stereotype as an emancipatory tool, and critiques the decision to reproduce the stereotype in the first place (JBoy, YouTube). Instead of wearing an assimilable version of Filipinoness, JBoy challenges Filipino Americans to clad themselves in what comes naturally to them in the everyday. A sincere sense of belonging then is achieved through a recognition of the struggles of different members of the community.

I read JBoy’s rant as a search for kapwa. His stories reveal a rejection of his presence, and a discrimination against him as not “fully” American. The negative reaction to his “incomplete” assimilation is perceived as a deficiency, and the action that would customarily initiate kapwa is not only arrested, but is shut down. The inverse of kapwa is a stinging and demoralizing denial of the

We construct our very own ‘authentic’ identity by having our selves partially reflected back through the eyes of others. The absence of that reflection can cause all kinds of fissures within identity. To quote Taylor: The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Gunew 99)

Kapwa is the intertwining of the self in other so much so that the self is the other and vice-versa. If one views the other as inferior and separates him/herself from the other and the group, s/he is seen to be too individuated and *makasarili* or selfish, and thus loses kapwa. According to EJR David in his book, *Filipino-American Postcolonial Psychology*, those who consider fellow beings unsophisticated or deficient in their acquisition of a more “occidental” worldview diminish their sense of kapwa until it is completely gone. Highlighting (FilAms’

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difference as privilege and those of immigrant/second generation’s as defective
destroys both individuals’ sense of kapwa toward each other. The one who
discriminates becomes less and less recognizable as kapwa.

Why should incidents such as these affect one’s conceptualization of the
self, especially if one has the privilege of switching between aspects of her
hybridity to control a situation? So what if some people are accommodating and
others are not? One can make the argument that since the improvisational
dimension of strategic hybridity is open and always attuned to possibility, one can
eventually begin a separate community and discard prior structures. As a truly
emancipatory move why doesn’t someone like JBoy create his own group to
identify with, based on his own terms? It is an attractive idea, especially for
persons of color and marginalized individuals who have been invisible for so long,
or who are expected to assimilate according to the dominant culture’s criteria. If
improvisation is about experimentation and making do, figuring out next steps
and venturing on despite not having a map to navigate through the chaos and
ambiguity, armed with nothing but one’s prior experience and tools like
pakikiramdam and just plain hope, then with every failed outcome or decision to
incipient action comes equal possibilities lying latent within an alternate beginning.
And that alternate beginning could be a truly authentic group.

But to form such groups imply their existence as a scripted response to
rejection. Thus laying out the “terms” for inclusion appears to automatically
exclude as well, negating kapwa’s spirit. It becomes the same exact move perpetrated by the colonial master: to constitute the community defined by the colonial authority, he first identifies the stranger. When one is identified as a stranger, s/he is relegated to an abject state. According to Sara Ahmed, one’s expulsion to an “uninhabitable zone” is actually meant to define borders and spaces that constitute “home” and being “at home” of the white, heterosexual male subject; his identity as a subject is likewise constituted against the abjection of the non-white body contained in uninhabitable, transitory spaces. “One does not then live in abjection; abject bodies are precisely the bodies that are not inhabited, are not livable as such, or indeed are not at home” (Ahmed 52, author’s emphasis). This points right back to the rejection of kapwa and the refusal to inhabit the space of the other. Home exists in the other and in the time that one would have remained entwined in the other’s being. In refusing to coexist in that incipient moment, the rejected one is denied a “home” and the other denies him/herself a home as well.

Improvisation then highlights homelessness. One is homeless in the incompleteness of being a hybrid on the one hand; on the other hand it indicates the continuous rebuilding of and/or the perpetual search for a home. For Filipino Americans homelessness is expressed as the instability of identity: that is, the ambiguity presented by strategic hybridity, and dwelling in the excess and displacement caused by hybridity. Improvisation suggests that no prior
construction of identity will be wholly applicable all the time, and all existing conceptualizations of identity are merely a way to freeze time. The homelessness of identity in improvisation reveals a level of estrangement that recognizes the risk of having to undo what was already established. The strategic application of one’s racial or cultural advantage forces one to relearn, over and over, the intricacies of the moment and reevaluate the responses we craft as we craft them. In other words, everything is still being written; and everything that is being written is written with the awareness that it could all fail. And yet we continue to write.

Learning “to move through life like water, ready to lose everything” (De Guia, 33) in the search for home calls for a higher order of creativity in facing disruption and destruction. For Filipino American laborers this was particularly poignant. Discriminated, not having any literal land on which to build property and faced with anti-miscegenation laws, they relied on their kababayans for a sense of homeliness that found expression in little acts of kindness. Second generation Filipino Americans who have no connection to the land of origin deny themselves the privilege of identifying as “fully” Filipino, and try to find comfort in calling themselves hybrids, halves-of-something. In other words, they are imperfect, incomplete, and unfinished versions of anything “authentically Filipino” and a smeared version of what is “truly American.” They go online in search of kapwa and a community that experiences similar incidents daily. So when people like
JBoy are rejected it is a bitter episode. In these encounters we see that he cannot write an identity alone, and needs a community writing together. JBoy in fact asks, “Why don’t we just get along? We’re all Filipino.” His use of his Filipinoness to try and link everybody back is itself an improvisational move, one we’re not sure will be heeded. But he tries anyway.

And yet it is in imperfection that improvisation derives its power. One is constantly (re)building—home, identity, community—through the interactions and encounters with fellow beings. The racially and culturally hybrid individual is constantly redefining her “formed” self, filtered through the actualities of everyday struggles and the possibilities that gather at the point of a decision. Improvisation triggered in strategic hybridity celebrates the imperfect moment; it is the imperfect moment that opens us to the confluence of ambiguity, failure, and community, and keeps us moving towards and creating home. Our notion of improvisation then (taking from Butler, Burke, and the values of kapwa and pakikiramdam) launches us into the unknown and foreign, aware that in the imperfect moment of improvisation one is able to glimpse an/other beginning.

MOVING ON

Strategic hybridity throws the hybrid other into a constant mode of
estrangement. It invites him/her to question his/her own identification with things, events, and beings s/he encounters in the everyday. But thrown into a transitionary mode, it likewise forces him/her to question not only what s/he sees within the frame but what lies beyond it. This has the potential to unsettle previous notions of a stable identity for Filipino Americans, causing chaos in a perfectly comfortable and homely position. Why walk out of the frame, like Marlon Fuentes did, into the unknown and foreign when your designated spot allows you to acquire an identity with which others can permanently recognize you, and you can permanently recognize them and the world? Strategic hybridity challenges this assumption by revealing the impermanence and imperfection of any situation and the insecurity of any stable position. The agency that racial and cultural hybrid persons possess to reveal multiple, alternate realities that lie beneath ordered surfaces is an important element in the excavation of forgotten struggles of others like them—people of color, refugees, migrants, strangers. All these stories connect and intertwine in the movement inspired by strategic hybridity. These stories need to be rewritten and retold. These stories will reveal the fissures through which alternate histories disturb and disrupt narratives that cloak the abuses of those who held the tools and wrote the scripts of oppression.

Along with the rewriting of these stories is the rewriting of identity. Creating and making as a means of encoding presence and experience is a crucial action. The voice of Carlos Bulosan, himself a farm laborer, encodes the traces of the
manongs’ struggle in one of the most persuasive examples of strategic hybridity—the creative appropriation of his life into a literary text. “The time had come, I felt, for me to utilize my experiences in written form. I had something to live for now, and to fight the world with; and I was no longer afraid of the past. I felt that I would not run away from myself again” (396). Filipino Americans’ videos connect with those of the manongs’ struggles, through paths created by detours and digressions, failures and improvisations, unwittingly carved into time by strategic hybridity. To traverse this route means embracing all the pieces that were, and could be, a part of their identity, despite being dispersed and fragmented, despite spaces empty and silent. It means venturing into the foreign, away from homely spaces, knowing that one’s homecoming will never be the same.

Filipino identity will always be a work in progress; Filipinoness happens as Filipinos/Filipino Americans confront the historical episodes that reveal the truth of forgotten oppressions and institutional practices of marginalization cloaked in “inclusive” rhetoric. These estranging encounters with history become moments of meditation and reinvention. What these historical anecdotes and vernacular videos persuade us to see is not the seamless progression of a story or a life, or the smooth surface of an image. Instead they force us to see the rifts and splits that paradoxically hold everything together, and orient us towards the possibilities that fragmented realities allow us to imagine beyond the ontic/obvious, the
stereotype, or the orderly unfolding of the everyday. For an identity in transition, it is not about getting to the end—the final, finished figure—that is most persuasive. Rather it is the recognition that one is in the middle of figuring things out that makes a moment heavy with possibility. And though we start to “write” ourselves with an ideal end in mind, estrangement reminds us that it’s when we ask the question, “what happens next?” that we really begin.
Conclusion | Going Home(less)

“Home is what you try to remember, not what you try to forget.”

— Marlon Fuentes, Bontoc Eulogy

“Remember that you and I made this journey together to a place where there was nowhere left to go.”

— Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake

In the summer of 2014, I found myself in St. Louis MO, at a conference venue just ten miles away from Clayton, MO, the site of the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair—the same grounds on which 1100 Filipinos were ordered to build replicas of their houses, and in which they were to make home in the Fall and Winter of 1904. Months before the conference, I decided to research and find the exact site of the former Philippine Village.

Figure 5.1. Google Maps. General area of the former Philippine Village in Clayton, MO. Web.
Filipinos have been fought, feared or forgotten. They were represented as insurgents, savages, sex-crazed imbeciles, laborers and cheats, inassimilable foreigners and model minorities, unidentifiable Asians and confused Hispanics; Malays and Mongols, perverts and strangers interchangeably, and anything else those in power saw fit to serve their needs and purposes for containment, control, and colonialism. The shifting and traveling identifications of the Filipino body is couched in a rhetoric of assimilation and diversity that continues to erase claims to invisibility and exclusion by mixed-race, bi-racial, and culturally hybrid Filipinos and Filipino Americans. Discourses in the humanities and social sciences have likewise resigned themselves to categorizing, among other things, Filipino American history, literature, and art, under a homogenous, hybridized umbrella of Asian Americanism, which likewise fails to highlight the complexities of the lives, struggles, and stories of Filipino Americans. It especially obscures the asymmetrical power relations between and among ethnicities, and the possibilities of reading and articulating the specificities of Filipino Americans’ conditions for being.

With these concerns bearing down on the discourse, this project decided to enter the conversation from the cracks, moving through and revealing them by way of quotidian rhetoric and the notion of estrangement. If rhetoric is the ability to see all available means of persuasion (Aristotle), I argued that quotidian rhetoric is the ability of things, beings, and events in our everyday lives to reveal
forgotten meanings. Quotidian rhetoric derives its force from the mood of estrangement; Martin Heidegger referred to this as *unheimlich*: the unhomely and uncanny. In my project I translate it to mean homelessness, especially when referring to identity—the “home” we are born in and which defines the “I,” the subject. Estrangement troubles this homely state, situating us at a “threshold between home and not-home” that is not a safe space (Haynes, 176). We are rendered “homeless.”

Estrangement is an uncomfortable and troubling thing on the one hand. It has the potential to throw our world into chaos, and can inspire terror, which we reject or avoid. On the other hand, it can inspire awe and exploration. Fundamental shifts in perspective emerge when we enter estranging encounters in our everyday lives, especially among things, events, and beings we take for granted as immutable and timeless. These are “things” that have come to constitute, and are constituted by, our identification with them at a particular time and place. The everydays we construct for ourselves through tradition, language, and things simultaneously make us feel at-home and secure, but they can also tranquilize us against urgent and critical truths about that very environment, and ourselves. Basic relationships are questioned and dislodged from their designated “place” in our worlds. When estrangement occurs, we suddenly find that the homes we’ve allotted for these things have either changed, moved, or disappeared.
After the conference, I traveled to the city of Clayton, MO. Four streets whose names remained the same since 1904 bound the area I was searching for. Taking my phone, and connected to a walking app, I ventured out. As I walked the streets of Clayton, I noticed that the city was made up of beautiful residential cul-de-sacs. I walked through several neighborhoods that had quaint coffee shops and hipster apartments, classy two-story abodes and village parks. As I passed the houses and stole a peek into their windows, I wondered: do they know what happened here?

Figure 5.2. Welcome sign, Clayton, MO. Author’s image.

I used estrangement as an approach to explore representations of Filipino American hybrid identity through vernacular video on the Web. Now considered an artifact of everyday life, vernacular videos made by second generation Filipino immigrants have created a genre of videos on Youtube that show them reenacting, explaining, or demonstrating traits from what I call an identity checklists. Using technology, the videographers estrange themselves from their everyday lives as Filipino American on one level; if we analyze this move further, we can suggest that they estrange themselves from a notion of Filipinoness as
part of their hybrid identity. A consequence of this analysis is the question of what it means to *innately* know what Filipinoness is, and how to tell if one possesses it, becomes inextricably linked. Why the need to authenticate one’s ethnicity? What benefits attend when proving one’s being Filipino, over the more “privileged” Filipino *American*? Beyond reinforcing caricatured, stereotyped portrayals of immigrant elders, what messages do these videos and videographers wish to convey about their identity and connection to an “imagined” authenticity? The videographers’ homelessness is expressed in the way they transform their personas, toggle between languages and accents, and scrutinize their genetic or racial features.

I identified three modes of estrangement that emerge from these videos: translation, nostalgia, and transition. Moving through these modes required me to look back at the intertwined histories and colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States—a chapter that has been forgotten in American discourse, and has been glossed over in Philippine historical narratives. Taking cues from the everyday ordinary customs presented in the videos, I discussed episodic narratives that demonstrated how Filipinos were estranged from themselves and from their history. The United States used language, images, and the body as a means to establish themselves as an imperial power in the Pacific. The English language was their main weapon for benevolent assimilation (Hsu) and for domesticating the Filipino “insurgent.” Identifying indigenous
customs and lore as inferior evicted Filipinos from their dwelling in language and culture. When photographic technology became instrumental in the discipline of anthropology, Filipinos and their ways of life were represented in visual media as primitive, unsanitary, and uncivilized, reinforcing the need for Western intervention to “uplift” Filipinos from their unprogressive, backward ways and guide them towards modernity and progress. They successfully contained the excess of foreignness that modern “scientific” discourse could not catalogue, and put it on display when 1100 Filipinos were transported to Missouri for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. The figure of the uncivilized, inassimilable brown body rationalized the treatment and exclusion of Filipino immigrant laborers (manongs) who began arriving on American soil not long after the World’s fair. Subjected to abusive conditions, racism, anti-immigration and anti-miscegenation laws, Filipinos were denied the right to call their adoptive country home.

These episodes in Philippine-American history reveal the Filipinos’ constant movement from object to abject body to inassimilable alien. They were rendered homeless. Filipinos were invisible as agents, and the richness of their identity predicated on multiple languages and distinct cultural practices was illegible unless it conformed to the frameworks established by the colonial/imperial master. I argued, however, that generations of Filipinos and Filipino Americans reappropriated this homelessness in ways that demonstrated their courage in questioning these everyday assumptions about themselves, their
history, the conditions surrounding their being here, and society’s perception of
them as “perpetual foreigners” (Espiritu).

*With the sun warming up and my heart pounding violently, I turned onto Wydown Boulevard, which according to my research was where Arrowhead Lake was built. It was an artificial body of water that separated the Philippine Village from the rest of the exhibits at the 1904 Fair. A third of the way up Wydown Blvd., I saw it: in place of the lake was a sunken park bounded on one side by mansion-like homes, and tall trees on the other. I made my way down from the street to the middle of the park, feeling at once exhilarated and dismayed; I was excited that my research paid off but I was also slighted that no markers or reminders existed to tell of what transpired here. All there was was a small plaque that indicated the space was a historical site. I paused: was I really surprised that this was what was revealed to me? I shouldn’t be. After all, any space that once held some semblance of home for the Filipino was already built with the expectation of its subsequent displacement.*

![Wydown Terrace, Clayton, MO](image1.jpg) ![Wydown Terrace Park](image2.jpg)

*Figure 5.3 and 5.4. Wydown Terrace, Clayton, MO and Wydown Terrace Park. Author’s images.*

The videographers in this study appropriate audio-visual technology to
displace themselves from their everyday and think through their relationships to
stories, practices, and languages not their own but are unmistakably a part of
them. In their portrayals of these “authentic” Filipino moments, I read the modes of estrangement in their use of translation to disrupt the homogenizing tendencies of the English language and American culture, amplifying the disjointedness of two disparate languages switching at different moments. In many of these videos nostalgia recreates those moments via parodies of their immigrant elders—parodies that may be seen as mockery, but one I read as a means to reestablish cultural and linguistic signposts. But they go a step further and reflect on this nostalgia, which Svetlana Boym says interrogates the symbols and imagined stability of any nationalism that emanates from a single, authoritative version; it dwells in the incongruences of memory and the multiplicity of sites for remembering. Most of all, the videographers’ nostalgia is a social rearticulation of memory and identity that “consists of collective frameworks” (14) emerging from creative and unconventional expressions of the ambivalence of homecoming and homelessness. A final reading of their movement as transition argues that Filipinoness is not merely a hybrid identity of past and present; it is not just a creative expression or processing of the colonizer and the colonized’s identity into a confrontational assertion of one nationalism over another. Filipinoness is an enactment of strategic hybridity: the moment of transitionality that performs a timely pivoting and “lubrication” of hybrid identifications as it responds to everyday situations in which a Filipino American may find herself. It seeks no instant resolutions or stabilization, and takes shape
at the moment of encounter. Strategic hybridity is a means to move beyond
colonial and imperial frameworks of identification, and reimagine Filipinoness not
as a trait, characteristic, or criteria, but as an event. It is a moment of
identification based on encounters with other beings, other events in other places
that allow the multiplicities of Filipino identity to unfold—especially aspects of
Filipinoness that as yet have no definition or form that can be contained and
controlled by hegemonic structures. Filipinoness enacted as strategic hybridity
can be interpreted as a disruptive, creative or improvisational force that
celebrates the elasticity and malleability of Filipino/Filipino American identity.

I leave the park and keep walking, cutting midway on De Mun Avenue and entering a
small street that ran parallel to the space where the makeshift houses of the Igorots were built.
On the very site of the Igorot Village stood a high school and a seminary, tall and steadfast,
seemingly oblivious to what took place there more than a hundred years ago. There were
banners hanging from the lampposts around it, declaring “community” and “justice.” In place of
the humble huts were these concrete buildings; instead of bare soil were manicured lawns and
cemented streets and sidewalks. Instead of words, figures, or faces I would recognize, there were
rocks. Where is the story here? Where are the voices? How does one inscribe history into this
situation? It’s difficult to write on granite.
Stretching and constantly transforming itself, Filipinoness conceptualized as strategic hybridity challenges the framework of identity itself. If the usual framework of identity is the urge to define something as against something else, Filipinoness seems already defined by its inherent and compelling urge to remain mobile and to search for its definitions within itself: like the turning of a river’s course within itself as a gathering of force to push forward. As much as I could, I approached the definition of Filipinoness by separating it from any nationalist frameworks or socially-constructed identarian concepts to define it. Instead I treated the notion of Filipinoness as emerging from its own experiences, struggles, and resistances against hegemonic, homogenizing discourses. Turning within itself, taking from its history and culture, and moving forward through improvisation with every encounter is how Filipinoness comes into being. Mobility becomes the symbol for being, a persistent transitioning from one identity or mode of being to another. Each idea of what is before stands only as a
reference for what is to come. To borrow Scott McCloud’s metaphor, Filipinoness is the trapeze artist launched into the air, flying between swings and the risk of a fall; it’s the constitution of identity at the moment of finding kapwa, and also its immanent possibility for rejection; it is the home address of a little grass house resting on the shoulders of twenty individuals as it moves through the countryside. In a way, these images show how Filipino history, the meditations of reflective nostalgia, and the scraps of language have an affinity for, and find harbor in, the fragment as a figure for writing and audio-visual composition. Filipino identity and history usually begins with a taken-for-granted fragment, often overlooked and ignored, but teeming with implications (Vicente Rafael elegantly demonstrates this in his book by employing “episodic narratives”; so do Rick Baldoz, Linda España-Maram, Dawn Mabalon, and other Filipino American scholars and artists) of the creativity and resourcefulness of the Filipino in coping with, and dealing with their estrangement as persons of color. Vernacular video’s status as a “homeless” medium—belonging to neither cinema nor television—is fragmentary as well. It captures fragments of the everyday and exists only out of the possibility of someone’s decision to record that moment. Its existence emerges as a fragment that possibly connects or is connected to by other audio-visual fragments. Filipino American videographers, constructing their own narratives of Filipino identity through anecdotes, disrupt any ordered or scripted attempt to contain their experience. The everydayness of their encounters is
handled with irony, their failures treated with humor. Vernacular video provides a
glimpse of moments of strategic hybridity, when they are working through their
everyday as a person of color in a predominantly white society. Fragments then
become a tool for persons of color to interrogate identity beyond a single
framework, or even a group of frameworks.

Frustration was welling up inside me. The funny thing was, I knew these structures
would be here. I suppose I was looking for some recognition, for something to call out to me and
then lodge itself in my lungs so that I would be left breathless as I responded in kind, ecstatic at
the connection made, and the silent acknowledgement of my presence: my presence as
representative of those who came before me. But no such moment occurred. I could not see
myself reflected in these things, nor in the faces of passersby. So I stood there, wondering, how
should I proceed?

Estrangement and quotidian rhetorics are concepts I feel are applicable to
discourses of marginalization and exclusion, allowing persons in “inhabitable
zones” (Ahmed) to discover their own frameworks derived from their everyday
experiences. I would like to explore in future research how these concepts may
apply to gender, or rather how gender may inform and enrich these concepts.
The role of women as key figures in these vernacular videos and portrayals
(especially the figure of the mother) needs to be investigated. Scholars in
transnational feminist rhetoric have taken up the movement of female bodies in
their discourse (see Sara McKinnon, Chandra Mohanti, Rebecca Dingo, and Ania
Loomba), but unfortunately this study was not able to explore this important issue.
It remains crucial however, in the continued conversations about the feminine body conceptualized as the vessel that carries culture and nurtures tradition. That these videographers choose to portray female elder relatives more often than male relatives is telling of the role of immigrant mothers/grandmothers as a focal point for an estranging moment.

I decided to keep walking and continue on the course I set for myself: to close out the inscription of the area on the walking app so that I could see where I’d been. Originally I considered it a novel achievement: to be able to say I was here. But as I traced the paths, the question became, what was significant about my being here? I wanted to examine two seemingly disparate histories that were nonetheless connected by a sense of a deeply shared kinship, of kapwa. I suddenly felt silly designating myself the conduit between a group of my fellowmen whom I never knew, and those like me who, more than a hundred years later, nurture a desire to let them know that we know they were here.

Estrangement, more than proposing answers and methods, reframes the questions we ask. Instead of merely applying frameworks and concepts that tend to universalize experience and struggle, it orients us towards the possibilities of emerging ones that forcefully articulate the richness and importance of the lives of marginalized groups and shores up the oppression and exclusion they have borne in silence for so long. I see quotidian rhetorics and estrangement as an empowering approach for the marginalized and oppressed. Using their own experiences, they form their own frameworks and lenses with which to
understand their struggle, to appreciate their histories, and to critique an oppressive system, *on their own terms*. In other words, we not only speak for them; we let them guide us on the trails they carve for themselves. I consider it a humane and just way of seeing them and “seeing” through them. They turn estrangement from its notion as a petrified pause at a threshold, to a mood and a tool that enables them on an empowering path. Using this approach, future research could go towards exploring an audio-visual language that specifies a Filipino American representation. An initial idea is to build on Gregory Ulmer’s popcycle and the categorical image, an estranging of a position and space/place through images. Extending this to an audio-visual medium slots in the characteristic of motion and mobility, the unfolding of time, and the demonstration of transitions as it pulls fragments together in an interpretive project. It likewise extends the research to explore the collaborative potentials of such an approach, which Sarah Arroyo argues participatory composition advocates through a “relinquishing” of mastery—that is, a detachment from preordained and premeditated concepts of writing and learning that potentially colonize a learner. Improvisation then “directs” such participatory and collaborative projects, adding yet another layer of interpretation that can enrich the audio-visual artifact.

*Holding on to the fragments of video I shot, I was uncertain if I would ever return to this spot. And as I kept moving, I realized that as I dug through history, searching for this place, I recognized myself as one of those who did not know as much as I should have about my own*
kababayan. In my attempt to describe and discuss Filipinoness, what was revealed to me was my own estrangement.

Quotidian rhetorics recognizes the everyday as a series of connected fragments; estrangement is the tool of attunement that animates a situation, position, and identity by dislodging them from their historical, ideological, and cultural moorings to propose alternate possibilities. Ultimately what this project wishes to convey is the value of allowing Filipinoness to dwell in its homelessness, not as lost and uprooted from its history or culture, but one that embraces it all, and allows itself to be defined on its own terms.

Figure 5.6. Google Maps. My steps tracing the former site of the Philippine Village. Author’s image.

I walked on. I consoled myself with the thought that, perhaps I wasn’t meant to find anything at those spots. Perhaps what I was meant to do instead was re-inscribe a presence there: one not immediately visible, yet one that would feel familiar. Perhaps what I was meant to do was write a way into this space for others to dwell in the imperfect moments of history. After all, we’ll need many more hands and feet to carry this mobile, traveling dwelling forward.
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FILMS


YOUTUBE VIDEOS


“Did you know that I’m Half Filipino?” YouTube, uploaded by Lazyron Studios, 21 Jan. 2015, https://youtu.be/dTg4uH6arNI.


