



Introduction

THIS BOOK TRACES a genealogy of the Pilipino 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

the Philippines in the beginning of the twentieth century, anchoring a cultural logic to the reality of formal colonization. The triumph would be fully realized with post–World War II sovereignty for the Philippines, along with critical acclaim for dance companies going abroad. Finally, generations of youth in the United States, at the diasporic edge of the Philippines, would take up the sturdy forms, beaming with ethnic pride and steadied by nostalgic reflection.

But this is not that kind of book. Rather than dismiss the PCN as an anodyne exercise for divas to revel in adoring applause, I see the show as an opportunity by legions of students to address their bodies to what has been perceived as the irreversibility of linear time, the inevitability of national formations, and the incommensurability of Filipino experiences throughout the diaspora. This genealogy tracks how invented traditions provide oblique challenges to understanding the arc and tumble of U.S.–Philippine relations. When Svetlana Boym, an artist and careful analyst of nostalgia, writes, “The stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations,” she might as well be referring to any one of the Pilipino Cultural Nights that have been produced or are in the planning stages.¹ With the show as my primary object of analysis, I will make use of Boym’s notion that when one looks back, one is often looking *sideways* or *laterally* rather than literally: For Filipino American students in the United States to perform aspects of Philippine history and culture on stage is not merely to pine for another location but to desire a different accounting of time, versions of the past that counter official Philippine and U.S. state narratives, which are themselves attempts to order people in and through time. Whether performers of Filipino descent in the United States know it or not, the staging and presentation of national identities has had a long, and often twisted or hidden, history that should allow us to explore what might have been lost, overcompensated, and idealized.

The Pilipino Cultural Night is a performance staged annually by thousands of students on dozens of college and university campuses throughout the United States and Canada. The show consists of two elements: the performance of Philippine folkloric forms through music, costume, and dance and a theatrical narrative, or “skit,” that is interspersed between the folkloric dances. PCNs share many features with other ethnically themed presentations in the United States—for example, Vietnamese American pageants, interpretations of Mexican ballet *folklorico*, and religiously themed parades and festivals organized by Italian American communities.²

I examine the meaning of the PCN’s elements against the politics of the day. I demonstrate that the folk forms on which the students have relied

as anchors to a timeless past are, in fact, modern techniques and repertoires that can be traced to the 1930s. The romantic nationalists of that period believed that Philippine sovereignty not only promised a juridical separation of the colonizer from the colonized, but also necessitated the creation of a cultural repertoire that was both *specific* to the Philippines and *comparable* to the cultural repertoire of other nation-states. I track how the international reception of Filipino dance theater in the late 1950s served as the backdrop of essentialist assertions of Philippine culture by savvy post–World War II elites in Manila. Such claims to cultural authority merged with political moves within the capital to anchor the country within the U.S. Asia–Pacific sphere of influence. From the 1980s through the present, the PCN has become a self-perpetuating activity for thousands of participants throughout the United States. Not merely the show itself but the matrix of activity surrounding its production, according to one of my informants, serves as a rite of passage for acting in concert and refashioning the terms of what it means to be “Filipino American.”

There is no such thing as a “small” PCN. Nearly all productions are planned months in advance, are elaborately staged, and enlist hundreds of cast and crew members. Traditionally, the PCN is the largest event mounted by a campus’s Filipino student organization. Organizers, choreographers, consultants, actors, writers, and musicians volunteer thousands of hours in rehearsal and planning. The shows have created friendly rivalries between campuses over the staging of the dances and the complexity of the theatrical narrative. This has also necessitated the creation of a master calendar for the “PCN season”—generally, February through May—to allow students, relatives, and friends the opportunity to attend multiple shows or to avoid scheduling shows against each other. One campus student organization in Southern California founded a retention group when it was discovered that performers were being placed on academic probation for missing classes and devoting so much time to the PCN. Faculty have occasionally encouraged the activity by agreeing to offer course credit for students’ rehearsal time.

Elements of the PCN emerged in the late 1970s, and the shows were fully realized as a genre in the early 1980s as the number of Filipino students attending colleges and universities grew to its largest up to that point. The shows’ popularity mirrors the growth of the broader Filipino community in the United States, which jumped 126 percent between 1970 and 1980. At the University of California, the number of undergraduate degrees conferred to students self-identifying as Filipinos more than quadrupled between 1982 and 1992.³

The outsider will most likely recognize in the PCN the dance-theater presentations that became popular internationally in the late 1950s. Some

specialists who are knowledgeable about Philippine dance history will be able to reach even further back to note that the national repertoire was created in the 1930s as elites in Manila anticipated Philippine independence and the need to create a unique cultural repertoire. While most parents beam at their children's performances, some wonder aloud what all the fuss is about. The performers, however, know why the shows are important. They take to the stage primarily for each other, as if the experience of the PCN were itself a kind of sacrament or an ethnically specific graduation ceremony that invents a community against the larger backdrop of a culture that expects nation, ethnicity, and identity to be languages of the past.⁴ For PCN performers, "Filipino culture," rendered through the show's dances, seems to be a timeless thing—as if it has always existed; as if performing the movements, donning the costumes, and playing the native instruments in the present gives the performer a simultaneity with an unchanged past. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The title of this book is a play on the Filipino American writer Bienvenido Santos's "The Day the Dancers Came," a short story that was first published by the *Philippines Free Press* in 1960. The protagonist, the elderly Fil Acayan, anticipates the performance in Chicago of a dance troupe from his native Philippines. Fil is terribly excited by the troupe's arrival. He prepares a meal for the young dancers, tries to convince his recalcitrant buddy and roommate to attend the show, and brings along a "magic sound mirror" to record audio from his seat in the audience. The performance represents much more than an evening's entertainment. In Fil, the dancers activate a powerful investment in the graceful and familiar movements he might have once known, perhaps even participated in, in his younger days. Those movements that are animated, stylized, and lifted with song and costume are actually elements of a national repertoire. At a personal and individuated level, folk dances offer a visceral connection to the overseas viewer to home, youth, idyllic simplicity, and reliably gendered roles. At a collective level, the choreography reminds viewers of how a nation may be expressed as a community in motion—directed, purposeful, disciplined, commensurable with the stagecraft of other nations, and, ultimately, answerable to the invented body politic. We can imagine that Fil arrived in the United States sometime in the early 1920s, along with thousands of *kababayan* (fellow Filipinos), well before the Philippines would become a commonwealth and a generation before the granting of sovereignty in 1946. Like many romantic nationalists, Fil feminizes the nation by linking women's dancing bodies with a dimmed sense of the home he has left behind, rhapsodizing about their "talking eyes." At the very center of the story are those crucial elements: Fil's anticipation of a performance in

which one can fulfill the promise of reuniting wayward son with mother nation and his investment in repertoire—that the rehearsed, collective action are tokens for his membership in a community unavailable to him in the United States.

In Santos's story, the dancers eventually leave. Their youthful and jet-setting lives are a stark contrast to the slowed and sedentary tempo of Fil's advanced years. In *The Day the Dancers Stayed*, however, anticipation and investment are played out over several generations of students' performing bodies and between the Philippines and the United States. In this book, the dancers are not only members of a fabled troupe from far away; they are also active players along one of the forward edges of both the Philippine diaspora and the U.S. multiculture. They are interpreters and inventors of their own histories—Philippine *and* American. The dancers and their show are here to stay.

Repertoire and the Surrogate

Two works that anchor my thinking regarding history, memory, and performance are Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* and Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead*. I appreciate how Taylor pushes us to consider that *los Estados Unidos* is not simply a synonym for "America" and that our writing as students of expressive forms of culture benefits from widened perspectives that track cultural work across national borders, languages and dialects, and communities. By taking in the uneven development of the Americas as something much larger and more complex than the "mainland," her work also foregrounds trauma and terror as processes that do not belong to one time period, regime, or era.⁵ Rather, we have to confront how multiple "presents" are summoned in various expressive forms of culture.

Taylor also offers a useful distinction between archives and repertoires. The former is associated with the stuff of institutions and the things that are often taken for granted inside them—texts, artifacts, documents, and so on—making them more precious. The archivist aims to preserve and make permanent, recording information into various magnetic, photographic, digital, and other media. The repertoire hews closer to the live, the visceral, the embodied, the temporary and fleeting. We can associate it with that which is informal, experimental, unstable, unreliable, gestural, and spoken. We should be careful to note from Taylor's distinction that archives and repertoires act not independently of but, rather, dialectically on each other. Without privileging one over the other, students of expressive forms of culture understand that performances are "vital acts of transfer," that

the things we do with our bodies to learn and share repertoires are also ways to communicate histories, lessons, identities, affinities, and commitments of all sorts.⁶

Joseph Roach's circum-Atlantic genealogy of performance resonates with Taylor's global approach to writing about repertoire as a site for producing alternative historical accounts of the world as enacted by the ordinary and the self-empowered. I import from Roach his three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution. For the organizers and performers of a PCN, it is the act of substitution—for Roach, *surrogation*—that is at the heart of the show.⁷ As student performers don period costumes; recite lines to evoke the timbre of ancestors, prophets, or heroines; or contort their bodies to mime seemingly timeless sacraments, they undertake the kind of work that Roach describes: "In the life of a community, *the process of surrogation does not begin or end* but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of *departure . . .* survivors attempt to fit satisfactory *alternates*."⁸

The PCN is less about the construction of a finished *product* each year than about a *process* without end—never an end, never the past giving way to the present, never the hurts of history allayed, smoothed over, explained away, justified, or excused. The performative work of the Pilipino Cultural Night strikes a deep, resonant chord with participants (performers, crew, and audiences) because the substitutions are never complete, never completely satisfying, and are therefore in need of endless staging and restaging. The show's space permits only a temporary fix of one night (albeit a year in the offing). Like Rabelais's carnivalesque, or Derek Walcott's witness of the *ramleela*, the social order to which the participants aspire is restored *after* the event while the show reinvents hierarchies in the evening.⁹ In addition, the participants hold far too many expectations for any show to be able to satisfy a student body's desire *to complete*, or *to carry out thoroughly*, which is one way to think about the history of the term "performance," which I will discuss later.

Could not the history of the Philippines as a Western colony—substituting Americans for Spaniards in 1898, for starters—be the driving force that accounts for those scores of cavities created by loss or other forms of departure? The shows are cavities without enclosures in which the irreversibility of modern time is arrested and into which the student bodies insert themselves. Add to the array of survivors the seditious playwrights of old, the soldiers such as the Filipino rebel Andres Bonifacio, who paid his own dues on stage as a vernacular actor. Move forward through the century to the Philippine diaspora's Californian coasts and valleys, where students

assume the stance of other *katipuneros* and *ilustrados* (anticolonial revolutionaries and elite activists). They play the parts year after year, filling vacancies left open long ago. The PCN is not a singular show but a process of surrogation without end.

What could those *other forms of departure* mean? Such removal could also refer to the purposeful erasure of empire from U.S. historiography, the active refusal to take account of actual agents—the fully engaged and sovereign actors (who are instead reduced to *insurrectos*, bandits or insurgents). PCNs have repeatedly attempted to perform such characters back onto the stage of history. And yet Roach notes that this “process of trying out various candidates in different situations” often results in the “doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins.”¹⁰ What we have are performances like the PCN that stand in “for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace.”¹¹ Pilipino Cultural Nights are not literal but lateral truths, acts of performative surrogation, the sideways substitution of a student body into time’s breach.

In this book, I point to very specific examples of how repertoires imported from the Philippines by Filipino American student performers are actively joined with scenarios and narratives borne out of their U.S.-based lives. Of course, more is going on than facile *recitation* and *remembrance*. In addition to the idea of articulation in the declarative or enunciative sense, performances demonstrate the potential to join disparate elements. Taking a cue from Stuart Hall, “An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions.”¹² But let us not confuse performance’s ability to allow generations to speak to each other as evidence of agreement or consensus. A closer look at these repertoires reveals oblique critiques and disagreements registered between child and parent, mentee and mentor, student and teacher. Cultural productions like PCNs echo the critically imaginative work of other U.S. immigrants and allow us to look more deeply into Filipino American lives. In his powerfully evocative analysis of Clifford Odets’s play *Awake and Sing* (1935), Robert Warshow listened closely to the kind of intergenerational dialogue taking place in New York’s working-class Jewish communities in the early twentieth century. In Odets’s work, Warshow deftly teased out the experience of an audience’s recognition of ethnicity on stage—a recognition of themselves—that could easily have been used to describe those attending Pilipino Cultural Night productions, where one could see “a continuous series of familiar signposts, each suggesting with the immediate communication of poetry the whole complex of life of the characters: what they are, what they want, how they stand with

the world.”¹³ Warshow’s take on Odets can help us understand how the children of Filipino immigrants saw and continue to see their parents—sometimes heroically while at other times relegated to nostalgia, “coming off a boat, having to find a job the next day” and “for the rest of his life, likely to be taken up by the numberless techniques of getting by.”¹⁴ Pilipino Cultural Nights are also shot through with latent anger, bitterness, and resentment toward prior generations, obliquely critiquing them for not communicating enough of the culture and for pursuing economic security and social prestige, because “without a dollar you don’t look the world in the eye.”¹⁵ The narrators and performers of PCNs are like the immigrant children that Warshow writes about, a U.S. generation born or raised that possesses “a kind of edge, as if they were a day older in history than everyone else.”¹⁶

Asian American literary scholarship helps to drive home the point of these intergenerational antagonisms. For example, Erin Ninh’s detailed analyses of tension expressed through different generations helps us understand that the “subject’s relation to the nation must come to terms with the immigrant family as that nation’s intermediary and agent.”¹⁷ We can turn to those narratives that, in her terms, express “a pervading anger and bitterness at conditions of their upbringing which they cannot name with finality or certitude.”¹⁸ Filipino and Filipino American authors such as Bienvenido Santos and R. Zamora Linmark have given us characters that fit Warshow’s bill of having an edge. The young Kalihi protagonists in Linmark’s first novel, *Rolling the R’s*, speak boldly and at every opportunity, without prompting by parents and against the advice and teaching of their elders. Zamora has noted that the characters in the novel should not be understood as taking part in the colloquial process of coming of age but are fully realized as they are—brash, playful, smart-alecky, and contemptuous as they resist with a full-throated pidgin the standardized English required for their book reports.¹⁹ In Santos’s short story “The Day the Dancers Came,” the elderly, working-class Filipino protagonist looks forward to the visit of a troupe of young dancers from his native Philippines, only to be disappointed by the gulfs that exist between them. The old-timer, trapped by low wages and even lower self-esteem, has internalized the dominant codes of his day: He sees himself as *basura* (trash) compared with the lithe bodies of the dancers he thinks he knows.²⁰ Even though these two examples are works of fiction, they speak powerful truths about how cultural producers can, on occasion, refuse the romance of the immigrant’s journey to the “new world.” Those harsh lessons of disappointment, shame, and anger are voiced by actual people such as Valerie Corpus, who came to the United States in 1979 at sixteen. “I hated everything,” she said. She even began directing her anger toward her mother, pointing to her

everyday annoyances—having to do without maids (to whom the family had access in the Philippines), witnessing public displays of affection, or suffering a white woman’s scowl on a subway after being told that “I had no right to be here.”²¹

Cultural performances often take us directly into our most difficult and painful experiences—between “home” and “homeland,” across (and *against*) generations, and even within ethnic and national groups that we occasionally assume to be welcoming. In contemporary scholarly discussions, Victor Turner’s idea of subjects living “betwixt and between” has become ubiquitous when describing all of those liminal states from which we go, to which we aspire, and of which we dream. As a backbone to the world’s labor flows, Filipinos in the diaspora know all too well about the costs of living one’s life “in between.”

I also take from Turner’s work the notion of performance as that which attempts to deliver on a promise, traced to the old French term *parfournir*, “to complete” or “to carry out thoroughly.” A performance, then, is the “*proper finale* of an experience.”²² Lawyers rely on a definition of performance that highlights “the fulfillment or accomplishment of a promise, contract, or other obligation according to its terms, relieving such person of all further obligation or liability thereunder.”²³ From the fourteenth century, we can find references to performance as the execution of an agreement, the fulfillment of one’s obligation to another. How may we understand performance when there is not, in legal parlance, a “meeting of the minds”? Can we envision performance as the carrying out of other kinds of obligations or the execution of agreement (or, at least, its attempt) across generations and geographic locales? I believe we can if we adopt a genealogical approach to history writing and history telling and cultural criticism that Roach, Taylor, and Turner suggest in their work. Tracing the histories of a performing-arts genre like the PCN is precisely the kind of task that is well suited to genealogical inquiry, for “it operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”²⁴

Trying to make sense out of those tangled and confused parchments means being open to what Reynaldo Ileto refers to as nonlinear emplotments. He reminds us of the challenge that is no doubt shared throughout the Philippine diaspora: “From the moment typical Filipino students begin to learn about themselves, their society, history, and culture through books, the mass media, and the classroom, they become immersed in ideas of development, emergence, linear time, scientific reason, humane pragmatism, governmental ordering, and nation building.”²⁵ From my years of teaching on ten college and university campuses in California and Hawai‘i,

it sounds like those “typical Filipino students” share a lot with their U.S. counterparts. Are not most of us socialized into the schema that Ileo draws out, which underscores the marking of histories into “arbitrary historical periods,” the selective highlighting and suppression of events, and the “evolutionary ordering of phenomena” from primitive to advanced? Indeed, it would be difficult—if not impossible—to argue that most of the students working and living at this forward edge of the Philippine diaspora in the United States have not internalized such linear emplotments, and for good reason. The history of the Philippines that has been communicated with churchly fervor posits that familiar narrative arc beginning with the Fall (Spanish colonization), followed by baroque Darkness (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European sensibilities), and emerging into the Recovery (with nineteenth-century native elites speaking for the masses). Regime change brought about by the Americans only confirms the inevitability of Progress in the twentieth century.²⁶ Those of us who want to contribute to a more dynamic and critical account of Philippine and Filipino American histories and cultures take these familiar arcs with a grain of salt. Too much is hidden beneath the chronicles that advance subjects from darkness to light and from chaos to consensus.

Rather than attempt to capture the “exact and pure essence of things” (Foucault’s phrasing), students of the performative open themselves to a line of work where we can prize the accidents that make up our repertoires, not the origins of things but “an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within and from underneath.”²⁷ We could, as the most careful of us entreat, to think about the cultural work we produce that emphasizes the “lowly, complex and contingent.” How can we give equal status to all of those “interruptions, repetitions, and reversals, uncovering the subjugations, confrontations, power struggles, and resistances that linear history tends to conceal”?²⁸ Whether as scholars or as performers, we are often fragile inheritors and clumsy inventors of the “past.”

Changing the Subjects: Performance and Filipino American Studies

For the thousands of young Filipino Americans who have taken to the stage, participating in performing-arts genres such as the PCN has offered some of the only history lessons available about the Philippine Revolution of 1896, the literary politics of Carlos Bulosan, the struggle of the *sakadas* in Hawai‘i, or the back-breaking labor in Salinas, Delano, Spokane, or Chicago. Performing a play or choreographing dances offers not only the

possibility of entertainment, but also the chance to encounter the past in a corporeal fashion, to sustain an oblique critique of American assimilation, or to call a community into being.²⁹

This book can be read as a study of youth cultures, especially since students in the United States and the Philippines are at the center of the productions discussed. But while this is not strictly a social history of youth activities, since we examine the ambitions and anxieties of educators, sponsors, and administrators, students' bodies have been crucial in the expression of the "nation," both in the Philippines and throughout the diaspora.³⁰ Many other works highlight a particular geographic locale in which a scene or subculture has taken hold. My attention builds on existing studies in the field by widening the focus beyond discrete ethnogeographic communities (for example, New York City, Los Angeles, Honolulu, or Seattle) while tracing a genealogy of trans-Pacific cultural production between the United States and the Philippines. My aim is not to demonstrate how the cultural forms are developed in the Philippines and are then inherited and deployed effortlessly in the United States but, instead, to argue that the PCN represents the invention, and occasionally also the misinterpretation, of cultural repertoire. I also highlight macrostructural dimensions to cultural work—from the anticipation of independence with the passage of the Tidings–McDuffie Act of 1934, the post–World War II reassertion of U.S. hegemony in Asia to contain nationalist movements throughout the region, and the postindustrial and martial-law-era politicization of Filipino youth on college campuses in the United States to the present moment that hails the Philippines as the "second front" in the endless war on terror. Also, my work highlights the interplay between youth cultures as imagined by the participants and organizers (student leaders, choreographers, writers, actors, and dancers) and the work of state and institutional agents (university administrators, educators, state-sponsored artistic directors). That interplay between state agents and student bodies demonstrates that popular cultural forms are never exclusively acts of resistance or tools of discipline and repression. Stuart Hall recognized that symbols, performances, and repertoires belong neither to the elite nor to the aggrieved when he wrote, "There is no guarantee that, because at one time it was linked with a pertinent struggle, that it will always be the living expression of a class. . . . Culture is not already permanently inscribed with the conditions of a class before that struggle begins."³¹ We should be concerned with popular culture not because it guarantees or is synonymous with resistance, but because it has been and continues to be a place of possibility, one of the grounds on which struggle may be waged.³²

The conversations that have been taking place in the field broadly conceived as performance studies have been invaluable for my work. Scholars have resisted labeling performance studies as a stand-alone discipline, embracing instead an eclectic approach that has made use of methodologies from both the social sciences and the humanities.³³ I have already mentioned the importance of work by Taylor and Roach on this project. An additional inspiration for considering performative aspects of Filipino American cultures has been the field of dance theory and ethnography, often associated with scholars such as Susan Leigh Foster, Marta Savigliano, and Barbara Browning, each providing complex testimony about choreographed bodies as metaphors and evidence for social movements, but also as conduits for a variety of information that is not always accessible in “traditional” modes of producing knowledge.³⁴ Scholars such as David Román, Daphne Brooks, Ann Cvetkovich, and Jose Muñoz offer powerful examples of how crisis is at the very center of contemporary American life and how the relative “health” of individual bodies is not simply a metaphor for the body politic but can also be the source of trenchant critiques. A crisis-centered stance insists on paying close attention to the contradictory, experimental, and contingent aspects of academic work. I think it attracts a kind of scholar who draws inspiration from what Jan Cohen-Cruz refers to as “local acts”—those community-based approaches to understanding performance as much as undertaking scholarship.³⁵ Such approaches are at the very foundation of Asian American studies, and the number of scholars working at the intersection of that field with performing arts and popular culture is growing. A hallmark of Asian American studies has been the notion that race is both irreducible as a category of analysis (in that race is not merely a function of another analytic) and a constantly shifting project in determining social relations.³⁶

Filipino American studies asks questions that are at the center of contemporary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Research in three areas deserves particular notice: first, in the fields of security studies and international relations, where the projection of U.S. military power continues unabated throughout the world; second, how the global economy continues to unfold with drastic consequences for the world’s transnational labor flows; and third, how Filipino American studies can also shed light on the curious, contradictory, and dynamic ways in which modern identities and communities are configured. Over the course of the twentieth century, the United States has exercised an unparalleled military presence in the Philippines, a condition that accounts for a significant part of the lives of soldiers, retirees, dependents, and other community members. The United States benefited from ninety-nine-year, rent-free leases to

operate its largest overseas bases, as well as indirect control of Philippine military forces through the establishment of the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group. Even though the Philippines attained sovereignty in 1946, the post–September 11, 2001, era has witnessed the restoration of that military presence with the re-tasking of the *Balikatan* (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises to prepare troops for the “second front” on the war on terror. And just as Ferdinand Marcos leveraged U.S. materiel and funding to fend off what he claimed to be armed communist threats while growing his personal assets, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo reenlisted Philippine forces in the affirmation of bilateral mutual defense treaties between the two countries.³⁷ In the United States, the dominant and often romanticized narratives of agricultural and service-sector labor for which Filipinos have been recruited have overshadowed generations of service in the U.S. Armed Forces that began in World War I. Overlapping with plantation and fieldwork done by thousands of Filipinos are complex histories of migration and settlement facilitated by military careers. Such service has accounted for the establishment of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Filipino American communities throughout the United States, from Hawaiian Army and Navy enclaves in Pearlridge to marine families in Bremerton, Washington; naval families in Alameda and San Pedro, California; and second- and third-generation families in Virginia Beach, Virginia.³⁸

Those tracking the global flows of contemporarily distributed labor would do well to study the fate of the Filipino diaspora. Current conversations in the United States that implore politicians to “save our jobs” are anchored in an economic paradigm that does not always adequately acknowledge how transnational capital has dispersed the forces of production. As a result of government-led drives to export local labor, Filipinos have witnessed and participated in patterns of work of which most people in the United States simply have no sense. Eleven percent of the Filipino population (more than eight hundred thousand workers) lives overseas, traveling to more than one hundred eighty countries as domestic helpers, engineers, nurses, bricklayers, teachers, farmers, seafarers, stenographers, hairdressers, crane operators, cooks, and entertainers. Their remittances account for one-tenth of their home country’s gross national product. Transnational capital looks to the Philippines as a model for how to manage one of the most globally dispersed workforces in modern times.³⁹

Finally, in theorizing complex subjectivities, Filipino Americans have long confounded the fixity of racial categorizations in U.S. law, the premium placed on a linear narrative of assimilation, and the insistence on identity as an individuated articulation of difference. Foundational research emphasized narratives in Asian American studies that constituted the

recovery or reconstitution of cultural memory or the telling of local histories. Of course, these continue to be important, challenging, and needed at all levels of education, perhaps even more so at the primary and secondary levels. But studies about Filipino American lives have as much to say about crisis as they do about continuity and confrontation, as well as consensus.⁴⁰

The field has been primarily anchored in history and the social sciences—namely, sociology and anthropology. Barbara Posadas's *Filipino Americans* offers a general and well-structured overview of Filipinos as a U.S. ethnic minority. Works by Catherine Choy, Dorothy Fujita-Rony, Augusto Espiritu, and Linda Maram pay close attention to developing historical research of Filipinos from the early twentieth century to the present while demonstrating the gendered and trans-Pacific focuses for their work on nurses, agricultural workers, and writers. Deserving special attention are Espiritu's and Maram's texts, both offering novel approaches to the intellectual and performative lives of specific authors and communities, with special attention to the midcentury contexts of Philippine independence and working-class Filipino American youth cultures in the United States.⁴¹

Social scientists such as Jonathan Okamura, Rhacel Parreñas, Yen Le Espiritu, Rick Bonus, Emily Ignacio, and Martin Manalansan problematize the notion of diaspora as simply an extension of national subjectivities “beyond” the Philippine nation. Their grounded analyses allow us to focus on new kinds of communities being built, contextualized, and imagined in locales that reflect rooting and routing throughout the world: in Hawai‘i, Europe, near the Canadian and Mexican borders, in New York, or on the Internet. Their work raises a critique within contemporary U.S.-based social-science work—namely, that the premium placed on assimilation to “American culture” no longer holds. They allow us to get beyond facile statements about the persistence of ethnic identity and how overseas communities imagine “homelands” from safe, suburban spaces.⁴² Three more works ably demonstrate what is going on in the field. Sharon Delmendo's *Star-Entangled Banner*, the ambitious volume edited by Angel Shaw and Luis Francia titled *Vestiges of War*, and Allan Isaac's analyses of literary works point to the need to demystify U.S.–Philippine relations by turning to that inaugural moment of imperialism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their works continue to be inspired partly by developments announced within the landmark American studies collection edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, *The Cultures of United States Imperialism*. As scholars and practitioners of the arts, Delmendo, Shaw, Francia, and

Isaac bear witness to the role that the imagination and cultural work continue to play in the unfolding of the field.⁴³

This cohort of scholars and writers partake in scholarship described by Renato Constantino as partisan and by Howard Zinn as partial—that no “subject” of academic writing merely waits to be spoken for or represented, and that any description of the world “must be a partial description, so a choice is made about what part of reality to describe, and behind that choice is often a definite *interest*, in the sense of something useful for a particular individual or group.”⁴⁴ In that regard, Filipino American studies can be understood as a field of inquiry that has grown out of the mass-based social struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. That work would have modest beginnings in the training of a handful of scholars in Philippine studies by Boone Schirmer at Goddard College; in the dozens of initiatives launched through campus and conference proceedings; in the home-grown courses on art, language, history, and culture anchored in churches, self-help organizations, and unions; and in the dozens of independent publications, pamphlets, monographs, and self-financed studies only occasionally backed by large publishers. Some contexts need to be kept in mind: not only the critique of the domestic nature of the Civil Rights Movement, but also the politicization of communities throughout the United States after Ferdinand Marcos’s declaration of martial law in 1972. Activists organizing around San Francisco’s International Hotel throughout the 1970s would issue a clarion call for social justice around the issue of affordable housing in the wake of city planners’ razing of the city to create the “Wall Street of the West.”

Each of these events, and dozens more concerning language use, access to higher education, the indignities suffered under anti-miscegenation laws, struggles over community policing, and campaigns for equitable health care and employee protection, would help to drive the field’s initial questions. Some works that adopted a crisis-centered and engaged approach are Royal Morales’s *Makibaka* (“struggle”; published in the same year that the Marcos regime declared martial law); the introduction to Filipino American literature written by Oscar Peñaranda, Sam Tagatac, and Serafin Syquia in the first edition of *Aiiieeeee!*; E. San Juan Jr.’s book-length analysis of Carlos Bulosan’s extant writings; and a groundbreaking anthology edited by students at the University of California, Los Angeles, entitled *Letters in Exile*. A lot of this critical writing would find its artistic and aesthetic sensibility worked out in the pages of anthologies devoted to graphic arts and literature such as *Aion*, *Gidra*, *Bridge*, and *East–West*.⁴⁵

Artists such as the self-described “Flip poets” of San Francisco in the 1970s have been central to the invention and assertion of a critical Filipino

American subjectivity. The writers and performers Al Robles, Serafin Syquia, Luis Syquia, Oscar Peñaranda, Emily Cachapero, and Virginia Cerenio (to name a few) linked the work of literature with community service. Robles and others created the Manilatown Senior Services Center, while Serafin Syquia developed creative-writing workshops for youth who lacked access to arts education. Subsequent groups of students and activists contributed their own talents by returning to the tradition of publishing work by younger writers: *Maganda* (University of California, Berkeley) and the second volume of *Liwanag* (San Francisco State University) are two examples of a generation that took cues while making their own way with student-driven literary cultures in the 1990s. The literary scene for Filipino Americans has been active. Spoken-word collectives, fusing hip hop's energy with the politicized consciousness of young writers and performers, have flourished in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, and New York. A cohort of poets and writers continue to teach in youth-based programs; organize readings and fundraisers; and publish chapbooks, edited volumes, novels, short stories, and children's books. In the 1990s, another cohort of artists experimenting with film signaled an exciting development among Filipino American artists. Centered for the most part in Los Angeles, a group of designers, filmmakers, writers, and directors worked on each other's projects and demonstrated the vitality of new forms of cultural production that had not been widely used by Filipino Americans to that point. Functioning as a loose network, they would include Celine Salazar Parreñas, John Castro, Ernesto Foronda, Marlon Fuentes, and Pancho Gonzalez. Their strategies involved transparent realism, surreal parody, avant-gardist lyricism, and documentary fiction. Each demonstrated a profoundly keen awareness of Filipino history against the larger visual and filmic record dominated by one-sided treatments of wartime documentarians, ethnologists, and thousands of Hollywood feature-film directors that have used the Philippines as a backdrop for every war fought by the United States.

The work that has been forged by scholars such as Sunaina Maira and Martin Manalansan in the larger area known as Asian American diasporic cultural studies also serves as an important touchstone for my work and provides a solid link between performance studies and ethnic studies. This area is notable not only for continually pushing scholarly boundaries beyond the ideation of Asian America tethered exclusively to the North American West Coast, but also for another important reason: It focuses on practices and processes and not solely on the ruminative and beleaguered nature of individuated *identity*. When well-grounded and detailed social-science work such as Maira's and Manalansan's pays close attention to the multilayered and multisited signification of terms such as *biyuti*, or to the

collaborative dissonance and tension heard in the club scene on a Friday or Saturday night in Manhattan, all of us benefit from being able to refuse outdated and useless paradigms that have been used by all manner of power to target young, colored, and queer bodies. Maira keenly observes that the young, brown, and hip are no dupes. Rather than simply internalizing the dominant codes of parent or homeland, they “attempt to make sense of, or at least to accommodate to, discourses of multiculturalism and racialization, and to respond to family narratives of class mobility and cultural displacement.” She finds in their reflexivity and re-mixed cultural work the stirrings of a “critical nostalgia.”⁴⁶ Filipino American and South Asian American communities who share overlapping demographic and socioeconomic locations in contemporary U.S. society serve as a reminder to me and, I hope, to other scholars who want to mine these scenes for future comparative cultural analysis. This rather amorphous field of Asian American diasporic cultural studies, as I see it, is not simply a place to trumpet everything done *in the name of* one’s championed tribe. It is, rather, the analytical framework to assess how empirically grounded analyses of practices, processes, and repertoire continue to demystify the rule of empire between Asia and the Americas and to provide a meaningful accounting of the life chances and choices made *here* and *there*, at home and abroad.

Researching the Project and the Organization of the Text

I analyzed material drawn from archival sources in the United States and the Philippines, as well as that gathered from qualitative methods. The latter involved the use of long interviews and participant observation techniques developed along with my work as a musician, composer, and theater performer. I began my research for this book casually, first as an audience member, then as a musician and stage performer. Many times during the course of researching material for this book I felt that I was not engaged in research at all. I wrote and circulated publicity copy; auditioned singers and actors; rehearsed in concert halls, living rooms, and parking garages; wrote and improvised scripts, musical scores, and memorized lines; played a lead character; managed to avoid getting my ankle crushed between eight-foot clapping bamboo poles; and transported musical equipment, public-address systems, cast members, paint, costumes, PVC pipes, and lumber for sets. I participated in PCNs in California from 1989 to 2001.

One of my goals in this book is to look across generations and geographic locations without resorting to easy generalizations or uncritical

essentialisms. The nature of colonialism's trauma—whether in the Philippines or throughout its diaspora—requires that we learn how to interpret the echoes and traces of one period in others. Those invested in the building and maintaining the status quo have always insisted that the rest of us live in their categories, especially ones that neatly mark off the past (as timeless, completed, and never recurring) from the present. This book recognizes how each generation offers its own vision and version of the past, present, and future. We can and should wander beyond where our professions often warn against and wonder about what those communities have to say about each other.

The first two chapters provide detailed background material for the creation of the Pilipino Cultural Night. These chapters focus on two key moments: the creation of a national folkloric repertoire and the touristic popularization of dance-theater presentations. Chapter 1 focuses on the foundational work undertaken by Manila-based educators of the 1930s as they anticipated the colony's transition to commonwealth and eventually to sovereign nation. Here we learn of the anxiety of patrons and educators such as Jorge Bocobo, president of the University of the Philippines, and the physical educator and folklorist Francisca Reyes Aquino over what the *bodabil* (vaudeville) musician Lou Borromeo represented: the inevitability of American popular culture's "corruption" of the lives of young Filipinos when both the United States and the Philippines were formally bound by colonialism. Aquino invented a national folkloric repertoire that became a crucial tool for inculcating a kinetic nationalism disciplined into the bodies of young folks.

In Chapter 2, I focus attention on the emergence of the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company (hereafter, the Bayanihan) in defining for PCN organizers, tourists, and others the performative vocabulary of Filipino culture through its popular dance-theater performances. As the Philippines formalized its neocolonial embrace with United States, the career of the Bayanihan demonstrated the corresponding cultural logic of how national subjects are portrayed on the international stage. As folk dance was adapted into dance theater, from the schools to the concert hall, this celebrated dance company claimed representational authority in its work. Those claims and the response from several critics in the Philippines and the United States remind us that questions of national identity are also at play when performers take the stage.

Chapter 3 focuses on an early cultural-night show that helped to define what has become known as the "PCN genre." I select three contexts to highlight these changes: the postindustrialization of the U.S. economy; the reaction to race, taxes, and education in the *Bakke v. University of California*

Board of Regents decision; and the political realignment of the Reagan Democrats. We see the continued immigration of underemployed professionals to the United States whose children seek senses of themselves amid attacks on ethnic-studies curricula and affirmative-action policies. In Chapter 4, I analyze versions of the PCN that have emerged since the creation of the genre in the 1980s. While several other presentations predated the 1983 show—shows that used variety-style formats such as revues, declamations, dances, short plays, and other mixed-media installations—the PCNs produced since then have served as the true proving grounds for the strengthening of the form. How was this achieved? How did the diffuse cultural productions of a seemingly heterogeneous group of Philippine- and U.S.-born Filipinos become standardized and replicated? I identify what has become the basic structure of the PCN and describe constitutive relationships that have demonstrated that the form has become frustratingly predictable. Finally, in Chapter 5 I analyze the San Francisco comedy troupe Tongue in a Mood's parody of the PCN genre, *PCN Salute*, which boils a show that can take hours down to a twenty-minute sketch. The parody functioned as a critique of the now familiar essentialized cultural repertoire and demonstrated how popular forms continue to be sites for engaging contemporary discussions about representation and power. The jester reminds us how cultural work can continue to knock us off center and refuse predictable endings.

CULTURAL PERFORMERS who take to the stage as folkloric dancers or historical figures often appear to have the veneer of authenticity—or, at the least, they are able to convey a sense of comfort to the viewer and participant that what is being presented collapses historical time, that what is presented to the viewer is some transcendent and ahistorical figure conjured out of primordial pasts. In contrast to the immediacy and plasticity of our common and everyday entertainment, the cultural performer represents the embodied equivalent of the romanticized oral history—the true voice of the people. That process of embodiment is not natural, even though at times Filipino cultural productions seem so effortless, even *soulful*, as if analysis were not necessary. Whether as a performer, audience member, or critic of the PCN, I am grateful to have shared the company of artists, academics, and activists who believed there was something valuable to learn from the PCN and from Filipino American cultural production. I am thinking here of how Sarita See uses the phrase “excessive embodiment” to meditate on the notion of absences and presences when referring to the work of the Filipino visual artist Paul Pfeiffer. While some of Pfeiffer's work digitally removes the figure from the frame, critics like

See can take from artists a reminder that bodies are also burdened with surplus value and information.⁴⁷ In this case, the native body is set free from modernity itself: unbridled and self-possessed, free of colonial mastery and industrial discipline. Consider how this notion is challenged by the dramaturg and performance-studies scholar Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, who accounts for the “multiple functions” of the Filipino dancing body: “It is a corporeal metaphor for the ambivalent status of Filipinos as U.S. colonial subjects; it provides an archival embodiment of the anti-Filipino movement through dance; and finally, it serves as material evidence of the ‘success’ of the American imperial project.”⁴⁸ Again, as with See’s “excessive embodiment,” Burns’s account of multiple functions of performance helps us realize that repertoires can be at the center of analyzing the relationship between political choices and aesthetic chances.

These choices and chances can at times seem dizzying, given the tempo and scope of globalization. Undisciplined performers can wreak havoc on any well-planned show, and by extension unruly bodies pose threats to the body politic. As Arjun Appadurai points out in *Fear of Small Numbers*, the supposedly organized majority is increasingly threatened by the irrepressible few.⁴⁹ The immigrant, rabble-rouser, heckler, dissident, even the desegregated teenage partygoer—all can threaten a polity’s sense of order. Such dangerous figures have been subject to bodily censure by various means—from humiliation and ridicule to deportation, physical violence, even disappearance.⁵⁰ Against the backdrop of Filipino bodies scattering throughout the globe as a truly dispersed workforce (Robyn Rodriguez refers to this ensnared situation as a liminal condition of “migrant citizenship”),⁵¹ the repertoires I analyze in this book isolate and attempt to lock down some of those bodies into durable and predictable repertoires, while the performances attempt those lateral substitutions across several periods and places.