



Weston Teruya

Do Pirates Dream of Pixelated Sheep? Asian American
Identities and Pirate Futurism in Contemporary Art

If we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea... you will understand why the boat has not only been... the great instrument of economic development... but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. *In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.*¹

—Michael Foucault
On Other Spaces

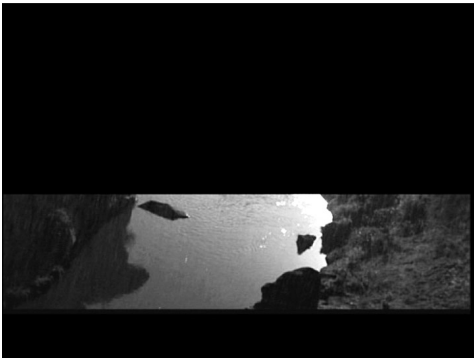
Projected on the video screen, blocks of variegated green jungle foliage and marshy waterways intermittently break up the monochrome black of the unlit display. Shifting windows reveal bits of the filmed landscape beneath a dark masking. These rectangular glimpses fade in and out, with each appearance giving some suggestion of a different angle on an unknown tropical landscape. The scattered placement of these scenic gaps within the obscured frame, as well as their shifting size and number, hints at something hidden, chased by the camera yet forever unseen.

In the 2005 video, *Body Double (Platoon)*, Bay Area artist Stephanie Syjuco appropriated and modified Oliver Stone's 1986 Vietnam War film *Platoon*. In her editing process, Syjuco masked the screen to remove the human characters and highlight only the natural backdrop. This result-

ing montage of landscapes depicts fragments of the Philippines, standing in as the more accessible and United States production-friendly "body double" for Vietnam.² Her cinematic exploration sifts through this locational role-play, manifested in dissolving glimpses of verdant tropics.

Syjuco's video mines this filmic representation of an American war in Asia in an impossible attempt to remember and reconstruct ties to the ghostly motherland expected from her as a Filipina American. By performing the pining for a distant Asian homeland—a symptom of the perpetual foreignness attributed to Asian Americans in popular culture—yet demonstrating its frustrated execution, she reveals the absurdity of the exercise. Syjuco mischievously describes the video as "a kind of home movie," while the piece suggests the impossibility of locating a meaningful home within it. While the reworked film stands as a document of insatiable longing, it ultimately makes use of its own shortcomings, tracing the expectation of a distant identification while highlighting the need to build a localized sense of identity.

This engagement with mass media and frustration of cultural expectations forms the impetus for what I term "pirate futurism." Pirate futurists are visual artists. Their work suggests speculative sites of agency, social intervention, or political commentary told through a mix of bootlegged pop-culture visuals, transmuted bits of film, or Web-borne pixelated images. The work emerges from the reworking of materials Syjuco demonstrated in *Body Double*, joined with suggestions of new speculative fictions. Pirate futurists exploit the limitations of these mediated representations,



Stephanie Syjuco, stills from *Body Double (Platoon)*, 2005, video projection, 120 minute loop, courtesy of the artist

not simply to point out their deficiencies, but also to use them productively. I argue that this artistic strategy has implications for the ways Asian Americans negotiate their varying identities within the context of visual culture. I examine the works by artists Stephanie Syjuco and Glenn Kaino to explore how they suggest dimensions and complications of pirate futurism.

Nowadays piracy often attacks the circulation of digital media, taking advantage of the proliferation of consumer computer technologies to distribute or cheaply bootleg music, movies, and software. It also recalls low-tech production on the black market; the manufacture of imitation luxury goods like handbags, watches, and designer clothing oftentimes located in the same countries where U.S. and European corporations outsource their labor to construct these branded products. Piracy embodies a backlash against the increasing consolidation of controls on the global flow of commodities. Local makers leverage a degree of agency and income from mimicking corporate goods.

Yet piracy implies not only the act of bootlegging or appropriation, but also, even more importantly, a productive disloyalty. The pirate figure suggests one who has no loyalty to a nation—or perhaps loyalty only to other shipmates or the interstitial space of the ocean itself. While piracy's mercenary motivation arises from self-interest or economic survival, it also presents the framework for a consciously unfixed network of relationships. This flexibility suggests a conception of belonging that destabilizes the overarching bonds of nationhood.

Historically, even when piracy fell in line with the workings of national or commercial in-

terests in mercenary fashion, the roguish specter of piracy always remained a threat to the workings of the seafaring industry because of their latent potential for betrayal. Asian Americans, as Syjuco's video suggests, are viewed as perpetually foreign, ever-longing for an unattainable homeland. This presumption of distant loyalties, a threatening inscrutability, has at moments framed Asian Americans as secret agents amongst the populace: sometimes involved in political espionage, other times as threats to American labor.³ Even when links to an Asian motherland are vigorously refuted, this shifty tendency toward assumed betrayal clings stubbornly to Asian American skin. Such is the glutinous, sticky quality of the stereotype. Individuals might try to wash themselves of its effects through doses of ultra-patriotism, but the process of racialization itself continuously overwrites it on the collective bodies of Asian Americans. Denial of stereotypes cannot undermine the rooted, systemic existence of those perceptions.

Instead of continuing to operate within this endless loop of cultural expectations and denial, the figure of the pirate claims ownership of that transnational slippage.⁴ Pirate culture presents an alternate conception of loyalty shaped by affinity and strategy rather than citizenship or the heteronormative radicles of lineage as embodied in the prototypical nuclear family. Piracy exposes belonging as an ongoing negotiation and presents the tools to find agency in that process. This flexible paradigm enables pirate futurism's field of strategic mobility in relation to the formation of identities.

In writing on early black merchant marines across what he calls *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy

describes the fruitfulness of this *in-between-ness*, the open seafaring field, as a rhizomatic site of exchange. He uses the ocean and its swarming parades of ships to describe “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system *in motion*,” cutting against presumptions of fixed and homogeneous notions of black culture and identity. In his telling, rather than being authentically sited in African lands, blackness emerges dynamically through the endlessly mobile interplay of cultures, individuals, and governments over the watery sea. The Atlantic serves as both a literal site of trade, transport, and social existence and a metaphorical relational space, embroiled in the production of the dynamics between Africa, Europe, and the Americas.⁵

For Gilroy, the possibilities opened include both the liberatory and the oppressive: vibrant transnational cultures and the wages of slavery and colonialism. Like piracy in relation to Asian American perpetual foreignness, the ocean’s expanse contains as much threat as opportunity. The perpetual alienness of Asian Americans continues to justify the demonization of Asian Americans and Asians with each respective war in Asia: from the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II to the post-9/11 racial profiling of South Asian and Middle Eastern American communities. These complications of piracy continually reemphasize the multivalent nature of the open ocean and its allowance for simultaneous potential and contradiction. As the work of both Syjuco and Kaino will demonstrate, the transgressive possibilities of pirate futurism operate within these conflicted dynamics and must acknowledge the role of power and privilege in determining the difference

between useful or potentially regressive acts of appropriation.

Futurism suggests the use of speculative fiction to imagine new social possibilities. This draws heavily from its invocation in *AfroFuturism*, a grouping whose fictions involve the radical act of envisioning new futures and histories of communities throughout the black diaspora.⁶ AfroFuturist creators like Octavia Butler, Sun Ra, and Ellen Gallagher have used storytelling, musical performance, and painting to produce past and future tales that complicate or reassess fixed representations of blackness.

As Michael Foucault noted in the epigraph, the pirate’s transport—the boat—provides a crucial vessel in activating a society’s cultural imagination. That creative apparatus, a storytelling voice, builds political agency through the traversal of shifting aquatic pathways similar to the pirate ship. To appropriate Foucault’s suggestion, in Asian American communities, when the possibilities for this kind of speculative subversion dissipate, the espionage of the secret agent remains in the place of the pirate. At most, the perpetual foreignness of the Asian American body can only be conscripted into games of nationally bounded subterfuge, never to transgress the limits of the Orobolus of patriotic loyalty and treason. But with pirate futurism’s speculative dimension, similar to AfroFuturism’s projects, Asian Americans can create transgressive possibilities for a different kind of community building.

Home Sweet Homeland

With the rough diorama construction and earnestness of an elementary school project, Stephanie



Stephanie Syjuco, from the series *The Village (Small Encampments)*, 2006, Fuji lightjet print, courtesy of the artist



Stephanie Syjuco, *Local Children*, from the series *The Village (Small Encampments)*, 2006, Fuji lightjet print, courtesy of the artist

Syjuco's latest photo series, *The Village (Small Encampments)*, sets tiny Internet-pillaged printouts of images taken in the Philippines within her apartment. Like *Body Double*, her scenes materialize the assumption that as a Filipina American she should feel the call of a homeland across the sea. Instead of looking to Hollywood cinema, this time Syjuco uses her computer as a diasporic connective tool, reaching out to the Philippines via the Web's visual representations. She exploits the low resolution of her downloaded sources to develop a provocative space for new narrative possibilities. That gap between high-fidelity reproduction and digital filtration not only fosters speculation, but also frustrates the demands for authenticity embedded in the usual representations of homeland.

Syjuco's photographs capture evidence of a playful exploration through these paper figurines. In one photo, a cutout character tills a multihued shag-rug-turned-grassy field with a digital plow while shelves of audio equipment loom in the background. The cutouts' fragile construction and digitized approximation of rural life seem inadequate and almost trivial against the solid carpentry of their macro setting. Set up in Syjuco's own apartment, the nested, fantastical homeland-within-a-home reimagines her belongings as sets for miniature worlds—even as it pokes fun at its own literal and identificatory shallowness, constructed from two-dimensional, paper mock-ups.

Syjuco delights in that uninhabitable representational space. While growing up in the United States, she stitched a mythic homeland from a patchwork vision of the Philippines she pulled from these popular media representations. Despite

its unreality, this fantasy held a symbolic value. Even with the gross essentialisms carried by this expectation of a distant motherland, there begins a kind of primary Asian American speculative fiction: a spectral place born of a compulsory need to envision a homeland across the sea.

It bears noting that Syjuco locates her investigation in pop-culture imagery. Lisa Lowe suggests that culture presents the terrain upon which we negotiate citizenship and participation in the nation, as well as the ever-present questions of difference that form limits on full inclusion.⁷ On one hand, idealized citizenship requires a forgetting; assimilation into the national body entails the disavowal of other histories, including ties to other countries or cultures—citizenship to another nation being the most tangible legal example. Yet at the same time, the persistence of Asian American alienness disrupts the ability to forget, to truly assimilate. The demand for identification with a distant homeland raised by the question of origins—"where are you *really* from?"—contradicts the disavowal inherent to U.S. citizenship. Therefore it falls to culture to become the site necessary for managing and assuaging this crisis.

Popular culture, in particular, attempts to smooth over the contradictions of Asian American racialization by molding immigrant difference into democratic tales of naturalization, multiculturalism, and diversity. The images Syjuco selected for *The Village* regularly circulate under the rubric of a distant heritage; something unmoving, but an innocuous and celebratory part of positive self-knowledge. Popular culture is the fodder for Asian American pirate futurists like Syjuco precisely be-

cause it is where narratives of identity are continuously produced.

Through a playful setup of home and homeland collapsed in singular space, Syjuco's work suggests a kind of Asian American catharsis. The identification with a distant motherland loops back into her home in San Francisco. She locates the traces of an identificatory negotiation, these digital images, within her apartment instead of simply using an Asian American immigrant narrative of assimilation to cover the space of loss suggested by a distant homeland. By doing so, she simultaneously gestures to the societal expectation of longing for that which is purportedly missing and claims her current domestic space as an active site of home. Syjuco not only identifies the problematic limitation of the mythic motherland, but also frustrates the cultural narrative of naturalization that attempts to hide the scar tissue of difference.

Not just dismissing this motherland dream as myth, Syjuco lingers on this space of fiction. In another photo, five small children stand arm in arm; the original source blown up, casting a ghostly, extrapolated pixel blur across their brown faces. In the background, other cut-out digital printouts are placed at varying distances to give a sense of depth to the rough tableau. A hint of the table holding the scene is visible, the precise wood grain of the surface the only thing appearing to be in focus because of the low resolution web images, lending the entire stage a heavy touch of unreality. The pixel blowout of the low-grade images suggests an extrapolation; a machine-estimated fictionalization. Limited information on the part of the source image requires that the computer fill in

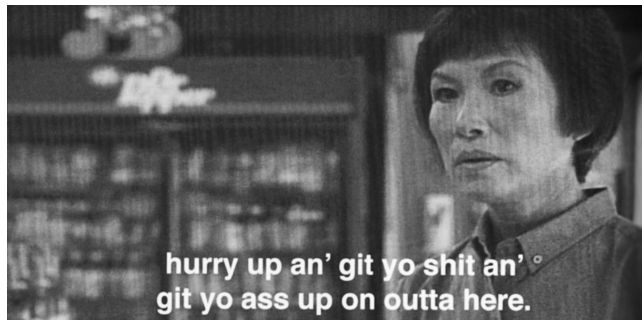
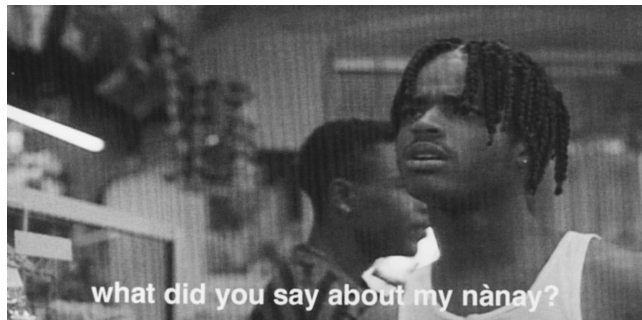
the gaps with made-up bits. In essence, these *pixel fictions* imagine possibilities from the deficiencies of the photos. The process of digital manipulation reveals itself as an assisted fiction within the workings of the computer tool itself. Pixelization produces a distorted graphic space, sometimes derided as poor quality, claimed here as a malleable site of creative agency.

Syjuco's pirate futurism arises from the culling of internet streams. The process is a local intervention in the deluge of digital networks. While the digital divide might doggedly persist, the beauty of Syjuco's brand of techno pillaging lies in the undetermined form of its end products. Her work suggests that this translation can be as low tech as the materials at hand. The currents of global capital and its accompanying media streams still pass into localized cultural topographies in order to meet with consumer audiences. If the visuals can find a way of seeping into the imagescape around us, they also provide the means for those digital manifestations to be chopped up, sewn, flipped and remixed at the whim of new pirate fantasies.

At the same time, in *The Village*, Syjuco also treads on difficult terrain, bringing to the surface what to some might appear to be a permissible internal exotification: her "Filipina-ness" lends credibility to this mish-mash construction of mediated representations standing in for the Philippines in her imagination. However, her confessed fascination with these "made up" Philippines speaks to the ways Asian Americans fetishize Asia in the process of constructing fantasies of homeland. The expectation of an essential root abroad makes scripting these imaginary homelands necessary for positive



Stephanie Syjuco, *Couch Hut*, from the series *The Village (Small Encampments)*, 2006, Fuji lightjet print, courtesy of the artist



Glenn Kaino, still from *Society II Menace*, 2003, video projection, 3'34". image courtesy of The Studio Museum in Harlem

racialized self-identity. Yet these imagined tales overwrite the privilege inherent to the ability to access those fictions, or at the very least, the question of upon whose visage these digitized fantasies get performed. In essence, acting out the compulsory identification with an Asian motherland erases the key differences of power and access that may exist between Asian Americans and those living in Asia. By implicating herself, Syjuco frustrates totalizing categories of identity, tracing the limits of a unitary Filipino-ness, much less a transnational Asia / Asian America.

This highlights the potentially complex arrangement of alignments enacted through any pirate practice. If piracy motivates questions of potential disloyalties, the results cannot, and should not, describe a singular political platform with uncontested investments and interests. Disloyalty doesn't entail only progressive moves. Even within a series like *The Village*, what would seem to be conflicting readings of neo-Orientalism and futurist agency can both consciously coexist. This kind of productive tension builds a space for a more nuanced discourse that both maintains and emerges from the mobility of the pirate.

Not only does *The Village* recall scenes from since-debunked, imaginary motherland tales, through her process Syjuco, but also it complicates representations of Filipino culture. She mashes images of traditional agrarian dress and homes with the digital pixelization of the image's surface. This pixel fiction points to the low-grade quality of the photos, while also suggesting potential readings not so calcified in a primitivized past, present, and future. Traces of computer technology and

traditional modes of agrarian life literally coexist rather than operating in binary opposition to one another.

The hazy figures travel in and out of the domestic present. And though the original images give a sense of frozen temporality, this digital phase shift activates their presence, imbuing them with the haunting agency of ghosts. Where otherwise they might simply be poorly taken photographs, cut out and resituated in her apartment, their texture gives them a peculiar presence. Pixel fictions create an imagined sense of spectral purpose. They are a technologically enabled *past-present*,⁸ forcing a reevaluation of an Orientalized Philippines in mediated representation while also reactivating Syjuco's own domestic space with evidence of a dioramic playtime, a pirate futurist process of storytelling, which simultaneously reassesses home and homeland.

Fight Club in Black Korea

In a 2003 video piece, entitled *Society II Menace*, Glenn Kaino redubbed the infamous opening of the 1993 Hollywood directorial debut of the brothers Allen and Albert Hughes: *Menace II Society*. In the original scene, the two young African American male protagonists, O-dog and Kaydee, are pitted against the Korean American couple running a South LA liquor store. Distrustful storeowners surveilled and accosted O-dog and Kaydee as they shop, heightening tensions until things come to a head after the Korean American man makes an off-hand comment about the teens' mothers. O-dog shoots the storeowners and robs the bodies before he and a frightened Kaydee flee the store.

The scene's operating logic hinges on the facile conflation of black masculinity with impulsive violence and the utter alienness of the shopkeepers within the community. These join to reinforce the inevitability of retaliation against the Korean American couple. The shopkeepers give off a familiar hostility, a greasy, racist coating that just won't uncongale from the top of the mouth. It manifests in the skittish shadowing of the young duo around the store. Some of it lies in the cultural assumptions given to the weight of unblinking, shifty almond eyes. But it's also the words, that harsh alien inflection, each syllable licked with condescension and suspicion. Depicted as ignorant and far too different to ever empathize with the surrounding community, they criminalize their customers. Their subsequent deaths are an unavoidable consequence of this prejudice. This unbending depiction of Korean American culpability rationalizes and makes possible what would otherwise be an outrageous and equally unyielding depiction of black machismo.

Swaths of Los Angeles had already burned a year before *Menace II Society's* release during the infamous 1992 riots. Chunks of it were still charred with dark scar tissue, but the thickets of politicians' promises had already started to thin. Communities still remembered news media images of African Americans and Latinos rushing in and out of broken storefronts "trying to get theirs" and stony-faced Korean American men armed and ready to protect their property.

This also was two years after Latasha Harlins's death—a bullet fired from the gun wielded by Korean American shopkeeper Soon Da Ju

coldly caught the back of her fifteen-year-old head. The older Korean American woman running the South Los Angeles corner store accused Latasha of stealing an orange juice and Latasha wouldn't stand for it. But Latasha was neither the one with the piece under the counter nor was she the one who feared the community on the other side of the register. Usually Soon Da Ju did not run the front of the store; she was covering for her husband, who was on break. Nervous and agitated, the shopkeeper escalated the situation and Latasha was senselessly killed because of a bottle of juice. Soon Da Ju's sentence amounted to a slap on the wrist, infuriating members of the South Los Angeles African American community. The case became the epitome of every disrespectful action, act of racial profiling, and the economic disparity between Korean American storeowners and their clientele. By the time of the riots, many framed the resulting damage to storefronts—whether Korean owned or not—as the result of the broken relations between the Los Angeles Korean American and African American communities.⁹

The same year that *Menace* first lit up movie screens, Ice Cube spit his frustration with racial profiling in Korean American owned liquor stores on his strident track *Black Korea*, punctuating his lyrics with the threat of a fiery end to the businesses in question:

*So don't follow me, up and down your
market
Or your little chop suey as'll be a target
of the nationwide boycott*

*Juice with the people, that's what the boy
got
So pay respect to the black fist
or we'll burn your store, right down to a
crisp
And then we'll see ya!
Cause you can't turn the ghetto into Black
Korea.¹⁰*

His words simultaneously identify the wrongful criminalization of black patrons while reinforcing a vitriolic xenophobia. He closes the song and its image of the store's burnt cinders with a warning against the imagined desire of Korean Americans to turn South Los Angeles communities into the spectral locale of the title, mimicking the kind of rhetoric loosely thrown about by anti-immigrant groups. Ice Cube's land is all black, and the presence of Korean Americans taints this purity. His definitive narrative draws the limits of understanding at a neo-*War of the Worlds*: aliens versus natives, South Central-style. On the other side, many in the Korean American community called for a boycott of Cube's album, yet meaningful conversations around the impulse behind his lyrics were few and far between. His threats of violence, and in a sense, proud claiming of the very real destruction of thousands of small businesses during the riots, overshadowed the legitimacy of his cry of racial profiling.

Such narratives of racialized antagonisms inexorably occlude any of the nuances and complications in the relationships between the two communities. Where could there possibly be room for the community building relationships between

African American and Korean American organizations and churches that had been in tense negotiation before the riot even took place?¹¹ What of the broader dynamics of immigration, war, histories of business ownership, economic disenfranchisement, civil rights, and nationalist struggles? And perhaps of greatest importance, what of the political context that isolated this so-called Black Korea, an expendable land shaped through National Guard-enforced embargo, to burn with civil unrest in April 1992? If *Menace* positioned itself as a treatise on the reality of "hood life," then within this choked discourse the celluloid death of the two storeowners became a narrative inevitability, a vengeful comeuppance, named justice, which outshined all competing intricacies.

In his piece created ten years later, Glenn Kaino redubbed the violent intro of *Menace* and, through the split between the new vocal mix and original filmic intent, hints at a suggestive intertwining of Asian American and African American communities that frustrates the reductive resolution of the Hughes brothers' original scene.

The visuals still unravel the same way. Larenz Tate's braided O-dog and Tyrin Turner's fade-topped Kaydee still stroll into the store. June Kyoto Lu's and Toshi Toda's unnamed grocers still eye and accost the pair. And after a disrespectful, offhanded comment about their mothers sparks the deadly climax, O-dog and Kaydee still scramble away, leaving the two shopkeepers dead on the floor. The difference lies in the driving narrative the vocal track creates. Lu's and Toda's characters speak with an Ebonics-inflected tone and Turner and Tate speak with a mishmash of what might

be Tagalog and Cantonese accents, creating a gap between the original relational intentions and Kaino's speculative disruption.¹²

The redubbing lacks the clean feel of a high-budget imported title, like when Disney reworks a Japanese anime with Hollywood marquee talent and precision sound engineering. Kaino's intervention has an improvised, making-comments-while-watching-television-in-the-living-room quality. The piece shares some of the loose ethos of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* or the unintentional camp of badly dubbed martial arts films.

Like Syjuco, Kaino claims a rough bootleg quality as a productive tool to form a pirate futurist reinterpretation. The almost playful tone of the voice actors chafes against the actions onscreen. Kaino creates a dubbing gap by reworking some of the lines themselves to carry out not just a change of accents, but also cultural sayings and attitudes. Lips and words fall out of sync as original footage and reworked dialogue reveal their differences. Kaino twists Hollywood's techniques against one of its own productions, dub mechanics pushing forth this altered narrative. The disconnect makes it impossible to passively lock into the logic presented by the film. Instead the audience is asked to parse the relationship between skin and voice, and the uncomfortable implications of the linkages we draw.

The change compromises whatever identificatory potential the filmic representations of angry black masculinity or passive-aggressive Asian prejudice and fear might have had for filmgoers. These Asian American and African American visual tropes are exposed in the way they reinforce and produce one another. And any selective con-

textual logic that may have imparted a sense of justice to the original shootings dissipates under the new scrutiny necessitated by the reinflected dialogue. The deaths can no longer be cleanly sold as revenge killings. Instead the piece highlights the inexplicability of each shopkeeper's prejudice and O-dog's brutal reaction.¹³

While this disruptive quality to the dubbing stands out most strongly, the piece attempts to truly operate as a translated filmic product. Voice work of this kind is typically associated with imported or exported movies as an alternative to subtitles. This redubbing suggests the broad consumption of these filmic images: their distribution through global currents of representation. However, the piece also questions what kind of audience might demand this particular kind of flipped dialogue for legibility. The evidence of dubbing demands an unseen but intended audience.

Considering the visual and vocal components separately, each draws upon racialized and gendered caricatures. But the combination of these limited representations also imagines new possibilities. At points, Kaino shifts the agency granted to each of the characters. For example, instead of silently following O-dog and Kaydee around the store, the Korean American woman snaps back at them rather than cowering at their verbal abuse. While her profiling of O-dog and Kaydee still remains unjustifiable, she literally has a voice with which to resist their demeaning language and the filmic depiction of her as a skittish, passive Asian woman, there only to emphasize O-dog's defiant strength.

Through the reformatted narrative, new questions also emerge: Were these revised versions

of O-dog and Kaydee raised in the Philippines or Korea? Are they multiracial? Does the accent of the shopkeepers now change the expectation of where they live in relation to their store? Are they an active part of the surrounding community instead of just being ignorant outsiders as implied in the original narrative? This dialogic turn frustrates the kind of stifling binarism that *Menace* attempted to build. These questions frustrate racial over-determinations, demonstrating the impossibility of Asian American and African American identities to be understood as discrete, not just in their representational opposition, but also in their cultural and historical connectivity.

In this way, *Society II Menace* is a speculative fiction told through existing representations. Through pirate futurist tactics, Kaino invokes dimensions of interaction between communities of color that are illegible within the Hollywood movie framework. At the same time, Kaino's work also avoids suggesting a simplistic alternative cure-all. Whatever realities may have existed or continue to play out in the individual relationships and community-wide dynamics between Asian American and African American communities, Kaino's work seems to suggest the impossibility of definitive documentation; those realities are no more visible and explicated through his work than the pop-culture representations that fuel the endeavor. If pirate futurism suggests an oceanic field through which fixed relationships can be dissolved in favor of multiple possibilities, Kaino's flipped narrative carries weight vis-à-vis its dislocating questions rather than singular answers. The transgressive potential of the piece lies in the suggestion, or perhaps hope,

that a community already exists and necessitates this kind of dubbed translation. At the same time, Kaino seems to acknowledge through the format of the piece that either Hollywood or the networks of actual black market pirates stands ready with a target-marketed release just for them.

Asian American pirate futurists dream of other social possibilities.

These artists' works begin with such bootlegged elements as snippets of epic cinema with Hollywood bankrolls—gritty narratives with a sheen of authenticity, like *Menace II Society*. It reworks ethnographic web images; pixilated photos capturing calcified Asian motherlands. Images with enough reality to make viewers want and need to identify—to find themselves in the course of those collectively consumed tales. Yet it is from the inevitable inadequacy of these representations, their apparent deficiencies, that pirate futurism can begin its work. Like the pixel fictions of Syjuco's *Village*, pirate futurism locates social possibility in the gaps of these failed images and their translation in each new locale.

It is this very process of pirate futurism that describes Asian American identity as a constantly shifting and active negotiation. Reclaiming the indelible stamp of alienness on Asian American-ness to shape a transnational mobility, pirate futurism constructs suggestions of other communities, conceptions of belonging, and home.

And this impulse to envision something different has always been the impetus for social change.

NOTES

1. Michael Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *The Visual Culture Reader*. editor Nicholas Mirzoeff. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 244. [emphasis mine]
2. The popularity of the Philippines as a so-called body double for Vietnam in these films hints at the unspoken colonial history of the Philippines in relation to the United States. Through her title, Syjuco also suggests the racialized homogenization of the old insult inflicted upon many Asian Americans: "you all look the same." Syjuco expanded this piece in late 2006 for an installation at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York that was a part of their exhibition *Altered, Stitched and Gathered*. She used the same technique to rework the films *Hamburger Hill* and *Apocalypse Now*, which also used the Philippines as replacement for Vietnam.
3. Asian American scholar Robert Lee explains the development of the perception of Asian American foreignness within U.S. culture through the figure of the *gook* (his name for what I here term the secret agent). His figure also encompasses the positive stereotype of the "model minority." He notes that "Asian American success is seen as camouflage for subversion." Like a secret agent whose covert identity occasionally slips, the model minority, even more than the unassimilated separatist, poses a threat because of their deep infiltrations into American social, political and economic life. Because of this, many of the scandals of supposed national treason or subversion have dealt with individuals who otherwise might be perceived as successful: businesspeople or scientists. Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999, 11.
4. I am indebted to Stephanie Syjuco's invocation of undercover agents and the "global Filipino underground" in relation to her own practice that inspired this reference to pirates as a position of reclaimed agency. Stephanie Syjuco, "Unsolicited Collaborations and Undercover Agents: Notes from a Local Underground," unpublished thesis, 2005.
5. Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity," *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005, 4. [emphasis mine]
6. As Alondra Nelson briefly notes, the name is also a critique of Italian Futurism's technological fetishization and the privileging of particular bodies in relation to mechanical and technological progress. In particular, the agent of these developments is clearly named in the young, male citizen. Therefore many of AfroFuturism's projects investigate the stereotypically oppositional relationship of blackness and technology. Alondra Nelson, "Future Texts: An Introduction," *Afrofuturism (A Special Issue of Social Text)*, #71, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 2002), 1–15.
7. Lisa Lowe, "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique," *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 1–36.
8. Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," *Location of Culture* (New York : Routledge, 1994), 7.
9. Edward T. Chang provides a more in depth reading of the political and economic factors that shaped the racial tensions fueling the riots in "America's First Multiethnic 'Riots,'" *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990's*, editor Karin Aguilar-San Juan, (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 101–117.
10. Ice Cube, "Black Korea," *Death Certificate*, Priority Records, 1993, Track 15.
11. Bong Hwan Kim, former director of the Korean Youth and Community Center in Los Angeles, narrates the challenges of building interracial co

alitions amongst the African American and Korean American communities both before and after the riots in: Elaine H. Kim, "Between Black and White: An Interview with Bong Hwan Kim," *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990's*, editor Karin Aguilar-San Juan, (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 71–100.

12. Within the logic of the new narrative, Kaino seems to suggest that this ethnic shift from Korean American characters to Filipino and Chinese accents is due to the dislocation of the scene from South Central Los Angeles to the East Los Angeles County suburb of Alhambra (something noted in the closing voice over)—which is more heavily Filipino and Chinese American. While this fails to engage the specificity of the original cultural context and narrative in its particular relationship with the Korean immigrant community, Kaino seems to acknowledge through the shift the ways the representation had come to stand in for a broader Asian American / African American dynamic over the intervening decade. He hints at this in the "inauthentic" execution of the accents, which come across as actors playing these roles rather than executing their natural vocal intonation. This in turn calls attention to the fact that Toda and Lu, who play the Korean American couple, are not ethnically Korean to begin with, speaking to the way some (particularly East) Asian American bodies are indiscriminately implicated by these representations regardless of their specific ethnicity or occupation.
13. Christine Y. Kim, et al., *Black Belt*, New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2003, 54–5.