The Day the Dancers Stayed

Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora

Theodore S. Gonzalves
"Not bad, not bad at all," Diotallevi said. "To arrive at the truth through the painstaking reconstruction of a false text."

—Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*
Janet Francendese never disappointed me as an editor. Her production team kept my eyes on the prize. The anonymous readers offered detailed and substantive suggestions.

Finally, special thanks go to Charita L. Castro for her hospitality during the final stages of the manuscript’s preparation. On occasion, she would hear me sing at one end of the dining table: Are we almost there, are we getting close? Are we getting near, that’s not far to go. I need to know, are we almost there? Otherwise, I would sing: It feels like home to me.

Prologue

The Mock Battle, 1898

The U.S.–Philippine war began with a fantastic performance: the American hero, a veteran commander taking control of a crew of fresh-faced sailors in a corner of the Pacific few back home had heard about; the nemesis, a Spaniard at the helm of his empire’s last stand in a far-flung colony. Both were aided by an efficient Belgian consul who brokered a plan to save Spanish honor, guarantee a bloodless victory, and, most important, keep the revolutionary native general in the dark about the entire operation. But before we get to the main attraction, the fanfare.

By the time U.S. Navy Admiral George Dewey sailed into Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, to capture or destroy the Spanish fleet, a letter written by Spanish Ambassador Enrique Dupuy de Lôme insulting President William McKinley had been published in William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal, an explosion aboard the U.S.S. Maine, harbored in Havana, had killed 246 sailors, and the U.S. Congress had passed the Teller Amendment, which “[disclaimed] any disposition of intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over [Cuba] except for pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people.” In late April, Congress declared war against Spain, and the U.S. Navy secretary cabled Admiral Dewey with orders to engage the enemy, not in the Caribbean but across the globe in the Philippines, where military commanders knew the empire
was weakest, with a flotilla described as antiquated and decrepit. The Americans were not alone in Manila Bay. Bismarck's unification of Germany in 1871 had created a powerful state with a per capita income that rivaled that in the United States. Coming late to the nineteenth-century land grab, the kaiser sent ships to both the Caribbean and the Pacific. While Britain had more at stake financially in the Philippines than other European powers, the Germans sent five warships to Manila, and London sent two. German Naval Commander Otto von Diederichs angered Dewey by refusing to honor the blockade, prompting the U.S. commander to say, "If Germany wants war, all right, we are ready."  

In an interview after the May 1 battle, captains involved in the action claimed that "it was the hand of God that turned aside the Spanish shells on that morning and left our ships and men scatheless." Dewey agreed: "Oh, yes, I believe it. God knows where all the shells went... If I were the good Presbyterian some persons have said I am, I should certainly say that the Lord meant to punish Spain for her years of wickedness and misrule in these islands. We have taken an empire and have lost scarcely a man."  

Not quite. While Dewey controlled the bay with a blockade, it was Filipino General Emilio Aguinaldo and his army that had secured Spain's defeat in the mind of the United States. By late May, the rebel leader's forces had captured five thousand Spaniards and surrounded the walled city section of Intramuros in an attempt to starve the colonizing army. On June 12, Aguinaldo declared the Philippines free from Spain, the first such declaration of independence in Asia in the twentieth century. Washington refused recognition. The result was a standoff: a bay blockaded by the U.S. fleet; the outlying areas of Manila's arrabales (suburbs) controlled by Filipino troops; and an increasingly frustrated Spanish administration cut off from support. Over the next two months, thousands of reinforcements for Dewey arrived from the United States. With the help of Belgian Consul Edouard André, Dewey began secret negotiations with his Spanish opposite, Governor-General Basilio Augustin. The Spanish commander, whose family had been taken prisoner by Filipino troops, sent a telegram to his superiors describing the harsh conditions the Spaniards faced in the city—starvation, sickness, weak and swollen legs from exposure while defending trenches, and low morale among the troops. For telling the truth and proposing surrender, Augustin was dismissed and ordered to transfer command to General Fermin Jaudenes, whose job it was to hold the city for Spain ("conservar las Filipinas a la soberania de la España"). Maintaining sovereignty over the islands would prove to be difficult, especially when military and administrative opinion began to turn against the powerful Catholic church in the colony. For example, Captain Don Juan de la Concha, in command of a cruiser, said he was "unwilling to lose Spanish lives in fighting for the monks," claiming that the Philippine colony was "priest-ridden." Jaudenes agreed. The Spanish problem was not simply about losing face through military defeat; more specifically, it was about to whom they should lose. Both U.S. and Spanish commanders did not think much of their Filipino counterparts. During negotiations between Dewey's camp and Jaudenes, U.S. Army General Wesley Merritt, commander of the San Francisco-based VIII Corps, shared his views of Filipinos, that he had come "with orders not to treat with the Indians; not to recognize them, and not to promise anything," adding, "Aguinaldo is just the same to me as a boy in the street." Jaudenes said he was "willing to surrender to white people, but never to niggers."  

The players had agreed on the terms for the mock battle for Manila. Only André, Dewey, Merritt, and Jaudenes knew of the complete plans. The success of the performance hinged on keeping Filipino troops out of the city while U.S. and Spanish troops exchanged places. The event would reinforce the Filipinos' debt to their new American masters for their gift of regime change. On August 12, Madrid agreed to a truce, but the news did not arrive. Dewey had cut the underwater cable. On the morning of August 13, the mock battle for Manila began. As the squadron mobilized, the band on board the British cruiser the Immortalité serenaded the Americans with "patriotic airs." At 9 A.M., the "attack" commenced with the flagship Olympia lobbing a few shells into the old fort at Malate while the Spanish guns on the coast provided no response. Land-based U.S. forces held back Filipinos outside the central city. The historian Teodoro Agoncillo understood the theatrical nature of the event when he wrote: "The few casualties on both sides in the phony attack were due to some 'actors' bungling their 'lines,' or possibly to the fact that very few officers were let in on the charade." According to plan, Dewey's staff transmitted the code for surrender to Jaudenes; the Spanish obliged by raising the white flag at 11:20 A.M., just in time for lunch. Later that afternoon, the German cruiser Kaiserin Augusta, which had on board a special guest—the recently dismissed Spanish Commander Augustin—made its way back to Madrid via Hong Kong. To bring the morning's shock and awe to a close, the crew of the Immortalité fired a twenty-one-gun salute in honor of the U.S. flag that was hoisted atop Manila's Fort Santiago, prompting Dewey to say, "I hope it floats there forever." Embittered by the tussle with von Diederichs, Dewey could not have been more prophetic in speaking to a New York Herald reporter when he said, "Our next war will be with Germany."
Seditious Plays, 1902–1906

By year's end, U.S. President McKinley had proclaimed a policy of “benevolent assimilation” for the Philippines. The ground forces were not quick to return home. In a matter of weeks, on February 4, 1899, the U.S.–Philippine War broke out. Although McKinley’s successor, Theodore Roosevelt, officially ended the war on July 4, 1902, a protracted struggle continued for years in the hills and throughout villages. According to Doreen G. Fernandez, this was when the playwrights' work began. For the next five years, “seditious plays” became a form of guerrilla warfare, in direct violation of Act 292, the Sedition Act, which made utterances and other actions supporting Philippine independence a crime.14 Government publications cited the “smoldering embers” of the “insurrection” that burned throughout the archipelago. Michael Cullinane cites the seditious plays as “the most controversial acts of the overall confrontation between oppositionists and the colonial government.”15 Vicente Rafael poses the repertoire of the seditious plays against the archive generated by U.S. census takers.16 For Fernandez and other observers, the plays were as “vital and immediate as a call to arms.”17 Playwrights, actors, stagehands, and audience members risked arrest, imprisonment, and fines by working on and attending the plays. U.S. colonial officials often sat clueless through several productions as plays that seemed to be about innocuous romances or featured characters with curious names conveyed alternative meanings to local audiences. The plays, written and performed in Tagalog, were a hit among the masses throughout Manila and outlying suburbs partly because the authors, often of modest means themselves, used popular theatrical conventions and forms, as well as their knowledge of popular culture, to create set and costume design, deep cultural references in the text and lyrics, and other devices that conveyed subversive meaning. Some Americans eventually penetrated the less clever disguises and became better informed about what was taking place on stage. For example, on the evening of May 8, 1903, Juan Matapang Cruz’s Hindi Aco Patay (I Am Not Dead) played to a large audience at the Teatro Nueva Luna in Mabalon. Toward the play’s conclusion, the image of a red sun on a revolutionary nationalist flag of the Katipunan (the leading anti-imperialist group first organized against the Spanish, then the Americans) rose in the background. On seeing this, a drunken U.S. soldier “threw an empty beer bottle at it, then climbed the stage with some others and tore the scenery apart.”18 The play would later be banned; the props from the stage confiscated; and the playwright arrested and sentenced for two years. Several other playwrights, actors, and stagehands would be jailed or fined.

The inaugural moment of Filipino American history occurred when war and performance were one—not on the occasion of a storied landing by intrepid seafarers, or with the settlement of an obscure outpost at the edge of a “new world,” or with the signing of a landmark peace accord, or with the election or elevation of a person of Filipino descent to the rank or governor, beauty queen, or pop star of the month. The inaugural moment of Filipino American history took place at the intersection of combat and cultural production, when a mock battle was answered by a seditious play at the beginning of the twentieth century, two decades before Henry Luce claimed an American Century for his Time magazine readers. This inaugural moment, a curious and dynamic time when authors of an Asian republic mined the U.S. Declaration of Independence to enunciate that republic’s own arrival and break from Madrid, went unrecognized amid a contest between two powers in very different times in their imperial careers: Spain, grappling its own humiliating decline with the loss of possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific, and the ascendant United States trying gracefully to walk softly while carrying its big stick across the “American lake” west of California. With the mock battle of Manila Bay, Filipino revolutionaries were consigned to the role of spectators in a sorry play between masters of imperial theater. Taking the conflict simultaneously underground yet in full view of a public, seditious playwrightseschewed escapist entertainment, regional tastes, and religious plays that celebrated Christian conversion. Rather, they created the first national performance repertoire to signal that the struggle was not over, to imagine an audience gathered for an evening as members of a fully sovereign nation.

Mock Battle Redux, 1997

More than a century after Admiral Dewey roared into Manila Bay to claim victory over what observers described as a “decrepit” Spanish fleet on May 1, 1898, the staged combat that opened the U.S.–Philippine War continued to reverberate across the Pacific, in a shopping plaza. Activists and community leaders based in the port city that served as the launching point for thousands of infantrymen from the U.S. heartland remember that overlooked war in a way that differs from the textbook version. They do not cheer for the decisive naval operation that resulted in the colonization of the Philippines, much less think about the commander of the Asiatic Squadron as a hero. They trouble the nation’s official account of the past and insist on a reckoning with the present that reexamines what is meant by the “special relationship.”
But first, they will need to change the text at the base of the commemorative statue. Shortly after the war, the sculptor Robert Aitken, an instructor at the San Francisco Art Institute, abandoned his plan to honor President William McKinley and shifted his attention to Dewey’s adventure. He created a ninety-foot monument in the form of a bronze statue of a lithe woman atop a granite shaft. Rather than depicting either McKinley or Dewey figuratively, he opted for another representation altogether. Aitken’s model was the voluptuous twenty-two-year-old Alma de Bretteville. Wearing a diaphanous gown, “Big Alma” (who stood six feet tall) was depicted by the sculptor in a leap, carrying a circular palm in one hand (as if to signal the “peace” at war’s end) and a trident in the other (hailing the Dewey as Poseidon, God of the Sea). Completed in 1901, the monument was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt on May 14, 1903, at Union Square, a busy retail area just north of Market Street and the site of pro-union rallies. By the 1980s, locals and officials were complaining about trash, pigeons, and homeless people converging in the square. Jim Chapell, president of San Francisco’s Planning and Urban Research Association, said, “The key here is to keep the square active. Homeless people only move in when middle-class people abandon a place.” It was time to give the park a facelift, and Mayor Willie Brown tagged it as a pet project: “[Union Square is the center of our urban landscape . . . a place where kings, queens and presidents always come.”

In 1997, the city sent out a call for proposals to turn the “space into a place,” according to the city planner and project manager Evan Rose. Competitors submitted plans along with a twenty dollar entry fee, hoping to land bragging rights and the one hundred thousand dollar prize. Design parameters were open, but all submissions needed to heed one requirement: the inclusion of the Dewey monument. Now part of the city’s patrimony, Aitken’s sculpture had survived the 1906 earthquake and the addition in 1942 of a one thousand stall parking garage under the park. The review committee pored over three hundred entries from ten countries to re-make the 2.6 acre square. The winning design was submitted by landscape architects from Sausalito and featured a piazza with wide stairways, generously sized terraces, and open-air performance spaces. In all, the total cost of the overhaul was twenty-five million dollars.

For most of the local coverage of the remodel and refit of the plaza, reporters referred to Aitken’s creation as both a monument and a memorial. The definitions of the two terms overlap, pointing to common origins: monere (“to remind”) and memoriale (“record,” “memory”). We can take a cue here from Marita Sturken, who delves into the politics of remembering when studying the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Building on Arthur Danto’s comments, she differentiates between the two terms: “Monuments are not generally built to commemorate defeats; the defeated dead are remembered in memorials. Whereas a monument most often signifies victory, a memorial refers to the life or lives sacrificed for a particular set of values. Whatever triumph a memorial may refer to, its depiction of victory is always tempered by a foregrounding of the lives lost . . . Memorials tend to emphasize specific texts or lists of the dead, whereas monuments offer less explanation; a memorial seems to demand the naming of those lost, whereas monuments are usually anonymous.”

Some explanation for the events in Manila Bay were chiseled into the monument’s base—for example, Navy Secretary John Long’s orders to Dewey to capture or destroy the Spanish fleet; a list of the seven ships in the Asiatic Squadron; and a recounting of the events of May 1, 1898, in which Dewey’s fleet “attacked and destroyed the Spanish fleet of ten war ships. Reduced the forts and held the city in subjection until the arrival of troops from America.”

At the moment city leaders planned to renew their commitments to such a history, voices from the Filipino community called the entire story into question. Members of the San Francisco Arts Commission, working with community activists, drafted text for a “corrective plaque” that would serve an educational purpose. One version starts by contextualizing the erection of the monument as an act of patriotism following the U.S. defeat of Spain in the Spanish–American War but then goes on to recount events that took place afterward: the signing of the Treaty of Paris; the start of the U.S.–Philippine War; the half-million Filipino civilians (comparing with ten thousand U.S. soldiers) killed; the creation of a direct colony; and the eventual independence of the Philippines in 1946—a fifty-year history lesson condensed into just over one hundred words. The Dewey monument currently has 155 words on its four-sided base. Agreeing with the sentiment to alter the text, Rene Ciria-Cruz, editor in chief of Filipinas, a monthly magazine based in San Francisco, said: “I just wish people would clarify the description of what’s being remembered. Otherwise, it becomes a monument to the ‘white man’s burden.”

While some voiced the idea of taking down the monument altogether, Dennis Normandy, who chaired the San Francisco–Manila Sister City Committee and a member of the city’s Public Utilities Commission, noted that “the preponderance of opinion is to have a plaque added that can discuss the relationship.” Hoping that members of the community would submit their own suggestions for the corrective plaque’s wording,
Bay Area activists solicited opinions and hoped to install the panel in May 2006. That effort has been ground down in the city’s arts and parks and recreation bureaucracies.26

That last word, “relationship,” gives us an indication that what activists seek at the base of a granite column are not simply alternative accounts of a distant past but, rather, ways to engage an ongoing legacy or perhaps to challenge possible endings for a performance that has not yet concluded.

Introduction

This book traces a genealogy of the Filipino Cultural Night (PCN), a cultural form made popular by Filipino students in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Every performance of the PCN is ultimately about one evening—as if no others will follow or, at least, no one else will bring it off in quite the same way. You hit your mark, recite the lines, and execute the action as directed; now you make your way to the exit. In pulling back from the cellular experience of playing one’s part well, there are, in fact, more than a thousand nights to explore and wonder about. In The Day the Dancers Stayed, I consider the relationship between the invention of performance repertoire and the development of diasporic identification.

The PCN has become the most popular expressive form of culture developed by Filipino American college students since the 1980s. Tracing how the show came to be involves understanding something about how the past and present inform each other. This project is not a production or documentary history of the PCN, although more than a few college courses and the occasional article have been devoted to that topic. Neither does it participate in a celebratory mode of chronicling Filipino American dance and performance for its own sake. A scheme of that order could involve a survey of expressive forms of culture in their most so-called primitive state, spied in the hinterlands and provinces, followed by an accounting of exogenous influences from Spain or Muslim-dominated southern regions. Next, Americans would bring their brand of popular culture to
4 Repetitive Motion

The Mechanics of Reverse Exile
(San Francisco, 1993)

Are Filipino Americans becoming more visible? To combat the collective Filipino identity crisis, some Filipino Americans are fighting for visibility by promoting cultural awareness and ethnic pride. For example, the mostly Filipino Kababayan Club of the University of California at Irvine (UCI) recently staged a play that showcased Filipino cuisine, music, dance, and customs, and portrayed a Filipina American discovering her cultural heritage. Due to the Kababayan Club's efforts to increase awareness about Filipino culture on campus, a course on Filipino Americans is now offered regularly at UCI.

—Ian Cao and Himilce Novas

In the same year that Filipino students helped to launch a popular performance genre, two academic works were published that would change how we think about the relationship between repertoire and cultural identity: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's The Invention of Tradition and Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities. Nations—and the repertoires associated with them—have very specific histories; are bound to specific times, cultures, and places; and have been subjected to endless amounts of editing, meddling, and experimentation. The essays in Hobsbawm and Ranger's volume challenged seemingly ageless cultural practices, especially claims to authority that had long been enjoyed by elites and affirmed by everyone else—from the augmentation of the trappings of the British monarchy for its Indian and African colonial subjects to revivals of Druid ritual and the performance of Celtic music. The supposedly long histories of bagpipes, kilts, and clan tartans, according to one writer in their volume, rested on creative scholarship aimed at providing symbolic rejoinders to British advances being made on Welsh and Scottish political autonomy.

In previous chapters, I described how the Philippine national repertoire was invented in the 1930s to anticipate the granting of sovereignty to the colony. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the choreography had left the schoolhouses where Aquino had trained legions of physical-education teachers for the international stage in a movement that mirrored the dispersal of the Filipino diaspora. Filipino Cultural Night casts and crews in the United States have often become the kind of communities Anderson described in which no individual can know all of the people in his or her community and yet "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." In a patrimonial sense, the organizers are the inevitable inheritors and stewards of enduring, if beleaguered, cultural practices. To forestall the "loss," the custodians renew that patrimony every year, reminding themselves of tradition's vitality.

In this chapter, I point to several theatrical elements that have become staples of the PCNs on numerous college and university campuses (although the activity is not carried out exclusively at the college level) since the 1980s. I identify the basic structure of the show, which has tended to harden over time. The PCN continues to enlist stand-ins not only for heroes of yore (iconic as well as undersung) but also, now, as reproductions of productions. How did the diffuse cultural productions of a seemingly heterogeneous group of Philippine- and U.S.-born Filipinos become standardized, replicated, and, ultimately, predictable?

The production of PCNs since the 1980s reflects the larger changes in immigration from the Philippines and changes within post-1965 Filipino American families. The 1980s saw large numbers of Filipinos immigrating to the United States, with the population growing 126 percent between 1970 and 1980. When Filipinos settled in the United States in this period, they did so along a pattern of dual-chain migration, revealing the community's cleavage along class lines. On the one hand, working-class families petitioned for relatives with similar life chances and choices. Many of these families had known the migratory life of labor camps or the urban experience of single-resident-occupancy hotels. Some would find their second and third generations moving out of the central cities and Manilatowns historically located in Los Angeles, Stockton, or San Francisco to the outlying areas or districts—to Daly City, San Leandro, or Carson, California. On the other hand, another cohort of what has been described as professional and technical workers—especially those working in the medical and information-technology fields—found that their migration to the United States would be facilitated by the reform of immigration laws in 1965. Another Filipino America began to form outside the traditional urban
cores, built on the middle-class expectations of dentists, nurse practitioners, insurance brokers, real-estate agents, software engineers, and attorneys. They made their homes in places like Milpitas, Hercules, Pinoles, California, as well as in the suburbs of Chicago and Houston and in Jersey City, New Jersey. Not only were Filipinos coming the United States, but the children of the generation of post-1965 immigrants were also coming of age, attending colleges and universities in increasing numbers. At the University of California, the number of undergraduate degrees conferred on Filipinos more than quadrupled between 1982 and 1992. Many of these students spent their time in chemistry and engineering labs, business programs, social-science lecture halls, and life-science facilities. The development of friendly rivalries among campuses has also necessitated the creation of master calendars to allow organizers to help plan around each other's shows.

To understand how the PCN has become so durable, we have to begin with the important role played by Filipino student organizations on college and university campuses. Many Filipino student organizations have histories that coincide with the political awakening of students on college campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For example, San Francisco State University's Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) was founded in 1967; the Pilipino American Alliance (PAA) at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, was founded in 1969; Samahang Pilipino at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), was founded in 1972; and Kababayan at the University of California, Irvine, was founded in 1974. During spring academic terms, the organizations' memberships elected officers for the following year. Certain positions were reserved for coordinating PCN logistics. Some organizations preferred to have a "cultural coordinator," the de facto PCN coordinator, sit on their executive board. Others preferred to staff that position with a broader mandate, sometimes titled "political and community coordinator" or "special events coordinator." In either case, those vying for the elected or appointed positions realized that their work would be devoted to the planning of a very complicated performance. Beginning in the fall, students were delegated various production tasks—designing sets, making costumes and props, catering, choreographing dance, arranging music, and so on. Several students sacrificed many hours of planning and rehearsal time. For the most part, each organization's leadership relied on what it recognized as its core members—those unelected and highly motivated individuals who volunteered time, labor, and out-of-pocket funds for several months ahead of the show's run. The number of cast and crew members grew as the production neared. This was especially true for rehearsals of large numbers such as the dance suites, where it has been typical to see more students in the few weeks before a show's run. On some of the larger campuses where productions have demanded several hours of rehearsal time each week, organizers have created tutoring programs for their members, justifying time spent on the show as community building and retention. This has been the subject of some internal criticism.

Members have also shouldered out-of-pocket expenses, usually the printing and reproduction of handbills, posters, and programs. But funding for the show has also been a long-term and sometimes complicated task. Students have tapped special student government programming grants from student activities offices (on most campuses, under the direction of the dean of students) or the office of the university president. The amounts granted for such shows have varied wildly, from a student organization's budget at a small campus laying out $300 to more than $30,000 for one evening's worth of entertainment. The group's finance officer generally has tracked major expenses, such as securing the venue, purchasing or renting costumes, and paying for choreographers, caterers, and printers. For example, in 2006, student legislators at UC Berkeley passed "A Bill in Support of PAA's 30th Annual Pilipino Cultural Night of UC Berkeley," allocating $1,500 to the show's coffers. The budget submitted for review included $14,180 to rent the venue; $800 for dance props, music, and costumes; $1,300 for publicity; $3,500 for programs; $1,200 to rent practice venues; $1,000 for set design; $3,000 for the "PCN Afterparty"; and $3,500 for miscellaneous expenses such as food, flowers, and pressing DVDs. The group's resources included a $4,000 allocation from PAA for the show, $1,000 from tentative sponsors, $18,000 in ticket sales, and $2,700 from "participant packages" ($30 per student for ninety students).

Native Elements

The efforts of student organizations, the influx of college-age Filipinos and Filipino Americans throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and the encouragement of friendly intercampus rivalries and support point to the further development of a "PCN genre," according to the choreographer Joel Jacinto. UCLA's Samahang Pilipino, he says, "had a lot to do with moving the genre forward or establishing the format of the genre and setting precedence in terms of the different types of productions that we did on campus. We helped give birth to the genre." Joel and Ave Jacinto co-founded a folkloric performing-arts troupe in Los Angeles and have returned often to their alma mater as consultants. Jacinto understands the PCN genre within contexts that emphasize presentation over participation in the Western sense of separating audiences from performers. Presentation
modes assume a passive audience, with performers remaining detached (conventionally barred from breaking the “fourth wall”) and usually accenteduated with defined play spaces on stages and by distinctive costuming, lighting, and so on. The PCN genre can be contrasted with the more organically and highly ritualized exchange out of which folkloric forms are based. In the participatory settings from which folk forms emerge, dances and songs are not done for others so much as they are done with others. Jacinto and his classmates helped to set in motion performance standards, elements, and expectations that have been hammered into predictable conventions since the 1980s. His reference to a “genre” is appropriate. Since the 1980s, student performers have insisted on key elements to distinguish PCNs in several ways. As past chapters have demonstrated, the PCN has been closely modeled on a particular kind of dance-theater presentation made popular in the 1950s and based on a national repertoire in the 1930s. Like other invented traditions that have dubious roots in an “authentic past,” the Filipino Cultural Night has become a static and seemingly unchanging and unchangeable artifact.

PCN participation has become a rote activity, what the actor and director Dom Magwili has referred to as a rite of passage. Richard Schechner, building on the work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, helps frame Magwili’s experience with his young charges. Schechner clarified that the movement through life’s various well-defined stages (e.g., birth, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, social advancement, job specialization, retirement, and death) would be punctuated with a host of rituals. Not only are rituals “memories in action,” but they also help people deal with “difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed or violate the norms of daily life.” With desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life, the PCN as a ritual is loaded with significance precisely at the time that students become more Filipino than fellow classmates who choose not to participate in the shows while also becoming less Filipino as they adopt consumption patterns, dominant cultural codes, and reward systems that often are in conflict with their immigrant parents’ histories.

Victor Turner’s concept of liminality can be applied here: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonials.” It come as no surprise, then, that colleges and universities have been what Schechner would refer to as “hotbeds” of invented rituals, with an array of activities that range from hazing, graduation ceremonies, and processions to sporting-events cheers. “The fact [that] there is a quick turnover in the student population helps establish new rituals swiftly,” Schechner notes.

“In real life a generation takes 20 or 30 years to turn over; at college it is four years.” To be neither here nor there can also mean, in a ritualistic sense, to be neither this kind of person nor that, an in-between time in which one is vulnerable and directionless. That is the moment one recognizes that one is at a crossroads, where being lost is not far from being found. The PCN as a rite—or as a profoundly Filipino American ritual—is as much about a mode of entry into dominant culture as it is a passage from ignorance and indifference to awareness and expression.

The PCN genre features two halves: folkloric forms and a theatrical narrative. I will discuss those two elements in greater detail later. First I want to highlight secondary aspects that mark the PCN in unique ways. The first concerns the use of flags and national anthems; the second is the deployment of Tagalog as the presumptive default language within the presentations.

Almost without exception, PCNs since the 1980s have opened with the singing of both the Philippine and U.S. national anthems. The former is uniformly sung in Tagalog, led by a soloist or a choir. This comports with the “Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines,” which states that the anthem must be rendered in “the national language.” The act also stipulates that “the singing must be done with fervor.” Like other invented traditions that seem to have unvarying histories, the Tagalog anthem is actually a mid-twentieth-century phenomenon. The composer Juan Felipe wrote the music to “Lupang Hinirang [Our Land]” in 1898 in the form of a military march without words. The poet Jose Palma’s added Spanish lyrics a year later concerning a beloved land (Tierra de amores) that would refuse to surrender to invasion (No te hollarán jamás); although there is comfort and sweetness there (En tu regazo dulce es vivir), her children would die to right any offense (Es una gloria para tus hijos, Cuando te ofenden, por ti morir). In the 1920s, during the U.S. colonial period when nationalist symbols and songs were banned, an English version, “The Philippine Hymn,” was commissioned and adopted by the commonwealth. Consider how such an adjustment—the creation of a hymn rather than an anthem—would suit the situation. Hymns are generally songs of praise or love of a deity. Anthems, by contrast, derive from an antiphonal style of singing; connote a secular practice; and involve groups in singing with each other, trading passages, or enjoining call-and-response. Hymns acknowledge the submission of authority to the divine. Anthemic singing allows for the sovereign to be reconstituted at the performance. With Philippine sovereignty in the hands of a foreign power, a hymn refers to an ethereal authority, somewhere other than in the presence of its colonial moment. It would not be until well into the 1950s that a Tagalog version would be
commissioned and embraced by an “independent” Philippines. At several PCN productions, the choir deftly merges “Lupang Hinirang” and the “Star-Spangled Banner” into a seamless medley.22

Related to this are the presentations of the two national flags on the stage, in printed material distributed to audiences, and in other publicity. The placement of the flags connotes a correspondence between the nations—that is, emblems of comparable sovereign entities, each with its own separate and equal standard. The Philippine flag’s symbols refer to foundational stories and a conception of what or whom is included under the banner: eight rays emanating from a sun to signify the regions that rose up against Spanish rule in the late nineteenth century, three stars indicating major regions in the country, and colors representing peace (blue in the top half) and patriotism (red in the bottom half). Interpretations of these signs have changed over time. At the signing of the Declaration of Philippine Independence in 1898, the colors “commemorated” the flag of the United States of North America, as a manifestation of our profound gratitude towards this Great Nation for its disinterested protection which it lent us and continues lending us.”23 The presentation of both the national anthems and the flags at the opening of PCNs suggests that U.S.–Philippine relations have been unambiguous and resolved with the granting of independence, despite what one scholar has referred to as their “entangling” for most of the twentieth century.24

Tagalog has occupied a central role in PCN productions. Hundreds of shows have rendered their titles in a Philippine language—for example, Fiesta Sa Ating Bayan (Celebration at Our Town), Pagasasama sa Pamanagitan ng Cultura (Unity through Culture), and Ang Nawalang Kayamanan (The Lost Treasure). In a study of language use and preservation by the grandchildren of contemporary immigrants, researchers justified the exclusion of U.S. Filipinos due to the “high rate of English monolingualism, attributable partly to the status of English as an official language of the Philippines,” despite the fact that Tagalog was the sixth most widely spoken language in U.S. homes. When the question was narrowed to the ten languages most frequently spoken at home other than English and Spanish, Tagalog rated fourth, ahead of Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, Russian, Polish, and Arabic and behind Chinese, French, and German.25 The use of Tagalog—in show titles, untranslated asides, the dynamic idiomatic play of Taglish puns delivered by characters on stage, and various publicity materials—has done more than merely reflect the popularity of speech patterns and preferences. Such usage may also be understood in the performative context as projections of aspirations and a rooting of diasporic sensibilities in a homeland vernacular to capture and play in public spaces amid recurring and anxious calls for “English Only” and “English First” initiatives.26 This process is also reflected by the popularity of Tagalog-immersion courses in Filipino in the Philippines and in the dozens of campaigns on campuses to offer instruction in the Tagalog and Ilokano languages. More than preservation, interest in native languages in places as disparate as Davis, California; DeKalb, Illinois; Mānoa, Hawai‘i; and Virginia Beach, Virginia hewed closely to concerns shared by Filipino intellectuals after World War II who, according to Augusto F. Espiritu, “validated not only the vernacular but also the Philippines’ indigenous, pre-Western, and especially oral cultural legacies.”27

As noted earlier, the PCN genre has consisted of two essential features. In the first feature, Filipino folkloric forms such as song, dance, music, and costuming, PCN organizers have unwittingly drawn from two competing schools of thought. On the one hand, they have relied on the repertoire invented in the 1930s by educators in Manila that authenticates an understanding of “Filipino culture.” That is, the folk forms helped to ground the students’ experimentation with fashioning identities and crafting a sense of transnationalism from within the context of the United States; through the shows, they became a different kind of “Americans” as well as “Filipinos.” On the other hand, the repertoire has drawn heavily from the highly stylized rendition of the dance-theater work popularized since the late 1950s. Samuel Gilmore notes, “For the average dance coordinator, the Bayanihan is often the first and only resource. It is not only readily accessible, it is also clearly a professional representation of traditional choreography. It thus functions as a widely accepted referent for traditional dance, and its use will generally deflect criticism from most sources or inquiry as to the source of particular dance movements. . . . In practice, the Bayanihan tapes serve as a legitimization resource for dance coordinators that helps to differentiate them from their peer group.”28 As I recounted in the previous two chapters, Bayanihan choreographers such as Lucrecia Urtula were taken to task by the traditionalist standard-bearer Francisca Reyes Aquino for speeding up tempos, liberalizing costuming choices, and performing dances and songs out of context or sequence. Aquino and her students, who were self-styled traditionalists, criticized this postwar stylization. Dance theater was not folk dance, Aquino would claim, and therefore did not have a claim on authenticity. The tension between these two streams remain blurred in the PCN genre.

The second feature is an asynchronous theatrical narration that performers refer to as the “skit.” It is in the theatrical narrations that the PCN has been more fully defined as a genre not originally from the Philippines and later adapted to U.S.-based needs, but rooted in and reflective of
students' anxieties and aspirations. While the performance of the national repertoire aimed for the epic, aspiring to the telling of the grandest tales and the demonstration of the homelands' patrimony, the language of the PCN's play was that of the lyrical—personalized and intimate testimony of undertheorized cultural identities and national affinities. While the performers played the roles of royalty, ritualized animals, and even gods in the folkloric suites, they embodied different versions of themselves in dramatic scenarios. These mini-plays allowed organizers to explicitly raise concerns about their experiences in the United States, including poking fun at their parents' reticence concerning family histories, the latent homophobia found in their peer groups, anti-gang exhortations, organizing to support affirmative-action and equal-opportunity programs, and celebrating the Pinoy boxers of the 1930s, and retelling the stories of Flor Contemplacion, Benigno Aquino, Ferdinand Marcos, "mail-order brides," the campaign for benefits waged by World War II-era Philippine veterans, the struggle for Filipino American and ethnic studies on college campuses, young people's challenges to their parents' traditional views on a whole host of issues (especially marriage and courting), and the prevalence of (and silence about) domestic violence. Contrasting genres of poetry, Max Harris posed the epic poet as a bearer of "impersonal and sacrosanct" traditions, while the lyric poet "writes of the personal and present." Leaning more toward exposition than analysis, PCNs—and, in particular, the theatrical narrations—have represented imminent and incomplete arguments for how cultural memories were to be preserved by this generation.

Perhaps the most widely used device in the shows has been the "reverse telos." The PCN genre has been both an imminent critique and a symptom of the assimilation paradigm at whose heart is a story of or proposition for how conflict among ethnic groups will be resolved. Assimilationists have recycled the popular metaphor of the "melting pot," which is also the title of a play written by Israel Zangwill in 1909 that was influential for dramatizing how recent immigrants could cast off memory, language, and their insistence on intraethnic marriage to realize a "New World Symphony." The assimilationist's premium has been built on the liberal expectation that immigrants, and especially their children, would sever their allegiance to the Old World to conform to the New.

How has this been reversed in the PCN genre? At the beginning of the show, the protagonists do not know their history or "culture," a situation that produces consternation and humor among their on-stage friends and family. In a familiar "quest" motif, the characters meet guides—elders, spirits, or parent figures—who "transport" them from safe, privileged, and increasingly suburban and apolitical settings to an idyllic Philippines. During their journey, the characters encounter sounds and visions that are dramatized in the form of folk-dance suites, and they marvel at their new knowledge of aspects of Filipino culture that had been unexplained. They have "gone native." The bird dances, courtship waltzes, warrior chants—all confirm for the characters the sanctioned repertoire of the Filipino. They rely on the visceral engagement with bodies for their authentication—costumed, armored, dancing, playing, and, often, praying. The protagonists are confronted with a test of some sort, a choice to be made or a task to be achieved, as the source of dramatic tension. Stay with the abusive boyfriend or risk the consequences of a public breakup? Leave behind one's barkada (close-knit group of friends) or follow an elder's stern judgment?"Throw the fight to cash in against your "countrymen" or see the match to the end? By the end of the show, the characters reached an epiphanic state of cultural awareness and pride that they could carry back with them to the United States. This motif—of the quest, a "reverse exile"—has been the most familiar one deployed throughout the genre. For young characters, "something" was missing: that which was replaced by an imagined return to the Philippines where the "crisis" of Filipino American identity could be solved. "Reverse exile" is bracketed here to call attention to the problematic of American-born Filipinos who do not "go back" to a place where they have never been. Compare Oscar Campomanes's explication of the exilic motif in Filipino literature where he situates Filipino American literature in a "reverse telos." The tacit assertion made here was that the Philippines—as represented in its folkloric repertoire—could be understood as a sturdy repository of knowledge, a warehouse of unchanging, static, and therefore "authentic" representations of Philippine life. The exercising of the "reverse exile" motif refused to acknowledge the fact of cultural change, indeterminacy, and reconstruction at work in both the Philippines and in the United States.

Assimilationists advance the liberal expectation that succeeding generations will intermarry with other ethnic and racial groups. They will move out of cloistered ghettos; change their eating patterns, patterns of dress, speech, and diet; and attain higher levels of education by breaking admissions barriers. And while such designations were merely taken for "extrinsic" manifestations of cultural change, the premium of assimilation would be best manifested in a cohort's move toward out-marriage and one's "primary associations." The teleology of American assimilation ends with the children of immigrants no longer dreaming of the homeland as their parents did. Rather than having less significance for succeeding generations, ethnic articulations of cultural identity, such as the PCN, continue to be popular. The PCN is both an oblique challenge and a symptom
of dominant culture’s call for assimilation. As such, PCNs have resonated with the more politically and socially charged articulations of Afrocentrism or Chicana/o nationalism. Calls for communities to laud “mother Africa” or “Aztlan” as homelands and to claim the lineage of ancient kings and queens over and against so-called democratically elected present-day leaders registered an implicit critique of contemporary culture. But it is not much of a leap to see that the embodied reference to the Philippines was also at its root a nascent critique of what has been available for Filipinos to make sense of themselves in the United States. The attention (obsession, even) to homelands for U.S.-based racial and ethnic minorities outside the nation suggested how the dominant national narrative of freedom balanced with equality was deferred rather than realized.

The PCN genre’s use of this imagined return to the Philippines stands in stark contrast to the sophisticated transnational work of Filipina activists based in the United States whose multigenerational stories are beginning to be documented. For example, working on issues that range from analyses of the Philippines’ labor-export policy to the fate of Amerasian children living near former U.S. military installations in the archipelago, groups such as the Gabriela Network USA articulate a keen sensitivity to respecting the sovereignty of Philippine-based leadership while enjoying a degree of freedom in undertaking innovative approaches to globalized organizing work. While the PCN protagonists have taken for granted travel and mobility as part of a journey to discover and then collapse the distance between past and present, between here and there, activists and other cultural workers outside the PCN genre have acknowledged their limited efficacy by virtue of not being in the Philippines while forging ongoing connections and conduits for political activity.

The PCN genre has also reversed the reticence of Filipino parents about personal histories. For a host of reasons related to shame or self-loathing, or simply to safeguard their children against feeling “different,” parents have made specific choices about what aspects of the culture are available. For example, Victor Merina recalled what happened when he was taunted as a young boy for his Filipino accent: “[My parents] didn’t want us to learn Tagalog [the main language of the Philippines] or a dialect from their islands, which is called Ivatan. At first they spoke both dialects at home with my sister and me. But after the incidents of language at school, they made a conscious decision not to mix the languages. So they didn’t speak any Tagalog to my sister or [me] when we were growing up. In retrospect, we all regret that now.”37 In so many shows, students have played out Merina’s frustrations. Playing the role of one’s parents on stage has made for easy laughs. Filipinos rarely see or hear themselves as Filipinos in popular media. “Anything but Filipino” could easily be a mantra for the hundreds of actors of Philippine descent auditioning for work in Los Angeles’s film and television industry or in New York’s theater district: Mexican rockers, Chinatown cooks, Koreatown gangsters, Vietnamese shop owners, even the occasional off-world creature such as an Ewok. The initial burst of laughter stems from recognizing the unrecognizable: an aunty, a cousin, or an elder with an exaggerated accent. When the accent becomes the punchline, it is not funny at all. Marivi Soliven Blanco observes that a sense of superiority is at the root of the humor of some Filipino American comedy. Reflecting on a comedy show she saw in Berkeley, she wrote, “I realized that all those jokes about the bizarre nicknames, dysfunctional plumbing, quirky media, and assorted freaks in the Philippines implied a sense of cultural (or at the very least, technological) superiority: ‘Look how absurd/backward/pretentious they are in the Islands! Aren’t we lucky we don’t have to live there?’”38 Often, though, the humor has revealed a keen insecurity on the part of the students, a resentment even directed toward elders for not having communicated more cultural knowledge.

As the show’s format and presentation have become more elaborate, so, too, has the criticism raised internally among organizers and externally among observers. Critics have argued that the PCN genre reinforces static constructions of Filipino American identities and that the origins of the folk forms need to be more concretely historicized or subjected to experimentation and play. Some have pointed to the “Orientalizing” function of the Muslim dance suites in several PCNs, particularly how students have undertheorized their importation of folkloric forms from the southern Philippines, opening themselves to the charge of being sloppy interpreters of “native” cultures.39 Even though shows have been produced regularly, some voices have become critical of “new and entering students” who “may not realize that people before them had struggled to provide many traditions/programs in existence.”40 A veteran choreographer and performer described the mindset of the student performers who took up the show after his class. Referring to to campaigns specifically aimed at the recruitment and retention of Filipinos, he said, “I think they are losing the purpose of why we’re doing this… [T]here were other people that really fought very hard to keep the doors open.”41 The performer railed at students’ sensibilities, which were also reflected in the larger community, that recognized only those hardships that were consigned to “history.” The danger, he said, was that the young students saw struggle not as marking them personally but as belonging only to the past. Theirs was a moment simply to be recognized on stage as they congratulated themselves as members of a meritocracy.
By the late 1980s, PCN performers and organizers were beginning to do their own research and hold out for the possibility that the show could be a means to achieve community organizing around access to higher education. Filipino admissions to UCLA, for example, had dropped 44 percent by the end of the 1980s, with only 141 people self-identified as “Filipino” admitted. “That means less Filipinos coming in, less Filipinos graduating, and less Filipinos returning to the community,” according to Arleen de Vera, a former coordinator of Samahang Pilipino’s Affirmative Action Student Task Force. Access to higher education would continue to be an issue well into the 1990s because of the rise of both conservatism and consequent politicizing of admissions policies and the increasing cost of education in general. When the Regents of the University of California banned race-conscious admissions policies in 1997, applications to graduate school by Filipino students fell by 10 percent, and the admission rate for the same group dropped by 14 percent. Rising tuition at the traditionally working-class San Francisco State University had a negative impact on those who were supporting themselves or family members. Between 1991 and 1993, tuition for a full-time resident undergraduate student averaged $491. The following year, that cost would more than double, to $1,070. How relevant were cultural productions given these material changes in the lives of students? Several others took PCN organizers to task for simply regurgitating familiar plot lines from previous years or from other campuses, offering contrived resolutions to weighty topics or even relying mechanistically on social realism as the prevailing aesthetic of the presentations. In other words, the criticism hinged on the point that the entire show had become an epic—a grand and bloated restatement of Filipino American culture.

**Cultural Evidence: Rethinking the Genre**

Criticisms raised by student organizers over the years have led to some modest changes and, occasionally, open challenges to the genre. Large campuses, especially those with more than twenty years of production history, such as UCI’s Kabahayan, have conducted post-show “wrap-up” sessions in which cast and audience members discuss problems related to the production and solutions to them. The dialogues generally have avoided openly tendentious comments and veered toward providing constructive criticism that the next year’s crew could use. UCLA’s Samahang Pilipino and UC Berkeley’s Pilipino American Alliance helped to argue for and staff credit-earning courses in which students can take a broader view of performance, history, and culture as well as the mechanics of event production. But talking about change is much different from actually carrying it out.

In one instance—*Cultural Evidence*, a show produced by PACE at San Francisco State University in 1993—the organizers emphasized nontraditional approaches to narrative through theater, music, film, and poetry by tapping the creativity of members and the surrounding community in an effort to break from the PCN’s hardened conventions. “Cultural Evidence” presented a series of shows over three days. The first evening included a film screening that featured works written, directed, and produced by students. It also featured a spoken-word event that drew on the city’s large community of writers. Young poets were invited to stage the share with veteran activists and artists such as the poet Al Robles and short-story writer Oscar Penaranda, who founded the original Kearny Street Workshop, the Manilatown Senior Center for Self-Help, and other community-based organizations. Part of the program included a one-act play accompanied by a jazz trio.

The second evening presented local hip-hop artists such as DJ Qbert, Bubala Tribe, Urban Soul, and Lani Luv, who represent a mix of disciplines and activities, including scratching/mixing, dance, rap, and graffiti styles. Filipino American hip hop is not merely a mixing of African American style; it demonstrates how young segments of the community are struggling and coming to terms with the most vital cultural forms of late-twentieth-century America. Filipinos have taken part in other aesthetically innovative moments in American culture: Consider, for example, the zoot suiters and beboppers of earlier generations. Today’s Filipino American hip hoppers not only participate in but also rearticulate the form through a distinctive and improvisatory soulful style. The third night featured a finale of sorts, a concession to organizers who wanted a more “traditional” cultural-night show involving folk-dance presentation. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the show concerned the organizers’ decision to retain only the so-called mountain and tribal suites, which in effect drew more attention to the pastiche of monologues and vignettes. The pieces written, directed, and performed by the students represented an eclectic mix of interests and talents, including a reading of a poem featured in a literary journal; a meditation on Filipina American adolescence and personal maturation; a lengthy “epic-documentary” of Philippine history, with the Magellan-slaying narrator (Lapu Lapu)—as-prophet; a play raising the problem of intergenerational conflict; and a dialogue set to the rhythm of two young Filipino men circa 1934 talking about how one of their countrymen created jazz.

Having displaced the PCN’s traditional attention to dance form, the show’s organizers left open the problematic of their editorial decision to highlight certain suites. Left out of the program were the barrio suites (featuring the signature *tinikling*) and the Muslim suite’s *singkil*. The *tinikling* has become a de facto “national” dance because of its popularity
and recognizability outside the Philippines. The singkil has been a staple of several PCNs for the same reason but also because of the implicit anti-Western narrative that can be read into its origins. In her reading of fictional works by the Filipino writers N.V.M. Gonzalez and Bienvenido Santos in which the dance figures prominently, Gertrudes Ang surmised that the “bamboo dancers” might represent “globe-trotting Filipinos . . . especially those in the States, caught there by [World War II] while in the midst of their studies or who were simply there as travelers with pleasure in mind.” Ang favors another angle: that the dance represents a blending of both “indigenous” or “autochthonous” (the bamboo) with the “imported” or “foreign” (as seen in the Western-based waltz music that accompanies the dance). Barbara Gaerlan saw the reliance on the singkil, a dance based on an ancient southern Philippine epic, by many of her Filipino American students as a reflection of a need to embody dancing characters that are “regal,” “proud,” and “unconquered” in marked contrast to the historical setting of the dance’s scenario, which involves a martial warrior prince attempting to rescue a princess in a forest of felled trees and presents enslaved people as attendants. Omitting these two iconic dances made a strong editorial statement and an implicit critique of two kinds of subjectivities often associated with the dances: on the one hand, the smiling, naive, accommodationist; and on the other, the unsmilng, imperious slavedriver. The former feared rocking any boat, while the latter wielded a masculine authority by conflating violence, sovereignty, and romance.

This eclectic, sometimes unfocused, and largely uneven finale to Cultural Evidence lacked the presentational unity of PCNs typical of the genre. In stratagizing with essentialisms rather than receiving them uncritically, the organizers of Cultural Evidence set the static inventory of dances aside (while not wholly jettisoning them) and opened creative spaces for its members to engage in a conversation about what they felt was important and how they viewed their “culture.” Rather than merely reproducing fixed structures, they highlighted the process of cultural production as an unfolding set of contradictions and possibilities. And yet, Cultural Evidence’s format did not have a lasting influence. In subsequent productions at the same campus, PCN organizers returned to the familiar conventions of Bayanihan-derived folkloric dances interspersed haphazardly among theatrical narrations.

In the next chapter, I turn to a production that focused less on enlisting audiences to reform the sturdy repertoire. Instead, satirists mocked the venerated performance. While Cultural Evidence aimed to rethink the PCN genre with an eye toward reform within the setting of a college or university campus, a group of artists—theirsefl veterans of dozens of PCNs—lobbed a parody from inside an independent black-box theater space.

5 Making a Mockery of Everything We Hold True and Dear

Exploring Parody with Tongue in a Mood’s PCN Salute (San Francisco, 1997)

Authorities, any authorities, fear above all other things laughter, derision or even the smile, because laughter denotes a critical awareness; it signifies imagination, intelligence and a rejection of all fanaticism.

—Dario Fo

WHEN DARIO FO, the Italian playwright and performer, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997, he heard not only cheers but also jeers. “I doubt that Fo is an author of the first rank,” said Mario Vargas Llosa, wryly adding, “Even in the Nobel, as in other prizes, mistakes happen.” Maurizio Gasparri, a member of the Italian Parliament, referred to Fo as “a clown who is worthy of a circus, but not of a prize of this significance.” In the pages of the Vatican’s L’Osservatore Romano, a writer noted that “Fo is the sixth Nobel from Italy after Carducci, Deledda, Pirandello, Quasimodo, [and] Montale. After these sages, a clown.” Performers like Fo, who draw inspiration from a long line of popular European entertainers such as “mummers, jesters, clowns, tumbler and storytellers,” insist on the change and play of meaning, even recasting the context through the alteration of one’s appearance, costume, gait, accent, gender, origin, and age. Fo’s critical attacks along two fronts. First are those who do not share his politics. Consistently over his long career Fo has hurled jokes into the teeth of the powerful, refusing to take seriously those who wield power indiscriminately or unjustly. And they were listening. Fo and his wife of more than fifty years, Franca Rame, a noted performer in her own right and descendant of a long line of respected actors, have been denied entry into several countries, including the United States between 1980 and 1986, and were banned from appearing on Italian television and radio from 1962 to 1977. “A clown can’t always be smiling,”
NEUROSCIENTISTS refer to the term “proprioception” as the sense afforded by a matrix of parts within the body working in concert to inform each other—that is, the body’s awareness of itself through sensors located in our inner ear and throughout our joints and muscles. Actors, dancers, musicians, even those working on their golf swing discipline the proprioceptive aspect of their bodies to reach beyond seemingly natural limits and to make what they do appear effortless. Consider the information culled from the proprioceptive as well as the pain communicated to and through phantom limbs. Information understood as pain travels along a complex path—from nerve endings to tissue masses outside the spinal column, then to pain-sensing neurons inside the spinal column, and finally to the brain. When those neurons, whose sole job it is to sense pain, no longer receive messages, they pass along instead nonsense or garbled data, information that is interpreted by the brain as pain. The monitoring continues, allowing amputees to feel something that is no longer there.2

Both of these experiences taught me young that our bodies carry vital and sometimes confusing information about who we are. From my experiences in learning music, I continue to think about the various techniques and forms of discipline to which we often subject our bodies to be in concert with others or our surroundings. From my father’s case, I have wondered about how we continue to feel the presence of unseen things, of things taken away. As much as I wanted to relate, I had no “sense” of what it could mean to experience my father’s inexplicable pain. I began to wonder about other kinds of absences, especially when reading a sociologist’s account of spectral presences: how family members, friends (and even foes), ancestors, and teachers continue to inform and haunt as if they were still a part of us, still connected.3 What else can our bodies tell us?

Notes

6. Ibid., 176.
7. Ibid., 174.
8. Ibid., 180.
12. Agoncillo and Guerrero, History of the Filipino People, 44.
14. The text of the relevant section reads, “Until it has been officially proclaimed that a state of war or insurrection against the authority of the United States no longer exists in the Philippine Islands, it shall be unlawful for any person to advance orally or by writing or printing or by like means, the independence of the Philippine Islands or their separation from the United States whether by peaceable or forcible means,
or to print, publish or circulate any handbill, newspaper or publication, advocating such independence or separation": "Public Laws Annotated," quoted in Doreen G. Fernandez, *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 82.


18. Ibid., 98–99.


25. Ibid.


Introduction


7. I thank the Temple University Press reader who suggested that I make this link more explicit.


11. Ibid.


15. Ibid., 62.

16. Ibid., 63.


18. Ibid., 1.


Epigraph: Lan Cao and Himilce Novas, Everything You Need to Know about Asian-American History (New York: Plume, 1996), 177. The authors fail to mention that the presence of Asian American studies classes at the University of California, Irvine, has been due largely to the efforts and sacrifice of hundreds of students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members. They, like most folks struggling to make ethnic studies a reality on campuses throughout the country, know that this is easier said than done.


4. My primary sources of analysis include oral histories and interviews with performers and their consultants that I conducted, as well as those collected by others and deposited at several campuses; attendance at shows from 1989 to 1999; and participant observation research. I played one of the lead acting roles in the San Francisco State University Filipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) production Muling Pagkiling ng Ating Kasaysayan (Rebirth of Our History) in 1992. For PACE’s Cultural Evidence in 1993, I wrote and composed music for a sketch while serving as an elected student leader for the group. For UCI Kababayan’s Street of Dreams in 1996, I composed, performed, and arranged music with a jazz trio while participating in several other aspects related to the production (music rehearsals, actor auditions, and post-production dialogues).


6. On the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, see ibid., chap. 3.

7. Corporate Student System Report CSS17D and CPEC Report DEG704, Office of the President, University of California, Berkeley.


13. Jaime Jacinto and Ave Jacinto, oral-history transcript, SPA.

14. Jacinto's comments were delivered at the Asian Pacific American Roundtable, California State University, Los Angeles, April 12, 1996. Jacinto drew on the distinction between participational and presentational modes adumbrated by Ricardo Trillo.


16. Ibid., 45; emphasis added.


18. Schechner, Performance Studies, 73.

19. Dom Magwilli, interview by the author, Los Angeles, March 2, 1998. Garcia Canclini wrote: "The literature on ritualism is concerned chiefly with rites or entry or of passage: who, and with what requirements, may enter a house or a church; what steps must be fulfilled in order to pass from one civil status to another or to assume an office or an honor." Garcia Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 24.


21. Ibid.


23. "When the Philippine flag is flown with another flag, the flags, if both are national flags, must be flown on separate staffs of the same height and shall be of equal size. The Philippine flag shall be hoisted first and lowered last" RA8491, sec. 12. Sec. 34 of the same act prohibits the use of the flag "in discotheques, cocktail parties, night and day clubs, casinos, gambling joints and places of vice or where frivolity prevails."


29. Garcia Canclini discusses how a nationalistic patrimony is inculcated in public displays—through parades, murals, museums, and processions:

The dramatization of the patrimony is the effort to simulate that there is an origin, a founding substance, in relation with which we should act today. This is the basis of authoritarian cultural policies. The world is a stage, but what must be performed is already prescribed. The practices and objects of value are found and catalogued in a fixed repertory. To be cultured implies knowing that repertory of symbolic goods and intervening correctly in the rituals that reproduce it. For that reason the notions of collection and ritual are key to deconstructing the links between culture and power. . . . The historical patrimony that is celebrated consists of founding events, the heroes who played the main roles in them, and the fetishized objects that evoke them. The legitimate rites are those that stage the desire for repetition and perpetuation of order. (Garcia Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 110)


In all the great explorers' narratives of the late Renaissance (Daniel Defoe has aptly called them the collection of the world—la collecte du monde) and those of the nineteenth-century explorers and ethnographers, not to mention Conrad's voyage up the Congo, there is the topos of the voyage south as Mary Louise Pratt has called it, referring to Gide and Camus, in
which the motif of control and authority has "sounded uninterruptedly." For the native who begins to see and hear that persisting note, it sounds "the note of crisis, of banishment, banishment from the heart, banishment from home." This is how Stephen Dedalus memorably states it in the Library episode Ulysses, the decolonizing native writer—such as Joyce, the Irish writer colonized by the British—re-experiences the quest-voyage motif from which he had been banished by means of the same trope carried over from the imperial into the new culture and adopted, reused, relived.

34. "Where would we be... without a touch of essentialism?" For Stuart Hall, paying attention to the overly determined labor of cultural production means having to admit that there are no pure forms:

Always these forms are the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying. Always these forms are impure, to some degree hybridized from a vernacular base. Thus, they must always be heard, not simply as the recovery of a lost dialogue bearing clues for the production of new musics (because there is never any going back to the old in a simple way), but as what they are—adaptations, molded to the mixed, contradictory, hybrid spaces of popular culture. (Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in Black Popular Culture: A Project, ed. Michelle Wallace [Seattle: Bay Press, 1992], 28–29)

Hall redirects my attention concerning how we have had to rely on conceptions of culture that are inadequate for grappling with performance genres such as the PCN. On the postmodern destruction of anthropological authority and the positing of the "cultural" as an autonomous sphere, see Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, Women Writing Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).


37. See Theodore S. Gonzalves, "When the Walls Speak a Nation: Contemporary Murals and the Narration of Filipino America," Journal of Asian American Studies 1,