(Trans)National Imaginary and Tropical Melancholy in Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters

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Abstract
This paper explores the Philippines’ specific condition of transnationality in Jessica Hagedorn’s novel Dogeaters. I use the linkage of the four terms—images, imagined community, social imaginary and the “identification imaginary” to examine the impact of global media on the nation’s process of reconstruction in the aftermath of American colonization. The first section concentrates on a sociopolitical investigation of the intricate relationship between global media and the nation-state in the construction of an “imagined community” based upon the cultural logic of “the spectacle.” I argue that the cultural logic of the society of the spectacle serves as a codified ground for the social production of meaning, which becomes a new form of Foucauldian technique of power. The paper’s second section turns to an in-depth psychoanalytical investigation of the trauma of loss and national melancholy hidden beneath the glossy surface of a society of the spectacle. Drawing upon Žižek’s ideas of uncanniness and surplus enjoyment in modernity, LaCapra’s distinction between absence, loss and lack, and Freud’s mourning and melancholia, this section argues that the revealing of the trauma of the society of the spectacle through magic realistic accounts sets in motion a journey toward healing and awakening.

Keywords
Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters, Filipino-American literature, transnation, imagined community, social imaginary, the society of the spectacle, Synopticon, melancholy

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Arif Dirlik’s influential article “Asians on the Rim” (1996) lays out two contradictory Asian-American cognitive “mappings” at the turn of the millennia: the locally-grounded Asian-American community and that of the Asian-American diasporic community that claims the spaces of transnational capital across the Pacific. For the diasporic Asian Americans whose identities include a global dimension, the success of their original countries on the Pacific Rim plays an important role in their cultural imaginary as well as daily life practices. Unlike countries like Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, which have become major players in the global economy, the Philippines is trapped in a state of “refeudalization.”¹ The country’s precipitous process of modernization in the wake of its multiple colonial history continues to plague the memories of the Filipino Americans while they are caught in the limbo between two terms: American and Filipino. Filipino-American writer Jessica Hagedorn’s novel Dogeaters (1990) returns to the homeland by depicting a specific Pacific experience of post-modernity which is at the same time a form of neocolonialism. The novel reveals a Philippines overwhelmed by the global/American media industry and the nation-state’s exploitation of the industry’s all-encompassing impact on the people’s social lives and their self-recognition. This paper will examine the Philippines’s specific experiences of globalization as are portrayed by Hagedorn—a diasporic Filipino-American writer. In order to tackle the complex entanglement of the issues of global media, nation, socio-cultural imagination, and self-recognition explored by the novel, I will first invoke Arjun Appadurai’s insightful observation regarding the global mediascape.

Commenting upon the relationship between contemporary social life and the global media, Arjun Appadurai invokes three terms—images, imagined community, and the imaginary—to highlight the inextricable linkage of media culture with the idea of nation and their joint penetration into the process of Lacanian “identification” on the part of the individual. He says:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (imaginaire) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations [...]. (31)

¹ E. San Juan, Jr. observes that “about seven million Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs) constitute the bulk of cheap domestic help around the world” (Introduction 3).
We can also add to Appadurai’s conceptual scheme by invoking Cornelius Castoriadis’s idea of the “social imaginary” as a codified ground for the social production of meaning.² The intertwining of these terms suggests the inextricable relations between media (in the sense of the production, circulation and consumption of media images), the social imaginary produced and coded by media, nation (as an imagined community), and the realm of identifying imaginary in global cultural economy. This paper will read Dogeaters from the linkages of these social, political, material, and psychological imaginaries.

Set in postcolonial Philippines under the reign of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1960s, Hagedorn’s novel deviates from the major concerns of the writing tradition laid down by such precursors as Carols Bulosan and Bienvenido N. Santos. Whereas Bulosan and Santos concentrate on the struggle of U.S.-based Filipino-Americans against a white hegemonic society fraught with racism, Orientalism and a colonial legacy that continues to see the Filipino immigrants as “little brown brothers,” Hagedorn’s novel brings us back to the country of origin to raise readers’ awareness of the shared history of the U.S. and the Philippines.³ Dogeaters thus expands the imaginative territory of the Filipino-American writing tradition by reaching back to a Philippines caught in a pseudo-transnational culture controlled and structured by the country’s continuing dependency on the U.S. Hagedorn’s novel works in two directions. On the one hand, it highlights the importance, especially in the case of Filipino immigrants in the U.S., of addressing the colonial trauma that has plagued first-generation Filipino immigrants, making it difficult for them to establish a diasporic community based upon a re-assertion of distinctive Filipino cultural practices, a strategy often adopted by other Asian-American communities.⁴ On the other hand, the novel attempts to delve into the multiple colonial histories from which the Philippines has suffered while examining

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² I encounter Castoriadis’s idea of “social imaginary” in Marilyn Ivy’s book Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan. Ivy uses the idea of the imaginary to point to the element of phantasm that forms the basis of national-cultural communities in both the U.S. and Japan. For her there are four configurations of the imaginary that resonate with her use of the term: Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”; Cornelius Castoriadis’s “social imaginary,” which serves as the codified ground for the social production of meaning; Claude Lefort’s “imaginary community,” which is related to mass media and modern ideologies; and Lacan’s “the imaginary,” which suggests a subject’s pre-symbolic identification with the image. See Ivy 4. For detailed discussions of these terms see Anderson; Castoriadis; Lefort, especially “Outline of the Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies”; and Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I” in Écrits.

³ See San Juan, “Mapping the Boundaries.”

⁴ While it might be risky to assert their Asian roots, Chinese-American writers often do so to formulate a distinctive Chinese-American cultural identity. For detailed discussions of such a strategy see Dirlik, “Asia-Pacific in Asian-American Perspective” 320-25.
the debased role the country played in its “transnational” cultural and economic exchanges with the U.S. *Dogeaters* thus responds to here and there, past and present, the history of colonialism and the new challenge of global capitalism. As E. San Juan, Jr. observes: “Ultimately, Filipino agency in the era of global capitalism depends not only on the vicissitudes of social transformation in the United States but, more crucially, on the fate of the struggle for social justice and popular-democratic sovereignty in the homeland” (“Displacing Borders” 127)

To fully grasp the sexual economy according to which the Philippines conducts its exchange with global capitalism, Hagedorn writes from the perspective of a gendered society shaped by Hollywood cinematic images and American consumer culture, propelled and mediated by the nation-state. The novel thus inspires critical readings on different, but equally multifarious, conceptual grounds: Rachel Lee (1999) deals with the intersecting representation of nationalism, gender and sexuality of the novel; Myra Mendible (2002) investigates the entanglement of self-image and cinematic images in a nation poised in the balance of the postmodern and postcolonial condition. Hsiu-chuan Lee (2001) traces out the book’s female writing as a potential textual and sociocultural strategy to dissolve the hegemony of a nation governed by simulacra. Viet Thanh Nguyen (2002) finds queer sexuality in the novel a subversive element in relation to its heterosexual romance, which is an integral part of the cinematic spectacle to which Filipino audiences are subjected. To think in light of Appadurai’s conceptualization, these studies are mostly conducted on the level of (postmodern) images, the imagined community, and the social imaginary (gender, sex, class and race).

This article will start with a sociohistorical examination of the intertwining of the three key words—images, the imagined community and social imaginary—as they are dramatized in the novel, to cross into a realm yet to be explored, namely, that of the “identifying imaginary.” It will be divided into two parts. The first section will concentrate on a sociopolitical investigation of the intricate relationship between global media, i.e., Hollywood filmic images, and the role the nation-state plays in the construction of an “imagined community” based upon the historical misrecognition created by the cultural logic of the spectacle. Here I will broach the idea of (trans)-nationality and its involvement with global media exchange. Using Aihwa Ong’s conceptualization of “transnationality” as a contrast to the specific (trans)nationality practiced by the Philippines, I will demonstrate the gift-giving logic implied in this transaction, and the society of the spectacle that arises as a result. I put the prefix
“trans-” into parenthesis to emphasize the fact that for the Philippines in the global political economy of the 1960s, any form of transnational exchange can hardly escape the control of the nation-state, whose rule is restricted by its subservient relationship with the U.S. The second section will be dedicated to an in-depth psychoanalytical investigation of the trauma of loss and national melancholy hidden beneath the glossy surface of a society that feeds on the logic of the spectacle. The focus of textual analysis will shift to the magic-realist narrative of the novel.

(Trans)nationality, Gift-giving and Misrecognition

In her book *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), Ong offers a definition of “transnationality” as a substitute for the idea of globalization:5

_Trans_ denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism. (4)

Ong’s conceptualization of “transnationality” derives from her field work among wealthy Chinese diasporas whose mobility and capital flows across the Pacific have helped formulate a new political consciousness among Chinese transcending the ideological boundaries of the nation-state. Breaking down the binary opposition between a totalizing global political economy and a specific local-cultural expression, Ong seeks to address the relational and horizontal linkages of contemporary social,

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5 Ong abandons the term “globalization” for several reasons. First of all, globalization often refers to a totalizing economic rationality devoid of human agency; secondly, theories of globalization are often established upon a top-down model in which “the global is macro-political economic and the local is situated, culturally creative, and resistant” (4). Ong argues: “But a model that analytically defines the global as political economic and the local as cultural does not quite capture the _horizontal_ and _relational_ nature of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural processes that stream across spaces. Nor does it express their embeddedness in differently configured regimes of power” (4).
economic and cultural flows that overdetermine the content of “globalization.” In sharp contrast to such free-floating transnational mobility, the Philippines occupies a subservient geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific Rim that limits the scope and the nature of its transnationality. The lingering effects of multiple colonization, first by Spain for over four hundred years, later by the U.S. for 50 some years, surface in the receptive role the country plays in its cultural and economic transaction with the U.S. *Dogeaters* delineates a Philippines still trapped by American cultural imperialism as it strives to find a foothold in global capitalism. The impact of Hollywood cinemas and the cultural logic of the spectacle are replacing the actual colonial political administration and military coercion to push the country into a state of postmodernity which is nonetheless still a front for neocolonialism. In this (trans)national images exchange, the power of the nation-state is hardly transcended; rather, it is the very agent through which the unequal transaction can be maintained and endured.

Because the novel concentrates mainly on the gender/sexual economy that sustains the public and private lives of different classes of people in the Philippines, it is possible to explore the novel’s political economy from a gendered point of view. It is my contention that the transaction between the global production of filmic images (in the U.S.) and the imagined community (in the Filipino nation-state) is based upon a gift-giving mechanism in Gayle Rubin’s sense. Rubin incorporates Levi-Strauss’s concept of the exchange of women to formulate her theory of the sex/gender system in human society. For Levi-Strauss, gift exchanges are the structural principles of the kinship system. With marriage as the basic form of the gift exchange between two groups, the mechanism both affirms the alliance between the two groups and establishes an incest-taboo. In this exchange process, women are the most precious of gifts. Rubin lays bare the oppression implied in such exchange by underlining the distinction between gift and giver. For Rubin, women are in no position to play the role of exchange partner because they are fixed in the role of “gift,” which means that they are unable to realize the benefit of their own circulation (37-38). The asymmetrical relation between the exchanger and the exchanged entails the constraints of female sexuality, for women are forced to “perform” their sexuality in response to the desire of others rather than actively pursuing their own desire. The exchange mechanism thus produces a sexual division at the expense of women.

In the fictional world of *Dogeaters*, this exchange mechanism is enacted via the

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6 See Rubin.
logic of postmodernist globalization. The alliance between a globalized cinematic industry, i.e., the Hollywood film industry, and the Philippines nation-state is realized through an exchange that offers as gifts, not women per se, but the commodification and exploitation of gendered subjects. More specifically, we have a (trans)national capitalist transaction in which the Philippines imports Hollywood films and American merchandises, while it offers sex tourism thus satisfying the desire of the West. In this exchange, the process of formation of gendered Filipino subjects is disrupted and reformulated. In Rubin’s paradigm, women’s suppression of their own desire serves both as the support for and the outcome of their role as gifts. The suppression of desire on women’s part comes to constitute the sex/gender system, which is considered natural under capitalist patriarchy. In the postcolonial Philippines, gendered Filipino subjects both produce and are produced by a mechanism of misrecognition mediated by filmic images. On the one hand, the identification with filmic images from the West renders gendered Filipino subjects vulnerable to commercial exploitation; on the other hand, this secondary misrecognition makes possible a social imaginary based upon the emphasis on appearances and the spectacle of the body. In the novel, the prime character who manipulates and embodies such an exchange, who turns the idea of beauty and the spectacle of the body into codified cultural norms that give meaning to social subjects is “The First Lady.”

*Dogeaters* offers a panoramic view of social life in Manila during the despotic reign of Ferdinand Marcos in the late 1960s. At the top of high society presides the First Lady, whose characterization is based upon a real-life portrait of Imelda Marcos. In the chapter entitled “The President’s Wife Has a Dream,” the First Lady dances with John Pope XIII and Hollywood heartthrob George Hamilton, while there is “a man asleep in a coffin” (123). The dream implies the death of the Phallus of the nation-state—the man in the coffin—and the feminization of the Philippines’ cultural and political transaction with the U.S. and the formal colonizer Spain. The First Lady is a border case in the multiple transactions between the U.S. and the Philippines. She is both the exchange partner and the gift itself. Her beauty and social status make it

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7 In Lacan’s explanation, the identifying process in the mirror stage is an outcome of the misrecognition between the child and its mirror image in the Imaginary Order, in which the child misrecognizes the image in the mirror not as a reflection of himself, but as himself. The presence of the mirror image serves to form a sense of boundary between the baby and the Other, so that he starts to get a sense of identity with clear boundary. For Lacan, this misrecognition is a structural element in the formation of a subject. I call the Filipinos’ identification with the images on the screen or the bodily spectacle secondary misrecognition because it is enforced and mediated by the forces of history. See Lacan 2-3 and Kaja Silverman 19-20.
possible for her to embody the nation; yet the Phallus she possesses in international exchange derives paradoxically from her on-going investments in her body as a fetish, an object of desire and a gift which is apprehended and reified by the fantasy of the West.\textsuperscript{8} The exchange value of her body, including its value of to-be-looked-at-ness and the extensive exposure of her bodily “spectacle” to the public, is used by her so that she may become a player in both domestic and international politics. The First Lady conflates her bodily “spectacle” with the body of the nation, fetishizing her beauty as a signifier for the Philippines to enhance the nation’s chance of international dealings. She plays up to the First World’s fantasy of Asia-Pacific economic receptivity and dependency on the First World. Unlike the King’s body under the monarchy, a body whose corporeal visibility designates the presence of a fixed and absolute power, the First Lady’s pseudo state power is sustained by the allure of her subject positions as the other, the body, and femininity vis-à-vis white western males.

Domestically, the First Lady appropriates a body politics based upon the cultural logic of the spectacle as a technology of power to rule over her subjects. She controls the public media, TV stations and newspapers, patronizes the beauty pageants, and personally organizes the Manila International Film Festival. Yet for these institutions to become effective agents in bringing together an imagined community based upon misrecognition, a cultural logic of the spectacle has to be already at work, setting up both the ground and the technique of a power which can regulate and organize the social imaginary of the Filipinos regarding their sense of self, their sense of history, and their social relations of gendered, class and racial propriety. However, to fully explicate the logic of the spectacle and its role as a technique of power in the fictional world of \textit{Dogeaters}, I want to have a quick look at Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of the “Synopticon” and Guy Debord’s concept of “the society of the spectacle.”

\textsuperscript{8} Neferti Xina M. Tadiar argues that a libidinal structure lies beneath the transnational exchange between the U.S. and the countries in the Asia-Pacific community. Concerning the U.S.-Philippines relations, she writes: “[The Philippines] is the mistress of the United States. Feminized in this relationship of debt and dependence, the Philippines produces the surplus pleasure (wealth) that the United States extracts from her bodily (manual) labor” (187). For a discussion of the way sexual fantasy works in the transnational exchange between the Philippines and the U.S., see Tadiar.
The Synopticon and the Society of the Spectacle

Contemplating spatial organization in the era of globalization, Bauman draws upon Thomas Mathiesen’s concept of “Synopticon” to elucidate a new technique of power consisting in the many watching the few. Bauman observes that Foucault’s concept of “Panopticon” confers power on the few who hide in the shadow to watch the many. This surveillance is meant to instill discipline and impose a uniform pattern of behavior on the inmates in a fixed, localized, and closely guarded space. Mathiesen challenges the limits of such a spatial paradigm, for it is unable to incorporate the rise of mass media in the forms of television and cinema, and the new techniques of power they produce. He coins the term “Synopticon” to address the power of the spectacle, which seduces people to watch the images of a selected few from far away. In the spatial organization of the Panopticon it is the watchers who hold the power; in the Synopticon it is the watched, the ones who embody the spectacle, who are craved and desired, and thus hold sway over the masses. Bauman explicates the spatial implications of this new scheme of power: “The Synopticon is in its nature global; the act of watching unties the watchers from their locality—transports them at least spiritually into cyberspace, in which distance no longer matters, even if bodily they remain in place” (52; italics mine).

In this instance, the distinctive feature of this globalized “world” is precisely its quality of being watched by the many in and from all corners of the globe. That is to say, they can “go global” precisely because of their capacity of being watched (Bauman 53). The quality of to-be-looked-at-ness, namely the quality of being a spectacle, becomes a great form of cultural capital in the postmodern world. Whoever catches the eye catches all. While Bauman foregrounds the global-local relation between the few and the many, the watched and the watchers, what he fails to develop is the impact of the former upon the latter in a context of unequal transnational exchange. In other words, how does the power of to-be-looked-at-ness operate in the condition when the images of the watched come from the western “center” and the many who watch are located in the Third World?

Debord’s idea of “the society of the spectacle” is crucial for our understanding of the way in which the spectacle organizes our social life. Debord claims: “The spectacle

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9 I thank Ms. Yi-ting Luo for bringing the idea of the Synopticon to my attention.
is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (12). He also stresses that the spectacle’s assertion of the predominance of appearance is not “something added to the real world—not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society’s real unreality” (13). The cultural preference for the spectacle of the body, and that of visual image in mass media, thus becomes the fundamental cultural logic according to which the society of the spectacle seduces its people into willing submission to a new form of disciplinary power. The presence of the quality of being watched holds the key to power in such a society. From a Foucauldian perspective, the Synopticon can be seen as a replacement of the coercive power of the Panopticon in disciplining and reshaping the bodies of the people. While the latter exercises its power from the center, where it puts the inmates under surveillance to enforce uniform and predictable bodily movements, the former’s exercise of power is less blatant and one-sided. In a world governed by the rule of the Synopticon, the mechanism of power lies in the fact that the watchers, while they gaze at the spectacle of the few admiringly, are promised a similar power of seduction as long as they enforce the same standard of beauty upon their own bodies. To reach that position of power, they must internalize the mechanism of the gaze by means of constantly checking upon themselves through a lens shaped by the dominant cultural ideologies. This new form of technique of power provides the codified cultural and social ground upon which the Filipinos organize and “imagine” their self-recognition.

In regard to Dogeaters, the Synopticon functions as a technology of power through which the nation-state produces its docile national subjects. Their docility lies in the people’s unconditional acceptance of, and self-surveillance according to, the concept of beauty set by Hollywood. And because the concept of beauty behind the spectacle connotes a preference for white middle class gender propriety, the spectacle functions as the network of power through which the nation-state circulates a dominant white American cultural ideology. It is possible to see this process as one of historical misrecognition by the Filipinos. In Lacan’s theorization of the Mirror Stage, the child’s “misrecognition” of the mirror image can be achieved only through its ratification by the gaze of the mother. The mother’s gaze stands in for the gaze of the Other (the symbolic order) to apprehend and reify the child’s identification with his/her mirror image. Therefore, for Lacan, it is not how we see or would like to see ourselves that
determines our “identification,” but how we are perceived by the cultural gaze. Since this process of misrecognition is built into our identification scenario, it is a structural misrecognition that is experienced by all. For the postcolonial Filipinos in the fictional world of *Dogeaters*, misrecognition is historically determined. As I have been arguing all along, the unequal exchange between the U.S. and the Filipino nation-state is established upon a disruption in the formation of gendered subjects. The political economy of the Philippines’ receptive role in globalization thus becomes the historical condition in which the cinematic images of American films or the public spectacle (of the beautiful body) serves as the gaze of the Other to enforce the Filipinos’ cultural identification. That is to say, the gaze of the m(O)ther in the Mirror Stage is permanently replaced by the gaze of the spectacle. Such historical misrecognition is manifested through various textual examples.

First of all, the filmic spectacle induces the desire to reproduce it on the part of the local people. They seek to shape and situate their bodies under the gaze of the public to increase their exchange value. For those at the lower end of the social scale, whose bodies may be watched yet who never really enjoy the power of celebrities, others’ gaze at their bodies constitutes the trajectory through which they gaze at and identifies with themselves. Joey Sands, the bastard son of a Filipino prostitute and a black American G.I.—a textual arrangement meant to hint at the military dependency of the Philippines on the U.S.—and the bomba Queen Lolita Luna both capitalize on the spectacles of their gorgeous bodies, seeking to hook up with any foreign directors or customers who can take them abroad. However, instead of attracting public attention, they internalize the gaze of the Other; they look at themselves, consume their own images, as if they were constantly watched and framed by a camera: “Everything for [Lolita] is a scene from a movie: zooms, pans, close-ups, climaxes and confrontations followed by whispered clinches” (Hagedorn 96). Joey, too, imagines himself in front of the coveted German director Rainer as if he were in a movie: “That’s when I imagine I’m in my movie. I’m the strong young animal—I’m the panther. Or else I’m the statue of a magnificent young god in a beautiful garden” (Hagedorn 132). Yet, without a return gaze from the West, without the appreciation of the mass media, both characters are immobilized by their own gazes.

On the other hand, the beauty pageant and the film festival function to send to the public the message that to be beautiful is to be patriotic. Here the cultural logic of the

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10 See Silverman 19-20.
spectacle as the technique of power operates in the realm of the social imaginary in various ways. First, it sets up a standard of cultural identification according to a certain body image favored and coded by the nation-state. Following Hollywood prototypes, this ideal body often appears to be white and heterosexual. The ideal body or the codified bodily spectacle becomes the medium through which social relations are organized on the level of race, class, gender, and sexuality. To be more specific, a codified spectacle with reified (white) racial and gender features is often upheld as the object of the gazes of the masses; the spectacle also serves as the superego that guards upon the masses’ subject management. The Third-World masses therefore exclude or marginalize those racial or gender markings of the body to make sure they are aligned with white, heterosexual, middle class propriety. Rio’s mother Dolores, for example, is the Mestizo child of a white American father and a brown Filipino mother. While she appears to be white and gorgeous, the brownness of her “blood” remains threatening and dangerous. For “brownness” is associated with a lower class social status. To suppress her treacherous, brown racial features, Dolores places her small, brown-skinned mother, Narcisa, in the guest room next to the kitchen in the back of the Gonzaga mansion. She is forbidden to eat at the family dinner table lest her brown racial traits should blemish their upper class status. The suppression of this brown racial trait is but part of the strategy of the family’s subject-management. To sever their link with yellow, brown or any other Asian racial features, they also suppress the truth that the family’s great-great-grandmother was a Chinese from Shanghai (Hagedorn 57).

The whiteness of her bodily spectacle provides Dolores, as well as other upper class women, an asset with which they can attempt to eliminate racial markings that bind their identity. Besides devoting all her time to keeping up her Rita Hayworth appearance by hiring a personal make-up man and a dressmaker, Dolores keeps a sanctuary of a few mauve rooms in which she indulges in racialized gendered performativity. With the windows boarded up and painted over to sever their connection with the Asian reality and the walls installed with full-length mirrors, the rooms are the ideal place for Dolores to identify with the mirror image of a “white” female body. Her racial markings eliminated, Dolores is able to formulate a self identity free from the “brownness” of her race. That is the reason why, when she calls her room a “womb,” her dressmaker calls it a “tomb” (Hagedorn 86).

Besides working as a technique to regulate one’s self-recognition and social relations, the spectacle of filmic images also constitutes an important medium through
which one organizes the social imaginary with regard to memory and history. Filmic images and body spectacles substitute for reality, memory and history to forge the basic points of reference or frames of memory through which one relates oneself to one’s past. Rio, the narrator who unfolds the narration of the novel by means of a detailed account of two melodramatic Hollywood movies *All That Heaven Allows* and *A Place in the Sun*, both produced in 1956, uses that year as a significant point from which to start telling the story of her family. She juxtaposes prolonged comments upon the appearance of the movie stars in the film with an account of her family background, including her father’s Spanish blood and his belief in dual citizenship, and her mother’s white American father Whitman Logan. This specific narrative blending reveals the double colonial background of Rio’s family and the working of a melodramatic perspective that constantly affects her field of vision. Her recollections of her parents and grandparents are not only framed by the spectacular love scenes on the screen, but are also stitched together by them to make her account a coherent yet unreliable narrative. In the passages in which she unravels the imagined “memory” of her grandmother taking care of her grandfather through cinematic frames—one with Jane Wyman taking care of a comatose Rock Hudson, and one with a close-up of a kiss between Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift—it is obvious that it is the filmic spectacles that set in motion her desire to tell, for the cinematic images serve to align her identification with a past that is not meant to be authentic and truthful. The fact that her family possesses the allure of white exotic glamour—her Rita Hayworth look-alike mother, her mother’s white American father, and her father with his Spanish connection—is as exciting as the melodramatic love scenes and the fascinating good looks of the Hollywood stars.

**Subsuming the Body of the Other Nation**

As a technique of power, the logic of the spectacle can also serve a more blatant and gruesome political purpose. It is used by the nation-state to make opaque the nasty political suppressions and the coercions of the military regime. The blending of the state control and the rule of the spectacle is especially vivid and chilling on the occasions when the visibility of the female body or the spectacle is highlighted to make invisible the scars of political violence on the bodies of the political dissidents.
and the social underdogs. While the workers are constructing the so-called “cultural center” for the Manila Film Festival, one of the structures collapses and buries the workers in the rubble. To complete the construction in time, the First Lady orders the workers to continue building by pouring more cement over the bodies of the buried workers. The cultural center is finished three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown. The episode is significant in that the bodies of the workers are hidden so that the film festival can open in time to make visible the filmic spectacles of the West.

While people on different social classes are engaged in the suppression of bodily features that betray their gendered, racial and class impropriety, the nation-state is also dedicated to the suppression of the other nation through coercing or subsuming its token figure—Daisy Avila. Hagedorn hints at the existence of a different nation through a subtle juxtaposition of two kinds of bodily spectacle. The plot of the novel is often set as a stage for the flaunting of quite a few upper class beauties who seem to be copies of Hollywood movie stars: Dolores Gonzaga, Rio’s mother, is a Rita Hayworth look-alike; Isabel Alacran, the wife of a business tycoon, the powerful and influential Severo Alacran, possesses a beauty modeled on that of Dietrich, Vicomtesse Jacqueline de Ribes, Nefertiti, and Grace Kelly; and of course, the First Lady. Yet, in the margins of the narrative, incorporated in the fragments of news clippings that are inserted in the gaps of the main story lines, we find other bodies—the dismembered, decapitated, bloated, decomposed, disfigured, anonymous, and unidentifiable bodies that float on the river. The news clipping from The Metro Manila Daily entitled “Floating Bodies” delineates such alternative “national” bodies in ways that blame the murders on political dissidents and insurgents. The juxtaposition of the two kinds of bodily spectacles might seem irrelevant on the surface; yet, they are related by the manipulation of the state power. The power that puts these bodies on the stage in the limelight is the very power that executes those whose bodies end up floating on the river and on the margin of the people’s field of vision. The exercise of the power of the state by making visible and turning invisible different bodily spectacles finds its best target in Daisy Avila, the daughter of the leader of the dissident party, Senator Domingo Avila.

Unlike other upper-class beauties in the story, Daisy’s sensational appearance does not invoke the spectacles of Hollywood luminaries. On the contrary, the narrative ties her beauty to the landscape of the Philippines; the news of her winning the beauty pageant is reported as a narrative unfolding a detailed account of the geography and
natural landscape of her country:

Before her twentieth birthday [...] Daisy Consuelo Avila is crowned the most beautiful woman in the Philippines, our tropical archipelago of 7100 known islands. We are serenaded by mournful gecko lizards, preyed on by vampire bats and other asuwangs, protected by Kapre giants crouching in acacia trees, enchanted by malevolent spirits living in caves and sacred termite-dwellings. The humid landscape swarms with prehistoric, horned warrior beetles with armored shells, flies with gleaming emerald eyes, and speckled brown mariposa butterflies the size of sparrows. Eagles nest in mountain peaks; in certain regions and seasons the sky blackens with humming locusts and flocks of divebomber cockroaches. Invisible mosquitoes lurk in the foliage, said to infect children with a mysterious fever that literally cooks the brain, causing hallucinations, insanity, or death. [...] The latest national survey reports that eighty dialects and languages are spoken; we are a fragmented nation of loyal believers, divided by blood feuds and controlled by the Church. (Hagedorn 100)

Daisy’s body evokes a different national imaginary, one that is often excluded from the field of vision by the regime of the spectacle. This imaginary includes the “body” of the political dissidents, the social underdogs, and the alternative imagined community outside and beyond the one linked by the logic of the spectacle. It is a nation firmly grounded in its tropical landscape and geographic specificity, where social relationships are determined more through local spatialization. Daisy’s appearance thus reveals a broader vision of the way one might “see” the nation, a nation characterized by multiple cultures and languages germinated from its geographical positioning, a nation that could go wild and slip out of control easily. To coerce and seduce such a “body” into the symbolic order of “the spectacle” would mean the nation-state’s triumphant subsuming of its national counter-part. When the panel of judges headed by General Ledesma votes to elect Daisy as their beauty queen, it simultaneously erases the symbolic meaning of Daisy as the “body” of the alternative nation. Furthermore, the visibility of Daisy’s body on stage provides an alibi for the terrorism the government resorts to in order to rule over its subjects. The visibility of such a spectacle thus renders invisible the “body” of the other nation.
The Return of the Repressed of Globalization

In a society that is governed by the logic of the spectacle in the interests of the nation-state and global media, how can one disrupt the power of willing surveillance so that a local form of knowledge, and a local subject-formation can start to take shape? Hagedorn shows us that on the path to deconstruction and reconstruction of the society of the spectacle, a process of awakening is necessary. Yet in the novel, awakening does not involve conscious awareness of the faults of the society and the misrecognition of individuals, nor does it designate a collective struggle against a (trans)national imaginary mechanism that constrains the local people’s self-recognition and social imaginary. For Hagedorn, awakening is possible only if the trauma of the society of the spectacle can be revealed and redeemed. Given that the norms of the society are established and regulated through the cultural logic of the spectacle, the psychological trauma of the society is hardly tangible. That is to say, in the melodramatic narrative space of the novel, which records the fascination of a society with the glamour of filmic images and bodily spectacles, things seem to be normal and regular. This is especially so if we follow the first narrator Rio’s accounts and memories. Since the novel consists of various narrative voices expressing opinions and life experiences from different textual spaces, the reader is given the chance to see things differently. It is thus in the fictional space of magic realistic narrative that we find the emergence of both the symptoms of trauma and the cleansing rituals that lead to the awakening. The uncanny, the inexplicable, and the mysterious phenomena that define this fictional space are the very symptoms through which one can detect the malaise of the society. What is unique in Hagedorn’s prescription is that she locates the possibility of resistance in the very site where the mark of social trauma can be both revealed and embodied. In other words, the acting-out and working-through of the symptoms of trauma provides a chance for the society to simultaneously heal itself and revolt against the source of its trauma.

The trauma of the society of the spectacle derives from the fact that the society is established at the expense of those whose bodies do not meet up to the racial, gendered and class proprieties set up by a regime constituted by a national despot and a global image industry. Which is to say, the society of the spectacle is built upon a collective loss that makes itself felt from time to time through bouts of psychotic episodes on the personal level. Since personal trauma often derives from collective loss, the process of
mourning of the individual characters can be seen as the mourning rituals for the society’s trauma. On a sociohistorical level, these psychological dramas can topple or subdue the regulative forces of the logic of the spectacle and its (trans)national transaction. Such insurgent mourning and awakening therefore accompany the emergence of local knowledge and herald the guerrilla warfare of the other nation against the authority. Two of the characters whom Hagedorn’s anonymous first person narrative voices follow, and on whom they focus to reveal the traumatic symptoms through uncanny accounts of unusual happenings, are Baby Alacran and the afore-mentioned Daisy Avila. Their traumatic symptoms are in fact either a form of acting-out or a working-through of the trauma suffered by the nation in order to assert the possibility of awakening.

The uncanniness of Baby Alacran’s story lies in the fact that she embodies what is marginalized, left out, and made invisible in the society of the spectacle. That is, she is everything that opposes the ideal of such a society. The exaggerated descriptions of her grotesque body and the magic-realistic accounts of what happens to her give her story a hint of surplus enjoyment that one often associates with the idea of uncanniness. To make the ideas of uncanniness and surplus enjoyment clear, a brief discussion is in order. For Žižek, uncanniness is a quality of the process of modernization, which sets in motion an enormous change of social life. The social relations supported by a manual mode of production are dissolved by the rise of capitalist cultural flows. In Shakespeare’s time, the immediate relations between people and places, things and values are gradually replaced by the abstract value of signs and symbolic tokens. The use and circulation of money is a perfect example of a system in which “nothing begets something” (Žižek 12). In Anthony Giddens’s opinion, time-space distanciation propels the process of modernization. Forces from far away increasingly tear places away from their immediate social contexts and histories to the extent that the local places are rendered phantasmagoric and abstract. The forces that structure the social relations of a “place” are often absent and invisible. Such a process also creates the social systems in which symbolic tokens serve as the basic elements that reorganize the social relationships of a local place (Giddens 14). Money, expert systems, and as in Dogeater’s case, the spectacle created by the mechanical images of the mass media, can all be seen as the “nothing” which is turned into “something” through the anamorphosis of globalization. And it is this condition, in which “nothing begets something,” that creates the uncanniness of modernity.

When “nothing begets something,” when the phantasmagoric spectacle produces
physical and social subjects, something that was there before is suppressed and sometimes lost. The symptoms of such trauma of loss lie in the return of the repressed which carries with it a surplus enjoyment with the paradoxical power to convert things into their opposite. Namely, what was beautiful and enjoyable before will return as something ugly and disgusting. In Dogeaters, one can trace the “surplus enjoyment” in the magic realistic account of Baby Alacran’s ugly body. This specific narrative account allows the reader to trace the trauma of globalization, to see what is normally not visible in the symbolic order. In other words, Baby’s grotesque body is a symptom of the return of the repressed caused by transnational flows of image.

The child of Severo Alacran, the coconut King, and the ravishing beauty Isabel Alacran, Rosario Alacran, nicknamed Baby, is a disappointment to her parents. In spite of the fact that she is the result of a marriage of wealth and looks, her appearance is totally different from her mother’s. Hagedorn exaggerates the plainness of her appearance:

She is unbearably shy, soft, plump, short like her father, without any hard edges. Her complexion is marred by tiny patches of acne. Her breasts are flat, her waist narrow, her hips much too wide and out of proportion to the rest of her. Her legs are thick and muscular—“peasant legs,” her mother calls them—in contrast to her feet, small and delicate. (25)

If her face is plain, her body is the embodiment of the grotesque and the bizarre. As a child, she chews her nails so often that the servants have to paint them with iodine; when that fails, they rub her fingertips with fiery chili peppers. When she is nine years old, her body starts to sweat uncontrollably. To prevent perspiration dripping from her armpits she wears pads under her arms. She lives in the constant worry that one day the sweat will find its way down her body to form small puddles next to her feet. Shortly after the period when she was suffering from perspiration, her fingers and toes develop an itchy rash; the rash turns into hideous, watery blisters and open sores; she looks as if she had leprosy. She is diagnosed as suffering from an extreme case of nonspecific tropical fungus. The doctor exhorts her parents: “think of your daughter’s body as a landscape, a tropical jungle whose moistness breeds this fungus, like moss on trees” (29).

As we have seen, Baby’s uncanny body is the site of a return of the repressed brought about by the disciplinary power of a spectacle that regulates the bodies of the
Filipinos. Yet Baby’s body and her disease are more than just symptoms of the society’s trauma, they can also disrupt the operation of the disciplinary power of the society of the spectacle. Baby’s nasty skin diseases and eccentric habits appear to be a protective shield that keeps the disciplinary power of the spectacle at bay. If “discipline” can be understood as the effect of a technology of power in the interests of capitalist accumulation and national control, then her grotesque body seems to resist being commodified, standardized, and turned into a symbolic token for the sake of the nation-state. It also disrupts the formation of social relations predicated on the logic of exchange of the body.

On the other hand, the conflation of Baby’s body and the term “tropical jungle” makes it possible for us to read her body simultaneously as a symbol of a premodern “primitive” Philippines. And it is in this simultaneous writing of body and land that one can start to locate the site of trauma and regeneration on both a personal and a collective level. Specifically, the sweaty, blistering, rash-inflicted body and the humid, fungus- and moss-permeated landscape trigger the mechanism of transnational capitalist flows to tame and manage the land and the body. Hagedorn’s synchronic descriptions of the body and the landscape unravel the origin of this desire.

From the perspective of the theory of trauma, the “nothingness” generated by the change of social relations in globalization, i.e., the substitution of the exchange value for use value, the tearing away of place from space, the misrecognition of the spectacle as the real thing, can be seen as a trauma of loss. The symbolic order of the spectacle is established through a process of historical misrecognition on the part of the Filipinos. Since the mother’s function as the one who sanctions or ratifies the child’s identification with the mirror image is replaced by the spectacle of the West, the formation of the subjects of the spectacle involves a suppression or loss of the culture of the m(O)ther. To fully understand the linkage between the trauma of loss and national melancholy in the novel’s specific historical context, it is important that we distinguish the differences among the three terms: loss, absence, and lack.

Dominick LaCapra defines the concept of loss in historical terms: the scene of loss lies in the historical past. In the case of the individual, something happening in the past causes the loss of a loved one; on a collective level, some major historical event takes place that causes the loss of sovereignty or freedom of a country or a group of people. Lack, however, takes place in the present and the future. It “indicates a felt need or a deficiency; it refers to something that ought to be there but is missing” (LaCapra 703). The concept of absence, on the other hand, is defined on a trans-
historical level: “absence is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future)” (LaCapra 700). Absence is hard to apprehend because it is something we never have. It is often articulated in terms of loss or lack, for that is the only way one can feel or emphasize the void of absence. LaCapra underlines the fact that in cross-cultural encounters, an absence may be experienced as lack because the members of one culture might feel a strong sense of lack when facing another culture that possesses something that is absent in their own culture (704).

Because the modernization in the history of the Philippines comes from western colonization, the country was never given a chance to develop its local specificity, and from which to move toward modernization by itself. That is, the “native” cultural or social forces were undercut or foreclosed before they have had the chance to accommodate themselves into modernity from a localized position. Thus, the “absence” in the “native” culture contains both the absence of the facilities of modernity and the absence of the chance to develop the “native” culture. Hagedorn expresses such an “absence” in the native culture through the trope of the tropical landscape. From the point of view of the West, the “absence” of the landscape of the Philippines is often come across as a putative “lack” in the aboriginal culture to adapt to modernity and globalization on its own. Such “lack” becomes the object of the desire of globalization. Western countries like Spain and the U.S. have constantly misread the “absence” of Filipino culture as “lack.” Colonization and transnational capitalist exchange can be seen as two historical stages in which the West strives to fill in this “lack.” In the colonial period, the West mobilizes the discourse of civilizing mission to legitimate its military conquests and political governance. In the era of globalization, the nation-state gives away some of its cultural autonomy in exchange for “something that ought to be there but is missing,” so that the country can be aligned with the cultural logic of transnational capitalism headed by the U.S. These violations thus cause the trauma of loss, in which the country has lost its cultural autonomy because western countries have misread the absence in its culture as lack. The figuring of Baby’s grotesque body as the site of a return of the repressed therefore lays bare the hidden grief of a local culture devastated by the transnational transaction between the global media industry and the nation-state.
The Trauma of Loss and National Melancholy

Besides serving as the embodiment of the local culture’s return of the repressed, Baby takes up the position of one who acts out the trauma of loss and the grief of the nation. For Freud, the trauma of loss often leads to two kinds of psychological interacting processes: mourning and melancholia. Mourning is regarded as a regular reaction to the loss of a loved one, one’s country, liberty, ideals, and so on, whereas melancholia is a pathological condition of repetitive captivation by the scene of loss (Freud 243-44). In LaCapra’s reading, the two terms are interpreted in a more concrete way that leads her to suggest that mourning might be seen as a form of working-through which can propel the subject toward a reconnection with the outside world, whereas melancholia might be seen as a form of acting-out of a traumatized self without having any healing effect (LaCapra 713). LaCapra writes:

[Freud] saw melancholia as characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again. (713)

In this light, Baby Alacran can be read as the scapegoat who bears the brunt of the traumatic loss for her people, who is caught in the melancholia of repeating the past, “and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object.” Hagedorn emphasizes the innate nature of Baby’s melancholia through her appearances: “Her only fine points are her melancholy eyes, dark and erotic” (Hagedorn 25). On the eve of her wedding, Baby hears of the assassination of Senator Domingo Avila, leader of the dissident party, and falls into an uncontrollable state of despondency. In reality, Baby does not know Senator Avila, nor does she share any of his political idealism. Yet she is the one who weeps involuntarily upon hearing the senator’s death. Her sorrow is accompanied by the relapse of her skin disease shortly after her wedding—a bodily expression of grief for the nation. To cope with this agony, Baby invents a grotesque ritual of mourning: “The weeping bride invents a cleansing ritual for herself. She makes it up as she goes along, this movie starring herself, this movie that goes on and on, this movie that is the
only sure way she knows to put herself to sleep. [...] It’s the black blood of a pig the weeping bride pours on her head, [...] mourning the death of a man she never knew” (Hagedorn 158).

In a sense, Baby is caught in the hysterical “cleansing” ritual for the sake of mourning a lost object embodied by Senator Avila. One can argue that Avila is the substitute for the nation’s lost object. Through him one might go back to a time before “nothingness” takes control. He also represents the agent able to break the complicity between the nation-state and globalization, so that a people’s nation can start to take shape. Baby’s unconscious identification with the lost object makes it possible for her to experience the melancholia of the tragic loss of the nation. She therefore functions as the surrogate mourner who is first haunted by the tropical fungus on her skin—an acting-out of the national melancholia triggered by the loss of a lush, “original” Filipino body/landscape—and then caught in a compulsive ritual of acting out the bloody assassination for a nation that does not know how to mourn nor whom or what it should mourn.

By stressing the ritual of melancholia for the lost object, I am not trying to endorse the attempt to recover one’s native culture as an epistemological and historical ground for the reconstruction of a postcolonial nation. For Hagedorn, what is important is not the thing that is lost but the rituals of acting-out and, in some cases working-through, which are crucial for opening the way to the stage of awakening, a passage toward the final “enlightenment” of the nation. That is to say, what causes the trauma is precisely the lack of the feeling of melancholy on the part of the general Filipino public regarding their loss, because that loss is often obscured by visual pleasure.11 Baby’s compulsive acting-out of her grief, although lacking an actual psychological healing effect, is already a step forward toward the nation’s final awakening. Hence, Hagedorn wrenches the concepts of mourning and melancholia out of their regular historical contexts of the Holocaust or other scenes of historical violence, and repositions them in the context of the global image and capital exchanges, in which what should be mourned is often masked by, because experienced as, pleasure and fascination. Melancholy, as a social expression of national melancholia, therefore is or can

11 I use the term “visual pleasure” in Laura Mulvey’s sense, emphasizing especially the mesmerizing and hallucinatory power of visual images on the screen to produce the trajectory of the gaze which helps the audience identify with the look of the camera, the male directors and the patriarchal regime of look. For a further understanding of Mulvey’s idea of visual pleasure, see her “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”
be a state of epiphany. To break out of the hallucination of visual pleasure becomes the utmost challenge for the people who are caught, defined, and regulated by the cultural logic of the spectacle.

Because of her ugliness and her privileged social status, Baby is exempted from the disciplinary power of the society of the spectacle. This allows her identification with the lost object and gives her the ability to feel depressed, a necessary condition for acting-out and working-through. But how can those whose very subject-formation depends upon the misrecognition constituted by the logic of the spectacle, start to awaken to the state of melancholy and depression? Hagedorn turns to Daisy’s growth to demonstrate such a process of awakening. Using the two tropes “sleeping” and “weeping,” Hagedorn focuses our attention on the reactionary nature of the exposure of one’s spectacular body, and the cleansing effect of melancholy and crying. In her lexicon, sleeping refers to indulgence in the sensation of the spectacle, whereas weeping and crying refer to the sudden awakening to the melancholy that lies behind such a sensation. Hagedorn quotes Jean Mallat in her opening epigraph to the novel, pointing to the innate weakness of the people who fall into the state of “sleep”: “They have the greatest respect for sleeping persons, and the greatest curse they can pronounce against anybody is to wish that he die in his sleep. They cannot abide the idea of waking a sleeping person, or when they are obliged to do it, it is always done as gently as possible” (Hagedorn 1).

In the chapter “Sleeping Beauty,” Daisy is voted and crowned the most beautiful woman in the Philippines. The title “sleeping beauty” indicates her easy submission to the regime of the spectacle. Yet, as soon as she is crowned, Daisy becomes inflicted with insomnia, characterized by sudden awakening from sleep by the involuntary fits of crying. Fearful of these bouts of weeping, Daisy dreads falling asleep. She becomes so grief-stricken that she is unable to fulfill her duty as Miss Philippines. Her tour of the provinces is indefinitely postponed, and her cameo role in the upcoming movie is canceled by Mabuhay Studios. Her crying and melancholy indicate an awakening from the pleasure and hallucination of to-be-looked-at-ness. At the moment she is able to

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12 Melancholy refers to a common feeling of depression; melancholia, on the other hand, is a mental disorder that, as I have demonstrated in the main text, is characterized by being caught in the compulsive repetition of acting-out the scene of trauma. See Anne Anling Cheng for a thorough discussion of the difference between the two terms. Baby is caught in a state of melancholia; her performance of the cleansing rituals will never lead to a breakthrough out of depression. The “melancholy” I point out here designates a feeling of depression of the general public, which is often clouded by the more obvious feeling of visual pleasure. It seems to me, the feeling of melancholy is crucial to the process of awakening.
experience this pleasure as a form of melancholy, she is well on the way to a final awakening.

Daisy’s awakening, therefore, disrupts the operation of the society of the spectacle in all forms of its disciplinary surveillance and cultural codification. Because of her emotional state, Daisy is unable and refuses to fulfill her duty as the beauty queen. She topples the authorities that rule the country; both Malacanang Palace and the Alacran Corporation send emissaries to persuade the ungrateful beauty queen to come out of hiding. But Daisy and her family shut their door against the emissaries and turn down an invitation from a TV talk show. The invisibility of Daisy’s spectacular body puts to a stop the commercial gain from the exploitation of that body, and pushes it beyond the range of national control over its dissidents. Refusing to appear on movie screen and TV show, Daisy interrupts the circulatory flow of spectacular images and its power of disciplinary surveillance over its people’s bodies, thus creating a rupture in the Synopticon guarded by the ruling class and corporate institutes like Mabuhay Studios. The “iron butterfly” breaks into tears on a TV show. Sponsors of the beauty pageant lose all their investments. And by refusing to copy the Hollywood movie stars, to produce and reproduce a white-racial and gendered ideal image through the aid of the domestic movie industry as well as the nation-state, Daisy disconnects the link between the Filipino nation-state, domestic corporations, and the Hollywood film industry. It is here that the body transcends the network of power that binds the interests of the corporate mechanism, the nation-state and transnational capitalism. This is the kind of “transnationality” that releases one from the coercion of (trans)-national imaginary.

On the other hand, the title of the chapter “Epiphany” illuminates the facts that compulsive crying and an inexplicable sense of distress can be seen as a working-through of racial melancholia. If we understand racial melancholia as a state in which the subject enjoys the disciplinary power of the spectacle over his/her body, Daisy’s repetitive hysterical “performance” can be seen as the strategy through which she is able to gradually divert us from the “performativity” sanctioned by the society of the spectacle. Judith Butler defines “performativity” as a reiteration of prescribed social norms that precede, constrain, and exceed the performer. “Performance,” however, is defined as an act that goes beyond and transgresses such confinement; in other words, it is an act with agency and will (Butler 12-13).

By refusing to follow the preconditioned rules of bodily performativity, of flaunting the spectacle and circulating her image as the target of the gaze of the many,
Daisy moves increasingly towards a state in which she is able to express her racial and gender specificity outside the preexisting script written by the society of the spectacle. When she finally agrees to appear on Cora Camacho’s show, she seizes the opportunity to denounce the beauty pageant as an insult to the women of the Philippines. The authorities, of course, will not tolerate Daisy’s outlandish performance. She is later gang raped by General Ladesma and his men. This rape is meant to put a stop to her transgression, to reincorporate her back into the “norms.” Yet, it paradoxically signifies Daisy’s symbolic death in the society of the spectacle, so that she can break its spells and undergo a rebirth as a guerrilla fighter.

The transnationality as defined by Dogeaters, then, involves both a macro political economy and micro body politics. We enter into such a transnationality when visual pleasure of the body is unveiled to reveal the racial melancholy beneath it. People’s awakening from inertia to racial melancholy paves the way to the rituals of acting-out and working-through, performed separately by Baby and Daisy. When the uncanny body comes back to haunt the melodramatic narrative through the outbreak of a mysterious disease and the grotesque ritual of blood pouring, when the seductive body transforms itself into a mourning body, the complicity between the (trans)national network of interests and power and the mechanism of racial misrecognition can start to become disentangled.

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