

## MARLON FUENTES

[ 8 ] *Extracts from an Imaginary Interview:  
Questions and Answers about Bontoc  
Eulogy*

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Q: What was the impetus in making this film?

A: My work in photography was being generated by an increasingly narrative subtext, ideas about duration and the use of history and ritual and their artifacts. I was also fascinated by how certain bodies of knowledge and their representational strategies were codified into structures and surfaces that had their own intrinsic valences and ways of reception. For example, anthropology and, specifically, ethnographic film had historically contained epistemological assumptions about the Other. These are deeply embedded in a historical tradition that can be traced to the early eighteenth century. On a personal level, I wanted to locate myself within the historical narratives that define the Filipino in America. Art for me has always been an orienting device, and I thought that film was a good medium that could capture the process of passage through the membranes we navigate. It is only in retrospect that a lot of the events that happen to us make sense. In this context, narrativizing discrete yet incomplete fragments of our memories becomes a vital way of knowing where we fit in the grander scheme of things. Growing older necessitates looking back, if only to reassure oneself that the increasing velocity by which we experience the passage of time has some meaning. Film has the power to impose a sense of order, purpose, and interconnectedness onto this vortex of events.

Q: The film straddles fact and fiction, mixing imagination and interior dialogue with history. Why did you use this particular approach?

A: The technique of conveying the event that occurred utilized the fictional character of Markod, a young Bontoc warrior designated as the Narrator's grandfather. The name is borrowed from Bontoc lore; it is the name of the

mythical narrator invoked at the end of an oral story transmission—"thus said Markod"—without which one is bound to be haunted in sleep. There were several Bontocs who died at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, and I envisioned the Markod character as a composite of the group, encapsulating their experience of the Fair. It was through Markod's eyes that the viewer saw the events that unfolded. More important, it was also through him that the events were interpreted. At times, the Narrator's voice and Markod's voice became interchangeable.

I wanted to make an *anti-illusionistic* piece, in the Brechtian sense of the word. I wanted the seams and sutures to show, and the process of the movie unfolding as a movie was a critical element. In a sense, the effect I wanted was synonymous to viewing an optical illusion, for example, the one with the profile of two human faces melding into contours of a vase, or, for example, the old woman/young woman picture. Depending on how long or intently you looked, the ground of the picture changed to reveal the other figure. In the film, the oscillation between the "fictionality" of the story (as clued in by liminal references or subtle sleights of hand) and the historical authenticity of what was transpiring, was a formal tension necessary to the theme: history as memory and vice versa. This oscillation was achieved by the juxtaposition of archival footage and photographs with the recreated footage of the children and the actor playing Markod. It was also complemented by references to early cinema, as in the jump cut that occurs in the scene of the rabbit being pulled out of the hat. This was fair warning to the viewer that here was, after all, a bungling Méliès incapable of tricking the audience. It was the incompetence that would lay bare the tricks of the trade, the porosity and unreliability of the cinematic language being used. These devices—i.e., the oscillation between implausibility and authenticity, the movement between past and present, using the children as narrative fulcrums of this temporal seesaw, the realistic foregrounding of the texture of the Narrator's voice—were all aspects I wanted the viewer to be aware of. Of course, in the absence of a familiarity with the references, the film could be read strictly as a realistic personal story about the events of the Fair. I crafted the film with the intention that it can present a straight historical story of what happened in 1904, regardless of the intertextual references embedded or the sophistication of the viewer. In a sense, the audience is really bimodal: the Filipino-American viewing the film for its historical and political interest, and the cineaste interested in strategies of ethnographic representation, early cinema, and formal/narrative issues relating to the documentary form.

Q: When you talk about an anti-illusionistic film, are you referring to a certain kind of realism?

A: In a sense, yes. The Hollywood model, in its classic form, aims for narrative totally driven by the dramatic world of the characters. The studios therefore simulate, by techniques such as invisible editing and a musical score that “is not heard,” the world of the characters while simultaneously obliterating the presence of the narrator/filmmaker. Even early fake documentaries such as Jim McBride’s *David Holzman’s Diary* (1968) present a hermetic surface that is subservient to the portrayal of the character’s world. The film’s difference is that this time it uses the documentary (i.e., the personal diary), compared to traditional dramatic narrative, as a form to explore the story. Both examples are illusionistic in purpose. *Bontoc*, however, aims to engage the viewer with the process of story telling itself, by foregrounding the elements I have mentioned earlier. *Bontoc*’s presentation is akin to an Indonesian shadow puppet performance (*wayang kulit*), where one can watch on either side of the screen. Watching the puppeteer’s side shows the movements of the craftsperson concurrent with the unfolding narrative. In the film, the narrator’s “search” and performance become part of the dramatic and thematic subtext of the story. The challenge was to be able to convey the story, while presenting the intentionality and the artifacts of cinematic effort, without losing the viewer. After all, the story still had to have the basic function of “historical” text. As an aside, materialist film has always struck me as the most realistic cinema one can make, because, after all, it is an exploration of the properties of the film. One of the most radical things one can accomplish is to direct the viewer toward the process of his/her perception at the very moment of perception. It is a special kind of mindfulness that the cinema is capable of facilitating.

Q: It is interesting that you did not pursue a Brechtian arc by diegetically revealing the fictional construct employed, i.e., providing a denouement (or frame) that overtly transforms the film into a formal orchestration of narrative deconstruction.

A: I seriously thought of that alternative, but in the end I opted for a solution that implicated the viewer more in the bidirectionality of the act of observing. Breaking the “ethnographic” surface by disclosing the fictional device within the film would have dissipated the emotional momentum generated by the historical gravity of the actual story. It could have been an aesthetically satisfying direction to take, but it could have trivialized

and deflated the tragedy of the nine Filipinos who died during the exposition, and the hundreds who endured the ordeal.

Q: What about your choices of archival footage, such as the Edison recreations? It seems that they add one more layer of tension to the narrative surface of the film.

A: The scenes representing the Philippine-American War—for example, the trench shots of “Filipinos” retreating from the advancing American soldiers—were obtained from the Library of Congress collection. They were, as you said, re-creations for Edison’s Biograph Company. In the particular reel I mentioned, the Filipinos were played by African Americans. These are of course pieces of archival footage that are filmed simulations of the real thing, passed off as newsreel at the time the footage was shown. The “truth” really depends on who, or where, or when the information was shown, and for what purpose. Another good example in the film is the Battle of Manila Bay sequence. The boats were scale-sized models of the 1898 battle, and the model setup itself was exhibited in St. Louis. So the scene is 1904-vintage simulation (i.e., an authentic Fair artifact of an actual Fair event) of a recorded event. I cut in the actual newsreel footage of the ship’s guns from the actual battle, so the perversity could be complete. I actually considered slowing the boat speeds to realistic speed, but I decided against it because the illusion of the boat model as real ships would then simply become seamless, thereby destroying the Brechtian scaffolding I was trying to create.

Q: Certain viewers, visual anthropologists, for example, have received *Bontoc Eulogy* as an ethnographic film. I have heard you and other critics refer to it as an autoethnographic film. Did you originally see the piece as having this specific reception?

A: I have a very keen interest in ethnographic filmmaking. It is a specialized genre that is a useful and dynamic way of communicating stories about the human situation. It is primarily observational in style (i.e., it communicates an authoritative claim in relation to its “objective” uninflected surface), and for that reason, it can be subject to a lot of politically derived criticism. Another reason this is so is because the choice of its subject has traditionally and historically been the Other.

As a filmmaker who wanted to explore history in a personal way, I found ethnographic film presented a stylized and codified syntax that in certain ways preempted content. I wanted to participate in the discourse

of ethnographic representation by using and appropriating the idea of the “native filmmaker.” This idea stems from an anthropological practice of handing over cameras to native peoples (as subjects of ethnographic research) as a way of capturing a unique insider perspective on the culture under study. More often than not, the assumption is that of a tabula rasa “recorder” of cultural facts. My case, of course, is a little different, but it is still a logical extension of the original idea.

Another reason for using the ethnographic form was actually based on logistics and availability of materials. My goal was to create a story from the bits of information I could unearth here in the United States, without going back to the Philippines. For many painful reasons that I shall not go into here, I was still not prepared to visit “back home.” Thus I consciously confined myself to the materials available in archival sources such as the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian. Fortunately, some interesting “salvage footage” existed in these archives (These items are footage taken by nonanthropologists such as U. S. Army camerapersons, home movie-makers, etc.). I found this footage (much concerning the Cordillerans) extremely appropriate for what I had in mind.

I believe that history is really an art of memory. The gaps and ellipses are just as important as the materials we have in our hands. If they are missing for certain reasons, whether by accident or force of omission, perhaps these irregularities force us to reflect on the nature and origins of our own situation.

Q: So, in a sense, your film is about the display of the fragment. I would like to quote a section from B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article “Objects of Ethnography” (1991), because I think it is particularly relevant:

The artfulness of the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt. Where does the object begin and where does it end? . . . Perhaps we should speak not of the ethnographic object but of the ethnographic fragment. Like the ruin, the ethnographic fragment is informed by a poetics of detachment. Detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments, but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible. Lovers of ruins in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England understood the distinctive pleasures afforded by architectural fragments, once enough time had passed for a detached attitude to form. Antiquarian John Aubrey valued the ruin as much as he did the earlier intact structure. Nor were the ruins left to accidental formation. Aesthetic principles guided the selective demolition of ruins and, where a ruin was lacking, the building of artificial ones. A history of the poetics of the fragment is yet to be written, for fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make a virtue, a vicissitude of history, or a

response to limitations on our ability to bring the world indoors. We make fragments.<sup>1</sup>

The article proceeds to make a distinction between *in situ* and *in context*, which are the two approaches to the display of the object.

A: These are terribly important distinctions because they can be applied to a wider context beyond the strictly museological implications of displaying the object.

Q: Metonymy and mimesis are the essential ideas behind the notion of *in situ*. Continuing Gimblett’s line of argument:

the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be recreated. The art of the metonym is an art that accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object. Showing it in all its partiality enhances its aura of its ‘realness.’ The art of mimesis, whether in the form of period rooms, ethnographic villages, recreated environments, reenacted rituals, or photomurals, places objects (or replicas of them) *in situ*. *In situ* approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings . . . *In situ* installations, no matter how mimetic, are not neutral . . . Representational conventions guide mimetic displays, despite the illusion of close fit, if not identity, between the representation and that which is represented . . . The notion of *in context*, which poses the interpretive problem of theoretical frame of reference, entails particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas. In addition to labels and commentary, objects are also set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships. *In context* approaches . . . establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display. There are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies.<sup>2</sup>

The reason I have cited this discussion is that I thought that these perspectives were specifically relevant to the display that was the Philippine Village, as the subject of your film. It is obvious that, in the Philippine display, the approaches of *in situ* and *in context* were integrated: there was a “brick by brick” mimetic display, but there was also a direct mediation afforded by the anthropologists’ presence. In fact the Anthropology Museum beside the Village offered an extensive frame of reference for the Fair-goer. Gimblett’s observation throws useful light on the primary

diegetic subject of the film, which is the Filipino display in 1904. But it seems to me that the Narrator himself (as a character in the story), and the filmmaker (meta-diegetically) implicate themselves in the process of “displaying” the fragment—albeit in a temporal, cinematic “installation,” so to speak.

A: This is a subtle point, but it is actually central to the whole idea I mentioned earlier about the film serving as an autoethnographic project. Gimblett’s display dichotomy can actually be used to frame the film as a personal reconstruction project. One can look at the “inert” salvage footage as being relocated *in situ* (temporally and spatially) into the film’s domain/setting. And one can view the Narrator as the interpretive commentator facilitating an *in context* site, if you will. Looking at it this way is really interpreting ethnographic film as a logical extension of the living exhibit approaches that preceded it historically.

Q: In both instances—that is, in 1904 St. Louis and in the film itself—one can posit that the image of the Native is still utilized as a sign. Do you think this is problematic?

A: The problem really is not whether a particular signifier essentializes or totalizes (as becomes the nature of objects chosen to represent some thing or idea); rather it is the way the process of representation perpetuates whatever oppressive power relationships may exist. This is the acid test.

The ideas of power, conflict, and marginalization are inherently embedded in the ideas of display, whether that display takes the form of folk festivals, of rituals, or of ethnographic film. The operative goal, I think, may be two-pronged: illumination of and opposition against further suffering and dehumanization. The problem with market-induced manic pluralism is that it neutralizes everything in its path, to the point where we become passive anaesthetized receptors of difference and cultural marginalia, transformed apathetic digesting organisms waiting for the newest jolt to register to confirm our existence.

Q: Do you think that, like its cousin, scientific categorization, aestheticizing the ethnographic fragment co-opts it and robs it of its potential to “illuminate and oppose?”

A: Every activity is vested with its own motivation, regardless of whether the latter is conscious or unconscious. Categorical or taxonomic imperatives follow some master narrative, one way or the other. It is the nature of

the grid. Likewise, specific aesthetic programs have corollary objectives, whether the distillation of the sublime or the baring forth of “what-is.” I can only speak of art, because it is the practice I am engaged in. I think that there is actually a moral imperative that generates art practice, regardless of how it is manifested. This engagement has to exist in the maker to begin with; one simply makes the best of what one can do based on the degree, sophistication, and energy of one’s moral commitment and position.

Q: The basic challenge of curation is the use of objects to illustrate an idea: to textualize objects, and objectify texts. If we were to view *Bontoc Eulogy* as an end product of curatorial activity—since, after all, it is an archaeology of sorts—how are we to read its underlying schema?

A: There are numerous interrelated thematic strands, and their respective visibility or materiality really depends on where the viewer is situated. The optimal viewer hopefully gets to digest most, if not all, of it. These thematics are entered into through their emotional doors. *Bontoc Eulogy* is not a theory film. Instead it is a film that deals with issues of race, difference, voyeurism, science as ideology, spectacle, memory, time—as the particularities of one’s existence in the here and now.

Filmmaking is as much a question of problem solving as it is of artistic creation. And I don’t mean just the logistics of narrativizing, but striking balance points (as you proceed on the story path) between, let’s say, respectful cultural “preservation” and continued exotization of a group.

Q: Let’s focus on the film in terms of its construction. I’d like you to talk more about the visual surface of the film, which blends archival footage with re-creations, and about the sound track, i.e., the voice-over and the music.

A: The primary source of the tribal footage was the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian. Jake Homiak was kind enough to lead me to the right sources, specifically the Hillman footage on the Northern Luzon tribes. It turned out that most of these were Cordilleran tribes. The Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress was a main source of photographs, as was, of course, the National Archives. The only 1904 vintage film footage that I was able to recover consisted of the panoramic shots at the exposition grounds, the fairground shots, the gondolas, and the extended crowd and parade scenes. There were no shots of the native Filipinos at the Fair, except the sequence of marching and exercising Scouts. There is probably extant footage of the tribes, but I haven’t found it. My research was done primarily in the Washington, D.C., area.

The present day re-creations, including the Narrator on the benches, Markod in the jungle environment: these were all taken in San Diego's Balboa Park. This was also the site of the Panama-California International Exposition of 1915–1916, incidentally.

Q: The scenes where the Narrator refers to visual memories of the homeland, in the beginning part of the film, were really not consistent with the approximate age of the character. They appear pre–World War II vintage.

A: It is interesting that you pointed out this inconsistency because not many people have noticed this, maybe because they didn't have a local knowledge of how Manila looked, or maybe because these scenes were consistent with their vision of what the Third World was supposed to look like—a frozen, romanticized version of provincial quaintness and repose. This temporal misallocation was part of the Brechtian pastiche I was using. It really emphasizes the Narrator's nostalgic longing for the homeland, tarnished with the patina of a long physical absence. In other words, his childhood there was so long ago that he had to physically raid the storehouse of memories to concretize its topography. The result was a corrupted vision, a floating fragment transmogrified by the passing decades, the reluctantly surviving images of stories passed down to him during his formative early years. By default, it represents the Narrator's unreliable memory of his dim lacunar landscape.

Q: Which brings up the topic of the Narrator's credibility . . .

A: The authorial voice of the Narrator clues the viewer into the potential fissures of the tale. This idea is introduced in the first sequence of the film, with the three successive shots of him listening to an ancient victrola, reminiscent of "his master's voice." This prologue suggests the possibility that the whole film, the whole story about to follow, is really a concoction of the character's imagination—a fleshing out of the sound artifacts he has heard. Right from the beginning, the possibility of a cinematic Piltdown is offered to the viewer. The tension created by the Narrator's credibility is a central one in the film. It is this very characteristic that becomes a trope for the fallibility and fragility of memory, and hence of history. The film has the initial aura of an omniscient narrator, which is quickly challenged by the "cracks" that follow as the story proceeds. It is probably the momentum of "wanting to believe," or perhaps more precisely "wanting to know what happens next," that propels the viewer onward.

Q: Or perhaps this occurs through the innate power of the historical images with intrinsic truth claims in their wake . . .

A: Absolutely. And it is the characteristic truth claim that after all is the subject of the film's deconstructive thrust. The re-creations, e.g. Enrico Obusan's Markod, served as the "fragments" that further "authenticated" the historical images, and vice versa. The children's performance, Markod's turntable display, were there to allow the viewer passage into the "historical" world of the Fair. They allowed the viewer a starting point in the oneiric re-creation, and prevented him/her from simply dismissing the visual world and surface of the film as an inert and petrified source of information. If you look at the whole narrative dynamics of the film as a membrane, often the viewer is caught in the membrane itself, bisected by it, with the left eye on one side (viewing the construction scaffolding) and the right eye on the other (absorbing the "content" of the text).

Q: A form of dichotic listening, so to speak . . .

A: Which is probably how the process of memory works. We are viewing the corruption of our recollections at the same time we are filtering, evaluating, and making note of what we think is important in the present. The problem is that conscious effort and intent only works to a certain extent. More often it is the preexisting gestalt of all our previous moments that really exerts the power to organize and select what we are going through.

Q: The archival patina of the film's hermetic visual surface seemed to extend to its sound as well. What processes were involved, particularly in the creation of the music and text?

A: The three basic elements of the film, the visuals, sound, and text, were organically, and precariously linked. My composer, Doug Quin, created the music simultaneous to my writing of the text. He did not have any preconceived notion (since I hadn't even done a first cut of the film) of how the piece was going to materialize. He saw the footage, I talked to him about my general intentions in terms of story, and that was that. We continued to talk about the formal, theoretical, and thematic issues that hovered around the film, but he never created a score in the traditional sense of the word. His work functioned as a sonic text for me, just as the archival images served as a visual text. When I wrote the Narrator's voice-over, the availability of images and sound (i.e., Quin's music) "dictated" what the Narrator had to say. I sort of threw everything into the subconscious

pot, and let things emerge. I knew what I wanted, analytically, as an objective observer of the process, but I didn't know exactly how it was going to be accomplished, or how the three strands were going to be woven together. I immersed myself fully into the world of the Fair, reading newspaper accounts, first person descriptions of the event, essentially saturating myself with any and every arcana available about the exposition. This even included complete inventories (in one instance, even, in Tagalog) of the objects on display, down to the taxonomic categories. I began to recognize the faces from the collection of photographs I had copied, and even had a mental map of the Fair's physical layout.

It was at this point that I began to write the text that was to be the Narrator's lines, after I had become intimately familiar with the music and of course the footage. Structurally, I had a basic idea of what I wanted. I was making a rough visual outline with the Steenbeck, while wrestling with the form and content of the Narrator. I was also trying out certain recreations that I thought could serve as the shift points (e.g., the children's scenes) for the story.

There were four types of music I was working with. The first was the group of field recordings of actual Cordilleran music, primarily percussive pieces using indigenous instruments, recorded live in their respective locales. The second was a recording of live performances by the Ramon Obusan Dance troop musicians, interpretations of tribal/village music. The third type was Doug Quin's compositions, partially based on local music documented and transcribed by ethnomusicologists in the Philippines. Quin also created musical pieces that were interpretations of the intermingling between the tribal cultures and turn-of-the-century cultural and musical ideas as represented by Ives, Sousa, etc. Quin's personal work is very much influenced by the sounds of animals in their local habitat and the sonic structures found in nature (he is also a recordist of rare and disappearing species, and has worked in the Amazon and at the North and South Poles). So he was eminently suited for the project, and I was very lucky to work with him. The music that you hear in Markod's later escape to the "jungle" encapsulates the interior space of the character using, quite appropriately and authoritatively, sounds from a natural forest habitat. So the idea of the resurrection of the fragment, which we have earlier touched on, even has relevance to Quin's essentially musical archaeology.

The fourth type of sound I used is composed of the marching band (Sousa) music and 1904 (or earlier) vintage recordings, including the classic original recording of *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Q: What about Markod's passages? The Narrator was translating for us what seemed like very old, degraded recorded audio. Was this in the Bontoc dialect? Was it an original archival recording?

A: The original source of Markod's voice-over is an English transcription of an interview conducted with a certain Chief Famoaley of Bontoc. This was dated 1906, two years after the Fair, at Coney Island in New York. You know, of course, that the Igorot contingent was so profitable and popular in St. Louis that the Fair authorities created a traveling road show that traveled across the United States in subsequent expositions and display venues.

From this document I selected certain passages that I thought were appropriate for the film. (Chief Famoaley was part of the original St. Louis group.) Afterward, these were retranslated (into old Bontoc) and read by Fermina Bagwan, a Bontoc elder based in the Los Angeles area. The wax cylinder hiss was added later, after changing the pitch of Mrs. Bagwan's recording to make it sound more androgynous.

Q: I'm surprised that you did not find original recordings, given the amount of ethnolinguistic investigations being done at the exposition's Anthropology Museum.

A: I'm sure there are cylinders remaining from the period. But I could not locate any in the course of my research. I wasn't working as a scholar, but as an artist. Therefore my own definition of authenticity was somewhat



Bontoc Eulogy (Marlon Fuentes, 1995)

flexible. There were realistic economic and time constraints to my fetishism for historical accuracy.

Q: How accurate was the ethnographic information embedded in the film?

A: It was accurate, for the most part, in terms of the images matching what was stated in the text. In certain sections, I have deliberately provided a false lead, a misdirection. This happens when “Antonio” is introduced, a Visayan (so the text says) who talks to Markod, yet the screen’s image of Antonio is actually a Negrito. This is directed at a Filipino audience who can readily see this subterfuge as a critical (albeit humorous) statement on intertribal mind sets. This kind of putdown is not uncommon. In *arnis* (the Philippine martial art), for example, I have heard certain practitioners criticized as coming from Batangas (a Tagalog province) yet moving in a “Visayan” way. There are certain other references to intertribal hostility, most apparently in Markod’s antagonism against the Scouts. There is a particular distaste reserved for collaborationist elements back home. There are even certain geographic groups that have traditionally been associated or accused of being collaborationists or worse, traitors to one cause or another. I will not name names here, but this is semi-common knowledge among Filipinos.

Q: It seems that even in the homeland (and by extension, in the diaspora), the idea of Toni Morrison’s “serviceable other” still applies. Morrison (*Playing in the Dark*, 1992) examines how white authors construct blacks as the kind of person required for the whites to have the identity they desire. In a similar vein, Johannes Fabian (*Time and the Other*, 1983) provides an analysis of how the European preserves his or her identity by the construction of a serviceable primitive as his Other.

A: Cultural distortions are produced when certain groups have the power to define reality and construct serviceable others. When this definition eventually dominates the environment where the groups reside, the problem begins in earnest. The solution, in my opinion, becomes a political process that starts with understanding the dynamics of social perceptions and how images of the other are created and perpetuated.

Q: There seems to be an interesting parallel between the narrative machinations in the film (its mixture of dissimulations and embedded truth claims) and the necessary history of an imagined homeland.

A: Philippine history is in itself a continuing process of identity formation in the context of its colonial past. Its geographic, ethnic, and class fractures are suffused with a hybrid nostalgia, nostalgia doubtless overshadowed and affected by the country’s colonial hybridization. When one talks of Philippine American history, and in a larger sphere, the Philippine diaspora, one begins to see hidden interaction effects: love–hate, stranded identities, mutant longings, self-flagellations, cultural camouflage, serendipitous belongings, defibrillating communities, phantom pain, social anesthesia, cultural amnesia: the absence of true north. The alien in America is constantly being bisected by this membrane of passage that does not melt away. Caught in the remnant of this time machine membrane, some of our limbs atrophy (they are after all, stuck in the side of the past, arrested and unable to follow the rest of the body in its tropic search for the father). Some of us, reptilians in your midst, shed our limbs, regrowing them in the new land. Others, more unfortunate, never regenerate; their only reminder is the painful phantom limb whose tremor wakes them in a sweat-drenched delirium. The rest choose to live with the vestigial remnants of their passage, living neither here nor there. It is easy to spot us: we walk in circles, while we console ourselves with the belief that, after all, our children will have better lives.

Q: There is a palpable wistfulness in the character of Markod, as well as in the persona of the Narrator, that encapsulates what you have just said. There is a difference, though, in their respective longings. Markod seeks redemption in the return to his terrain and by the decision of taking a head. The Narrator simply continues to dig until he reaches a dead end.

A: Markod represents the necessity and triumph of the imagination; the Narrator, the reconstitutive potential of an archaeology that is never finished: art and science stripped bare, floating downriver at twenty-four frames per second.

#### NOTES

1. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 388.
2. Ibid., 389.