“Puro arte lang iyan” (“She's just putting on a show”). This is a phrase I heard often as a child growing up in Olongapo City. I can still hear my aunt’s dismissive tone as she brushes aside my complaint as mere exaggeration. My protestation—she has cut my hair too short—is read as theatrical, superficial, and hyperbolic. To be called out for being *puro arte* is to be questioned about one's veracity and authenticity. Another variation is “*O tingnan mo, puro arte talaga*” (“Just look at her put on a show”). This version highlights the attention-seeking element of *puro arte*, directing notice to the performing body, already perceived to be overacting. What compels the speaker’s admonition is the body’s performative extravagance, a spectacle making that must be disciplined, reined in. To be called out for being *puro arte* at once exposes the performing subject’s propensity for histrionics and puts her in her place for showing off. It is a complex construction that foregrounds the overdramatics of performance precisely to make light of it.

Yet, to be *puro arte* is to strategically refuse unmediated or clear-cut expression. The invocation of *puro arte* also carries an acknowledgment, almost an
admirable recognition, of the theatrics at play. Putting on a show calls for an awareness of the labor of artful expression, of the creative efforts required to make something out of nothing. Furthermore, *puro arte* expresses an appreciation of the gall, the guts, and the sheer effort needed to put on such a display. Such a dual structure of *puro arte* is at work, for example, in playwright/writer Glecy Atienza’s description of Filipinas who are routinely read as *maarte* (fussy, particular, demanding); she writes, “Kaya pala mukhang maarte ay dahil may mga di masabi [She is overacting precisely because there are things she cannot say]” (xii). For Atienza, Filipinas deploy *puro arte* as a mode of self-presentation to exceed their erasure as subjects. Through their exaggerated flair and ostentation, they appear as difficult subjects who press against the accepted norms of gender and performance.

*Puro arte*, translated from Spanish into English, means “pure art.” However, in Filipino, as mentioned above, *puro arte* performs a much more ironic function, gesturing rather to the labor of overacting, histrionics, playfulness, and purely over-the-top dramatics. In this book, *puro arte* functions as an episteme, as a way of approaching the Filipino/a performing body at key moments in U.S.-Philippine imperial relations. I am inspired here by the creative “flip-pin’” of poet/performance artist joel b. tan in his poem “ignacio—in 2 parts”: “seguro in spanish means surely. / seguro in tagalog means probably” (15). Like tan, I perform an appropriative act that considers and highlights the playful and productive possibilities of *puro arte* as an embodiment of the Philippines’ multiple colonial histories. The many uses of the term point to its complex and at times seemingly contradictory referentiality: *puro arte* is superficial and overstated as it is creative and risky. In turning to *puro arte* as an epistemology for the Filipino/a performing body, I have no desire to discipline or question the term’s authenticity. Rather, my partiality is toward *puro arte*’s recognition of the effort to be performative, of the creative labor devoted to making a spectacle. *Puro arte*’s emphasis on the labor of theatricality is mined here for its potentialities in alternative forms of political and cultural expression. *Puro arte*’s ironic workings are brilliantly illustrated in a play such as Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*, as well as in the political aspirations of Sining Bayan’s social protest theater. In both locations, *puro arte*’s valuing of indirect expression, of laboring to articulate politics in ways that may not be familiar, shines. To be *puro arte* is to take risks in forms of political and artistic participation. As the imaginary curtain parts on this book, several questions become central: When it comes to Filipinos and performance, what is all the drama about? What are the various sites/stages on which Filipinos perform, and what politics do they engender? And last but not least, what is the “world creating power” of the Filipino/a performing body?
This book situates Filipino/a performing bodies within the contexts of nation building and community formation, and highlights the imbrication of Filipino/a racialization with histories of colonialism and imperialism. More broadly, the present work tracks the emergence of the Filipino/a performing body as it negotiates key historical events: the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines as a colony in the late nineteenth century; the dawn of Philippine independence (1920s-1930s); the tumultuous years of the Martial Law (1972-1981); and the closure of U.S. military bases in the Philippines at the end of the twentieth century. I trace the Filipino/a performing body across various sites, which include the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, early American plays about the Philippines, the Filipino patron in the U.S. taxi dance halls, theatrical performances about the Martial Law, and the phenomenon of Filipino/a actors in *Miss Saigon*. In so doing, my project conjoins and centers the history of the Philippines with U.S.-based race relations and discourses of globalization. Throughout the book, the Filipino/a performing body appears equally as a sign/object and as a laboring body, produced and producing within an uneven global cultural and economic system. The very term “Filipino/a performing body” is mobilized as an indicator of both embodied representations of “Filipinos” and of Filipino/a performance practices on various theatrical and political stages.

Within these varied sites of performance—the World’s Fair of 1904, early-twentieth-century American theater, U.S. taxi dance halls, anti–Martial Law protest performances and plays, and global productions of *Miss Saigon*—the Filipino/a performing body exhibits the “twin effects of bodily display and disappearance” (Pollock 3). It is both spectacularly visible and invisible, cast as it is within the triangulations of U.S.-Philippine relations, Filipino nationalisms, and globalization. Michel Foucault’s notion of emergence, “the moment of arising,” is most appropriate to invoke here. “Emergence,” writes Foucault, “is always produced in a particular state of forces;” in a “relationship of forces” (376). To mark the Filipino/a performing body’s emergence, its “eruption, [its] leap from the wings to center stage” is not to fix its origins within specific sites of display. Instead, *Puro Arte*’s concerns are genealogical, working more with the conditions of profit and pleasure that make possible the production and circulation of the Filipino/a performing body.

One serious challenge to situating the Filipino/a performing body within such narratives of colonialism and imperialism has been the charge of a return to “negative histories.” That is, approaching the Filipino/a performing body through the figuration of *puro arte* merely reproduces pathologizing colonial characterizations of Filipinos as unoriginal, excessive, and devoid of distinct cultural traits. Or worse, such an analytic makes visible a Filipino/a
performing body shaped primarily by and through multiple colonial genealogies. How does one then study the emergence of the Filipino/a performing body without reifying its colonial forms? What is gained by recourse to the fraught concept of *puro arte* for an analysis of an already fraught object? Rather than accede to such privileged readings of pathos and erasure, this book examines the epistemological possibilities afforded by a turn to *puro arte*. To call upon *puro arte* as an episteme is to interrogate how the Filipino/a performing body is made visible in its multiple colonial contexts and what the affective and material politics of that presence entail. To be clear here, this book is not interested in attenuating the lived brutalities and legacies of colonialism(s); it is interested more in the differentiated exposure of the Filipino/a performing body on various stages of imperial contestation, at interstitial sites of racial and cultural violence.

I: Filipino/a Racialization

“Invisible,” “forgotten,” “unrecognizable”: these words have defined U.S.-Filippine relations and Filipino American racial identity in the United States. I come at these descriptors of Filipino/a (racial) imperceptibility by turning to chosen moments and sites in the last century when the Filipino/a is visible, acknowledged, at the precise moment that s/he is misrecognized and erased. In so doing, I am interested in the effects of such historical performances of visibility and misrecognition and the kinds of communities and identity formations these performances facilitate. My engagement destabilizes the authority of colonial misrepresentations. These concerns are not meant to reify recognition and visibility as desirable correctives to the problem of Filipino/a representation. Rather, I wish to complicate, as feminist studies scholar Laura Kang puts it, the natural linkage among “voice, visibility, and liberation” (17).

Any genealogy of Filipino American representation for scholars such as Allan Isaac must first be mediated through an understanding of its affective attachments to the dominant logic of the U.S. nation-state. More specifically, Filipinos’ seemingly desperate search for national belonging in the United States, their desire to be part of “any national story as a sensation,” as Isaac deftly puts it, is symptomatic of a long history of spectacular imperialism (xix). His observation that Filipinos “desire and pleasure to be a visible part of the national story as a sensation” (xix) foregrounds a process of racialization constituted by and through the trope of sensationalism. Working within and through Isaac’s, or rather Filipinos’, “fondness for the sensational,” for *puro arte*, this book mines established representations of the Philippines,
Filipinos, and Filipino Americans, to account for the “particular state of forces” that produce the emergence of the Filipino/a performing body (Foucault 376).

For full dramatic effect, allow me to narrate briefly the story of Filipino/a invisibility. For decades, as Oscar Campomanes eloquently argues, U.S. imperial pursuits were euphemistically cast in the language of globalism, internationalism, and protectionism. U.S. control of the Philippines and other unincorporated territories was rarely described as aggressive international occupation; instead, the United States was hailed as a forceful new nation, benevolent in its foreign relations. The United States, or so the story goes, could not be characterized as a colonizing force because colonizers, like Spain, were throwbacks to the dark ages; they tortured, killed, and enslaved captives. As a nation born out of democratic desires, rule by the people, of the people, for the people, the United States did not at all resemble aging colonial empires whose reigns involved excessive coercion and brutality. Rather, U.S. involvement in global affairs was heralded as the beginning of a new and modern age of international relations. Within such a whitewashed colonial narrative, Filipinos/as remain unintelligible, erased by the systematic denial of U.S. imperial history and ambitions.

Such a narrative of U.S. imperial amnesia (whose by-product is the myth of U.S. exceptionalism) has had a corresponding arc in the field of Asian American Studies. As Campomanes pointedly asks vis-à-vis the history of Filipinos and Filipino Americans, “Who is doing the forgetting? What is being forgotten? How much has been forgotten? Why the need to continue forgetting?” (“Filipinos in the United States,” 164). Such questions not only are directed at the sanctioned amnesia of historians and scholars of American Studies and at the larger logic of American collective memory but also equally implicate the field-formation of Asian American Studies. Histories of colonialism, Campomanes argues in another essay, have posed a profound challenge to Asian American Studies, whose critical orbit has routinely circled around what he calls the “domesticity axis” (“New Formations,” 527). “Domesticity axis” characterizes the hegemony of post-1960s identity politics and cultural nationalism as a driving agenda within the field. While such an agenda generated significant foci, such as comparative ethnic and racial formations, the dominant one nation/U.S. nation orientation allowed much to fall away.

More specifically, the field’s approach to immigration, unhinged from the history of U.S. imperialism, contributed to Filipino Americans’ invisibility and, to use Rick Bonus’s description, to an “unsettling” condition within Asian American Studies (166). As the field continues to expand, we see more
of a critique of early Asian American Studies’ embeddedness in the one nation/U.S. nation paradigm. Filipino Americans are now granted a founding exceptionalism, as we learn more about how the story of Filipinos in the United States exceeds the field’s dominant attachment to the U.S. nation. It is thus no coincidence that newer scholarship in the field now exhibits Asian American Studies’ engagement with extranational subjects such as transnationalism, diaspora, and migration. Bonus’s use of “unsettling” as an epithet for the status of Filipino Americans is also apt for highlighting Asian Americans’ settler status on other island nations (such as Guam and Hawaii) that have been and continue to be under U.S. occupation.

Debates around the geopolitics of Asian American Studies have also significantly opened up the scholarship on Asian American performance. The “domesticity axis” within Asian American theater is characterized by Josephine Lee as a dialectic “between hyphenation and immigration.” For Lee, the problem lies in the very staged distinctions made between theater by “‘hyphenated’ Americans” (later generations of Asian Americans) and “immigrant theater” (“most usually only in terms of nineteenth or early-twentieth century performances of traditional Chinese opera, or perhaps Japanese Noh or Kabuki”) (“Between Immigration and Hyphenation,” 45, 50). There is a telos implied, as Lee argues, even imposed upon these works, such that “immigrant theater” is expected to evolve into the kind of theater produced by “hyphenated Americans.” What I propose here redirects these debates around the “domesticity axis” toward a set of concerns that differently cast the drama of Filipino/a invisibility. In addition to situating the practice of theater and performance within the epistemologies of imperialism, I look to the genre’s own analytical offerings, or what performance values, to consider the problem of theorizing the Filipino/a performing body. This book places the Filipino performing body not just within debates on U.S. imperialism, Philippine nation building, immigrant belonging, and the press of globalization on a racialized performing body. I have also chosen Filipino performances that critically intervene in debates about theater, race, and performance on American, Filipino, and global stages.

For now, I want to address the particular structure and politics of invisibility within the practices and genres of performance, in particular of American theater. On the one hand, theater is a cultural practice that privileges transformation, the disappearance of one body into another. That is, if a performer is evaluated through her ability to suspend disbelief, to transform perceptions of her body, then invisibility could mean the (desired) disappearing of oneself to create another life-world. Yet, such a process of transformation falls short when juxtaposed with questions of racial labor. In other
words, the emphasis on transformation works unevenly as it facilitates more exclusionary and discriminatory practices that routinely favor white bodies. Within hegemonic theories of performance, such a transformation is primarily available to unmarked (read: white) bodies, as phrased by Peggy Phelan. Unmarked bodies are the ones perceived as open to change and possibility. Thus, when Filipino/a migrant subjects fraternize U.S. taxi dance halls and out-perform their white counterparts, their spectacular (or what I will later call “splendid”) dancing marks them more as visible than as invisible bodies. As Filipinos transform their bodies through the stylizations of American popular dance, they become instead troublesome, overly visible, exceeding, as it were, the assigned script of Filipinos as docile U.S. colonial subjects. The unintelligibility of their status as “nationals” hovers between the languages of “hyphenation and immigration,” producing further anxiety and concern. In what follows, I engage theories of Filipino/a performance and theories of racialized performing bodies to attend precisely to such moments of historical hypervisibility and misrecognition within and against histories of U.S.-Philippine imperial relations and globalization.

II: *Palabas*, *Gaya*, and Theorizing the Filipino Performing Body

Diana Taylor’s playful opening paragraph in *The Archive and the Repertoire* engages the idea of performance as interpreted by various artists from Latin America. Through a string of anecdotes, approximations, and translations of “performance” in several languages, Taylor recenters geopolitics in the field of Performance Studies. Instead of offering a fixed theory of performance, she deliberates more on the limits and possibilities of “performance” both as “an object of analysis” and as “the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance” (3). Taylor’s interventions directly address the field’s linkages to colonialism exemplified in the Orientalist genealogies of the term “performance” itself and its shortcomings in adequately accounting for non-Western expressive practices. Ultimately she commits to “performance” “as a term simultaneously connoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world” (15). As for the lament over “performance” as an overarching term that may be reenacting the violence of colonialism, Taylor maintains that a mere word substitution does not undo “our shared history of power relations and cultural domination” (15). In many ways, this book stands in solidarity with Taylor, not only in foregrounding the ongoing, “shared history of power relations and cultural domination” but also in celebrating the acts of survival and imagination that undergird such histories. I have chosen to name my
study of the Filipino/a performing body *Puro Arte* precisely to recall and celebrate such histrionics and geopolitics of performance.

*Puro Arte* owes a debt to a long tradition of theoretical concepts through which Filipino/a performance has been analyzed. One key concept is *palabas*, literally meaning “show” or “theater.” Palabas, developed on the battlefields of an emergent Filipino nationalism, grants the Filipino/a performing body its resistive possibilities. Such a rendering of *palabas* is most evident in Doreen Fernandez’s eponymous collection of essays on Philippine theater history. While Fernandez translates “*palabas*” as “performance, show, entertainment, and fun” (viii), she also reads it as “people-based and community-oriented,” where acts of “performing . . . [become] part of living” (viii). The opening essay roots Philippine theater in mimetic rituals organized around representations of daily life. Fernandez argues that indigenous cultural expressions were unrecognized and unacknowledged by colonial scholars who dismissed Filipinos as not having structured theatrical practices. In turn, she reroutes drama’s definition from prepared text to “various imitations of life” based on Aristotle’s drama as mimesis (4). As the essays in the collection move from the precolonial to the Spanish, from the American occupation to Martial Law and Philippine drama in the late twentieth century, Fernandez returns to the potential, realized and unrealized, of *palabas* as a shared and dynamic performative practice. For Fernandez, there is “no division between audience and performer” within *palabas* as its communal structure presumes the needs and purpose it serves. Her understanding of *palabas* equally privileges locality; in other words, the performance event happens within a specific context, enacted by and for an informed audience. In valuing context, Fernandez builds a critique of appropriation and performance directed toward an unknowing, outsider audience. Within such formulations, *palabas* provides a vernacular and material contrast to colonial understandings of performance as exotic cultural practices produced by colonized bodies for consumption by the colonizer. These practices become exotic precisely because they are performed for (and later even by) outsiders, in contexts where they are regarded as alien, strange. Such a process of exoticization reinforces racial and cultural forms of otherness that justify colonial violence in the form of territorial occupation and denial of self-rule. Refusing such colonial genealogies of exoticized performance, Fernandez’s work on *palabas* instead constructs Philippine drama and its sensibilities against the backdrop of a vibrant Philippine history straining against the incursions of colonial rule and foreign occupation.

In conceptualizing *puro arte*, I am informed by *palabas’s* attachment to the performing body as a locality, as a mediated and contested space of
performance. That is, if the performing body itself is a locality, what is the relationship between labas (the outside/exterior) and loob (the inside/interior)? Such a question is of great import to scholars (such as myself) who envisage theater and/or performance as an artistic expression and a perception of actions in everyday life. In the case of palabas, the exterior becomes a space of resistance and ambiguity, equally reflecting and deflecting the landscape of the interior. Akin to palabas, my turn to puro arte too complicates performances dismissed as entertaining, mundane, quotidian, diversionary, obvious, vulgar, or simply superficial. Puro arte wrestles with the creative labor behind the historical spectacle of failed and/or exaggerated Filipino/a performances.

Rey Ileto’s *Pasyon and Revolution*, a book on the history of Philippine revolutionary movements, provides further insight on the link between labas and loob. In his discussion of the way revolutionaries perceived the meaning of their actions and the revolt itself, Ileto regards exteriority and interiority as intimately connected. He argues that the revolutionaries’ participation in Holy Week rituals, in particular their performances of the *pasyon* (a verse narrative of the life and suffering of Jesus Christ), crucially influenced “the style of peasant brotherhoods and uprising during the Spanish and early American colonial periods” (11). Ileto deviates from previous analyses of the *pasyon* as a colonial disciplinary apparatus that instilled “loyalty to Spain and the Church” and focused on the “preoccupation with morality and the afterlife rather than with conditions in this world” (12). Instead, Ileto reads the performativity of *pasyon*—repetition with a difference and mimicry as intervention—arguing for an understanding of *pasyon* as a vibrant and disruptive folk tradition for those in lowland Philippine society. The ritual of *pasyon*, argues Ileto, provided “language for articulating its [lowland Philippine society’s] own values, ideals, and even hopes of liberation” (12).

*Palabas*, in Fernandez’s and Ileto’s works, interprets and stages the Filipino/a performing body as an embodiment and/or a vehicle of nationalism. It highlights the potentiality of the Filipino/a performing body as a resistant subject, clearly identifying the site and practice of performance as oppositional. Nationalism unavoidably surfaces in any analysis of *palabas* as the concept emerges against the press of the cultures of imperialism. Yet the limits of nationalism, which include its hegemonic position as the resistant political ideology and its own demand for homogeneity, are equally visible within cultural projects that closely identify with nationalism. As a cultural agenda, nationalism’s restrictive tendencies surface within the phenomena of diaspora and migration. For example, when Ma-yi Theater Ensemble in New York started as a company in the early 1990s, they staged plays about
Filipino/a life and contemporary conditions in the Philippines. Soon the company realized that the plays they were producing were an ocean removed from their audience members, mostly immigrant, diasporic Filipinos whose primary and daily life was in the United States. Their Philippine-focused repertoire inadvertently passed over Filipino/a lives in the United States, privileging instead nationalist episodes of collectivity and memory. Eventually, Ma-yi even widened their mission statement to include the term “Asian American” so as to move towards a more multi- and interracial agenda in their programming. Theater Ma-yi’s move toward a racially expansive representational agenda was directly influenced by their location in New York, in the United States, in the diaspora. My own emphasis in this book too is less on recovering the nation (in the guise either of the Philippines and/or of the United States) than on dialoguing with the creative and critical legacies proffered by concepts such as palabas.

A second critical concept that makes an appearance in this book is the well-rehearsed concept of mimicry. In particular, *puro arte* enfolds the complex of mimicry as embodied in the labor of Filipino/a performing bodies. Mimicry/imitation is a familiar trope of colonial/postcolonial studies and performance studies, particularly as it engages with the struggles of minoritized subjects (such as women, queers, and people of color, to name a select few). I am drawn here by the historical and material processes that make the trope of mimicry such a literal and metaphorical space of performance. My interest in imitation/mimicry does not seek to valorize and romanticize postcolonial appropriations of “Western” cultural practices, or to simply narrate these practices as always already oppositional. Rather, the complex of mimicry (in all its fraught and celebratory forms), I want to suggest, is crucial to understanding the emergence of the Filipino/a performing body. The stages of Filipino/a mimicry I examine are marked by the labors of imitation, producing a body of performance riven by the historical stress of its own emergence.

One noteworthy example linking Filipinos and mimicry in colonial discourses is Arthur Stanley Riggs’s introduction to *Filipino Drama*, the 1906 collection of seditious play scripts. Riggs declares Filipino theater as a prime example of “the deficiencies and limitations of the people” (2). He characterizes Filipino literature as “singularly adulterated by foreign influences” (1). Expert anthropologist Albert Ernest Jenks, who reports that Filipino creativity “lacks inventiveness,” substantiates such observations (4). For Riggs and Jenks, Filipino drama’s absence of inventiveness reflects the naïve childlike-ness of Filipinos, and their absence of culture. Two decades later, an article printed in the *New York Times* supplements such early readings as it explains
how colonial subjects made up for their “lack of inventiveness” and what they could do with “foreign influences”:

Stage stars soon will be coming here from the Philippines, according to F. S. Churchill, a theatrical producer of Manila. . . . “For the past twenty years American vaudeville has been exceedingly popular in the Philippines,” said Mr. Churchill, “but the distance we are from the United States has made it an expensive proposition for us to offer Occidental amusement. Therefore, of necessity, we have had to train the local talent and I must say they have proved able entertainers. They are most apt in singing and dancing acts. Each year they grow more clever and American and European stages will be invaded by the Philippine artists before long.” (“Filipinos Apt on Stage,” 15)

This news article predicts, or rather warns, of the impending face-off between the colonizers and their colonial subjects. The touted invasion of Philippine artists into the metropole speaks directly to the specter of colonial panic. As Theater Studies scholar Joseph Roach writes, “performances propose possible candidates for succession” whereby “the anxiety generated by the process of substitution justifies the complicity of memory and forgetting” (6). Roach’s meditation on the linkages among mimicry, performance, and colonialism is helpful in understanding the trepidation toward the colonial subjects who have proven themselves to be “able entertainers.”

An older colonial text, however, provides a different recognition and possibility for the Filipinos’ knack for imitation. Jean Mallat, a French colonial figure who penned *The Philippines: History, Geography, Customs of the Spanish Colonies in Oceania*, speaks directly to the Filipino “talent” for “imitation”:

> It is mainly by the talent for imitation that these people [Indios] distinguish themselves, and this does not exclude, up to a certain point, genius and invention; to imitate well a thing often seen only once, one must know how to create, if not the thing itself, at least, the means to be used for executing it, now it is enough to tell the Indios to make such and such a thing, and they conceive on the spot the way of proceeding to do it. (458)

I am intrigued by Mallat’s observation here, which recurs in various parts of his text. Mallat does not foreclose originality or uniqueness despite his conclusion that mimicry is *the* distinguishing ability of the Indios/Filipinos. He acknowledges the skills and labor involved in “imitation,” beyond characterizing this “distinguishing talent” as a symptom of the Indios’ lack of
originality (hence dooming them from entering modernity) (458). There is an almost grudging admiration of the mimicking skills of Filipinos, offering a shift in tone in what is otherwise a dismissal of “imitation” in colonizers’ records of the natives.

Many critics interested in imitation as a complicated and recursive practice within Filipino culture have expressed concern about the dangers of forgetting the centrality of the concept in Filipino/a performance. Rather than treating imitation as a cheap trick or mindless aping, it has been regarded as an act that can be deliberate, an experiential method of learning, and a way of knowing the world. While I do turn to well-recognized performance sites such as the mainstream global stage and popular spaces of entertainment such as taxi dance halls, my analysis extends to more marginalized sites of study—everyday, quotidian forms of mimicry, by gay, working-class, and other minoritized subjects. Mallat’s nuanced rendering of the “Filipino indio’s distinguishing talent for/of imitation” provides inspiration as it underscores the dynamic labor of imitation. Phenomena such as Filipino/a participation in Miss Saigon productions provide a rethinking of “imitation” beyond a sedimented form of labor to a consideration of it as a more exacting and creative labor.

Roland Tolentino’s work on transvestites in Filipino cinema during the Martial Law era mobilizes the concept of gaya (mimic, imitate) to underscore the richness of imitation as creative process. For Tolentino, gaya “foregrounds the transvestite’s operation of mediating and transforming high and low” (“Transvestites and Transgressions,” 334). Building on Judith Butler’s generative revisioning of repetition in performance (and cautious of Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry in colonial discourse for its “homogenization of the signifying field”), Tolentino offers “gaya” as “an idiom to articulate and historicize the liminality of transvestism in the national culture” (336). He emphasizes the possibility of “imitation” as challenging the repressive regime of the Marcoses. Similarly, Fenella Cannell’s work on Bicolano culture, and specifically on gay mimicry, reads imitation beyond mere derivativeness. For Cannell, “imitation of content can constitute a self-transformative process” (224). She concludes that taking part in performances “which use idioms thought of as American. . . is both to move towards the pleasures of empowerment which come with ‘knowing the words’ of a text and making it one’s own, and also to move towards a transformation in which what is distant, powerful, and oppressive is brought closer and made more equal” (255). Mimicry, as Cannell implies here, requires self-knowledge, an intimacy with the object that one is mimicking. Such a knowledge toys with intimate proximity to overturn the equation of who mimics and who is mimicked. Lastly,
for Martin Manalansan, Filipino gay transmigrants’ performative practices, such as cross-dressing in gay Santacruzan, suggest more than “a parody of the real” (138). Decentering “parody” as the hegemonic, politicized intent of (white) drag, Manalansan reads the potential to “transform mimicry from mere simulacrum to a strategy that questions colonial and postcolonial power” in gay Santacruzan (140). This Filipino ritual appropriated in queer performance highlights the function of rituals in community formation and its performances as practices of reinvention toward a collective political voice.

Tolentino, Cannell, and Manalansan focus in particular on gay practices of imitation to produce a generative theory of Filipino/a mimicry, one that goes beyond mere “lack of inventiveness” and depleted cultural traits. They argue for the productive possibilities of the practice of imitation—from self-transformation to a subversive critique of an authoritarian regime that accounts for postcolonial and queer difference. With puro arte, I shift the site of inquiry to an interrogation of imitation as colonial context, process, and narrative. Puro arte interrupts the original/copy dichotomy and proffers a more supplementary form of analyzing acts of, and at times those read as, imitation.

III: At Rise: A Century of Filipino Acts

Theater scholar John Rouse writes, “No body ever simply appears on stage. Bodies are, rather, made to appear in performance, rendered visible as the encoded tissues interwoven by systems of ideological representation that mediate the anxieties and interests at play in specific historical moments” (iv). In the following four chapters I tease out the “anxieties and interests” of specific historical moments in U.S.-Philippine relations. Each chapter locates the Filipino/a performing body at key moments in U.S.-Philippine relations in varying sites. These moments are as follows: U.S. acquisition of the Philippines as a colony in the late nineteenth century; the dawn of Philippine independence (1920s-1930s); the tumultuous years of the Martial Law (1972-1981); and the closure of U.S. military bases in the Philippines at the end of the twentieth century. Even as the chapters in this book can be described as chronological, each chapter carefully preserves a dialectical relationship between the past and the present. The copresence of the past and the present allows for the complex consideration of the performative not as an uncritical site of visibility, resistance, or agency but as a relationship constituted through a shifting struggle and relationship of forces. To that end, the temporal order of the book situates the colonial histories of the Philippines...
within U.S.-based race relations and discourses of globalization, moving back and forth, as it were, between the imperialisms of the past and the hegemonies of the present.

The sign of “history” equally assumes multiple roles in this study on the Filipino/a performing body. On the one hand, history can be understood here as chronological and/or linear. Key dates and events provide an organizing logic to the narration of the drama of the Filipino/a performing body in the century-long “special relations” between the United States and the Philippines. I purposely capitalize on this conventional take on history not to reify these events as stable markers of Filipino/a emergence. Rather, in rerouting these histories through performance, I am interested in the mundane and transformative acts that make such histories possible and even desirable. More crucially, I interpret these historical spots of time as temporalities of Filipino/a racialization. In other words, these defining times in U.S.-Philippine relations become scripts of emergence, of a (mis)recognition of the Filipino/a as a racialized body. What appears as “historical” in this book is not simply history qua history; it also assumes various aliases, forms, and meanings: moments, instances, scenes, and occurrences. As I look at the Filipino/a performing body during these periods and in performances about these periods, I share David Román’s interest in “a critical temporality [what he defines as contemporary] that engages the past without being held captive to it and that instantiates the present without defining a future” (Performance in America, 1). By engaging the Filipino/a performing body on diverse arenas at different temporal moments, I theorize Filipino American theater and performance as a practice that is dynamic and in the making. In other words, the production and circulation of the Filipino/a performing body is a matter of doing, a process of relation, not simply reified nor a given.

While I make use of history to locate how and where the Filipino performing body finds itself during these historical moments, I also pay attention to these performative acts as self- and community-expressions of, interpretations of, and interventions in these historical events. At times, I follow the lead of the performances and their points of reference. In doing so, I have created unexpected temporal reorderings, defying what may be obvious affiliations and pairings. For example, in chapter 1, a more predictable juxtaposition of early-twentieth-century imperial stage acts might have set the Philippine seditious plays against the contemporaneous World’s Fair. These “seditious plays,” performed mostly in Tagalog and staged in greater Manila, Bulacan, and Ilocos Norte, were banned for inciting anti-American sentiments and provoking riots. Recuperated in Philippine theater scholarship as the ultimate theater of Filipino nationalism, the
seditious plays’ anti-U.S. colonialism and enactments of Filipinos’ aspiration for free nationhood become an easy read against colonialist display of Filipinos in the Philippine Reservation of the St. Louis World’s Fair. Vince Rafael has argued that these nationalist dramas “resignify the vernacular so as to reclaim the capacity of people to nominate themselves as agents in and interpreters of their experience” (46). In this book, these plays are noted as a crucial citational presence in a discussion of Sining Bayan’s anti-imperial transnational politics. In researching Sining Bayan’s social protest theater against Marcos’ Martial Law, I came to a renewed understanding of these seditious plays beyond their reified place in imaginings of nationhood. I have argued elsewhere that the recuperation of seditious plays in Filipino American progressive organizing signals a decolonization of the stage that distinctly departs from a reconstitution of “native,” as proffered by Christopher Balme, and moves more toward a recognition of the impossibility of such a project.

The stages on which I locate the Filipino/a performing body shuttle between the nation and the diaspora. These locations are treated as fluid and contained, separate but connected. Here, the Filipino performing body appears in display, in protest, in and as a disguise, as an impersonation, and more. While I consider the forces of and with which Filipino American theater and performance emerge, I return over and over again to the imaginative world(s) these performing bodies create for themselves and for those who experience their performance.

IV: Stages of Puro Arte

In the following chapters, I interrogate moments of Filipinos’ visibility, their audibility, their “splendid dancing,” and their dramatic abilities. These occasions, at times, have been celebrated as forms of accomplishment, of inclusion, of overcoming racism, of rising above institutional and personal barriers. Following the language of puro arte, I examine instead how these spectacular accomplishments tend to blind us, serving often to mystify rather than open up historical conditions. I work against treating these moments simply as temporalities of Filipino corporeal, vocal, and emotional exceptionality; they are more opportunities to interrogate the complex interplay of corporeality and history. Of concern here is the politics of what enables emergence—whether it be in the form of sound, movement, or visuality.

The first chapter, “Which Way to the Philippines? The United Stages of Empire,” examines dramatizations of U.S.-Philippine contact during the years leading up to, during, and immediately after the Spanish-American
War. In the early years of the American empire, the Filipino/a performing body appears in piecemeal form on diverse U.S. stages, including the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, as part of chautauqua circuits, and on theater venues in major American cities such as New York and Chicago. I turn to two of these sites, the Philippine Reservation at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and the musical comedy *Shoo-Fly Regiment* by the African American creative team of Bob Cole, J. Rosamond, and James Weldon Johnson. I approach these various performing stages as “contact zones,” as complex terrains of interaction among American patrons, Filipino/a performers, and the Philippines (Pratt 7). In this chapter, I also ask how this early contact between the United States and the Philippines is present in contemporary Filipino Americans’ self-imaginations. The centennial celebrations, between 1996 and 2006, provide a glimpse into theatrical explorations of this query.

The world’s fair and musical theater productions participate in and extend U.S. imperialism, performing, as it were, the complex and often contradictory sentiments of a newly burgeoning and increasingly racialized empire. In these early years of empire building, the Philippines is assigned a prominent role. More specific to my focus is how the Filipino/a performing body, and performances of Filipinos/as, as in the case of *The Shoo-Fly Regiment*, become part of national debates and anxieties consuming the nation as it grapples with its new identity. Expanding existing scholarly works on the significance of the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair to the United States’ bid for a seat among nations of empire, I emphasize the crucial role played by the Philippines and the Filipino/a performing body within American women’s and African American men’s struggle for suffrage. I end with a reflection on how such early scenes of Filipino/a visibility are represented in contemporary Filipino American artistic practices such as the POMO Festival in San Francisco. Initiated as part of the Philippine Independence Centennial celebrations, the POMO Festival wrestles with the visibility of Filipinos gained through these early portrayals and performance stages.

Nearly two decades after the Philippines became a U.S. acquisition, the “Philippine Question” gripped the U.S. nation once again, this time in the guise of a threat posed by Filipino male migrants. Chapter 2, “Splendid Dancing: Of Filipinos and Taxi Dance Halls,” traces the popular mobilizations of taxi dance halls as an American urban phenomenon, and thinks through the Filipino performing body within such a social formation. The taxi dance halls were at peak popularity in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, when male patrons of various kinds eagerly came to pay to dance with (mostly white) women. Significantly, Filipino male patrons, who were students and migrant laborers, constituted a quarter of the patrons of the taxi
dance halls, a demographic that can be attributed partially to the influx of imperial/colonial subjects into the metropole. This was an era rife with anti-Filipino sentiments, which soon became the basis for the Filipino Exclusion Act. I read the dance hall as a complex and prominent physical and cultural space of exchange between the native and immigrant communities.

Taxi dance halls facilitated one of the few spaces of social interaction between Americans and the new Filipino subjects of American imperialism. Within spaces such as the taxi dance halls, the spectacle of the Filipino dancing body emerges as a vibrant and potentially violating instantiation of the effects of U.S. imperialism. This “brown menace’s” “splendid dancing” is a corporeal testament to one of the key anxieties of American men. Filipinos competed for jobs in a rapidly shrinking American labor market, even as American men warily regarded Filipinos and their appeal to white women as the problem of the decade. Unlike “other Orientals,” whose masculinity was defined as asexual, the Filipinos' supposed hypersexuality fueled the very fire that ignited their eventual exclusion. Part of my contention here is that the persistent reading of Filipino corporeality (as splendid dancers and passionate lovers of white women) through the lens of “exceptionality” equally circulates and corrupts the very languages of U.S. imperialism.

Chapter 3, “Coup de Théâtre: The Drama of Martial Law,” interrogates the mobilizations of Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1981) in contemporary Filipino American theatrical works. I am interested in the spectral intersection of the past and present within the history of Filipino American performance as staged in the juxtaposition of Sining Bayan and productions of Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters. My concerns in this chapter are twofold. First, I map the use of theater during the anti–Martial Law activism in the United States, representing the Filipino/a performing body in protest. I focus on the work of Sining Bayan (translated as “Theater of the People”), the cultural arm to the radical Filipino American anti–Martial Law/anti-Marcos political group Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino/KDP. From 1972 to 1981, Sining Bayan staged plays about the struggle of Filipino people in the Philippines and in the United States. During these years, Sining Bayan was an artistic and public voice for the radical politics of the KDP in the United States. In many ways, engaging the multiple histories of Sining Bayan was one of the most challenging narrative tasks of this book. Laura Briggs, in her essay “Notes on Activism and Epistemologies,” calls for an acknowledgment of the intellectual work of activist movements. She opens her essay by providing a scene of camaraderie by narrating a story about an event at an activist reunion/conference, where she found herself participating in a sing-along of “Solidarity Forever.” I was struck by the various ways Briggs articulated
how she felt about this scene—she found it fun, funny, and also a little bit embarrassing. This opening scenario provides Briggs the launching point for her discussion of ascribing ideas to political movements. In the essay, her prepositions vary—“speak for,” “speak from,” “speak of”—as she talks about the political movements. Prepositions establish, name, articulate relations to movement. Reading Briggs’s essay, I ask myself, What preposition do I use to articulate my relationship to this movement that I write about? This prepositional quandary is also compounded by the fact that the language by which I came to know the world has one preposition—“Sa.” As noted in Paraluman Aspillera’s Basic Tagalog for Foreigners and Non-Tagalogs, “The universal use of sa in Tagalog and other Philippine languages could be the reason why Filipinos find it difficult to learn the different meanings of and the various uses of English prepositions” (116). The predicament I found myself in informed the way I have crafted words, yet it is also crucial to how I relate, in this instance, to Sining Bayan’s political movement that I write on, of, about, or around, in this chapter.

The chapter shifts the discussion to focus on the way Martial Law is dramatized in Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters: The Play. Encouraged and pursued by the highly acclaimed American theater director Michael Greif, Hagedorn embarked on a multiyear process to adapt her novel into a play. In the latter half of the chapter, my motivating concern as I discuss Dogeaters: The Play is to make visible the palpable force and persistence of Martial Law in the Filipino/a and Filipino American theatrical imaginary. The referentiality of Martial Law mandates a paradoxical structure of both forgetting and remembering, a model of memory that returns to life, only in its dark and vivid hauntings—to echo Filipino American director Jon Rivera—that are lodged deep in the body politics of nation.

Chapter 4, “How in the Light of One Night Did We Come So Far? Working Miss Saigon,” extends the discussion of the Filipino/a performing body on the contemporary global stage through a focus on the casting phenomenon of Filipinos/as in the musical Miss Saigon. The continuing worldwide productions of one of the most famous and indeed controversial musicals in contemporary musical history clearly demands further scrutiny. On this performing stage, the Filipino/a body becomes an icon of intersecting colonial histories—the United States in the Philippines, France in Vietnam, the United States in Vietnam. In this chapter, I shift the conversation that Miss Saigon has so famously generated about American theater’s fraught history of yellowfacing and racist labor practices to attend to the ways in which labor, being, self, and affect are collapsed in the phenomenon of Filipinas in this musical industry. I am compelled by the question of where the body of the
performer ends and that of the character begins, as framed by African American theater scholars Harry Elam and Alice Rayner in their discussion of a production of Suzi Lori-Parks’s play Venus. This question, of course, carries higher stakes for feminized and racialized performers who are called upon to both represent and exceed the scripts of their characters. As I argue in this chapter, Filipino/a performers in global productions of Miss Saigon bear the weight of their own successes, and the interpretations of, expectations of, and impositions of their global audiences, the Philippine nation, the Filipino people, and each other. Broadly speaking, this final chapter fittingly gestures to the world-making possibilities of performance and considers what forms of being in the world the space of performance can and must provide.