

# COLLAGING IDENTITY: poetics to “un-one” the Filipino

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## BACKGROUND

“The identity of the Filipino today is of a person asking what is his identity.” – Nick Joaquin<sup>1</sup>

I return to the subject of my identity frequently in my writing—migrant, Filipino, queer. I aimed for a theoretical basis to help me work through the complexities I often feel when reflecting upon not just the collisions of these experiences, but the collisions inherent in the Filipino identity itself. It is an identity wrought with colonial and imperial encounters, with nationalisms, reclamations, and appropriations, and with precariousness. I’m curious to find a frame of mind that may either cohere such collisions, or otherwise understand its multiplicity.

What is the relationship between violence and beauty? How can one queer identity, and what does that act offer us? What is the nature of Filipino identity? In what ways is this identity settled, negotiated, and unsettled?



## METHOD

I engaged with the following texts and art -

- *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* by Renate Lorenz
- *Beyond the Nation: Diasporic Filipino Literature and Queer Reading* by Martin Joseph Ponce
- *Ephemera* series by Ulises Carrion
- *Mirror Box* by Ulises Carrion
- *The New Art of Making Books* by Ulises Carrion
- *Ulises Carrion: The Big Monster* by the Institute of
- *Delights of Ephemera: Mail Art During COVID-19* at the Usdan Gallery in Bennington College
- *Troika* by Charles Ginnever
- “Autotopographies” by Jennifer A. Gonzalez
- Letters between Bjork and Timothy Morton

- to cohere an eclectic frame of thinking, informing a poesis shaped by an attention to collage/assemblage, ephemera, negative space, and queer theory.



## IMPLICIT ARGUMENTS

The collage offers an attentiveness to relationships, to their quality/nature, to the visions released and generated from them, and to the act of construction, the assemblage of which may imply intention, incomplete control, and sometimes violence. In my manuscript, one can argue

- That **the colonial encounter pervades** in the present, manifesting in various ways, including acts of memory and history.
- That encounter is constant, is in **constant relation** with ourselves.
- That in our **precarious identities**,<sup>3</sup> we are in a constant **state of becoming**.<sup>4</sup> That our identities are not fixed and will respond to new contexts.
- That we can re-orient an identity mired with violence into an identity of **generous ambiguity**--generous in terms of the generative possibilities for the future.
- That we can begin from a place of beyond-ness than one of other-ness. That we can begin from a place of **real complexity than mythic purity**. That the place of real complexity points to fantasies, that the Filipino identity is poised to embody.
- That collaged identities carry a **relational promise**, and that relational practices—awareness of the connectedness of memory and beings—is essential to intend just choices.
- That the **embrace of an unsettled identity** can offer more richness and truth than one that is fixed

## COLLAGE/ASSEMBLAGE

Several qualities attracted me to the idea of the collage and assemblage:

- their imperfect, individual, human-made quality
- Relation of the unrelated, imbuing new meanings, sometimes through the literal act of layering
- **Artifice** -
  - sometimes **the violence** of such: the occasional rifts at the edges, revealing their constructed nature, the dismemberment of certain parts to create new wholes,
  - and sometimes the precise, balanced, and seamless arrangement, **intentioned** practices of a collage aesthetic.
- **Queer vibes**
  - The multiple, refusal, blurred boundaries
  - Fantastical, generative
  - As drag, the “productive connections of natural and artificial, animate and inanimate...all that which tends more to produce **connections** to others and other things than to represent them.” She continues “What becomes visible in this drag is not people, individuals, subjects, or identities, but rather **assemblages**; indeed those that do not work at any ‘doing gender/sexuality/race,’ but instead at an ‘**undoing**’” (Lorenz).<sup>2</sup>

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## REFERENCES

1. Cited by Nick Joaquin in *Beyond the Nation: Diasporic Filipino Literature and Queer Reading* (2012) on pg 12.
2. Pg 21 of Renate Lorenz’s *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (2012), citing Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004).
3. Pg 119 of *Queer Art*, citing Stefan Brecht’s *Queer Theatre*, describing “precarious subjects” as “momentary stable.”
4. As in “becoming otherwise,” to point “elsewhere, and when it is embodied, to bring the elsewhere home,” citing Butler’s *Undoing Gender* on pg 107 of *Queer Art*.
5. Excerpt of Jose Garcia Villa’s poem “5” in *Volume Two* (1949), cited in *Beyond the Nation* on pg 4.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

What are the Filipino nationalist movements, what do they respond to, what do they promise, and what are their problems? What is the purpose of identity, what are its limitations, and what alternatives exist? In what ways is Filipino identity changing today—in terms of ethnicity, language, gender, religion, and otherwise? How is Filipino identity today engaged in the act of becoming?

To , become , a , One!  
The , precision , of , un-oneing ,  
The , procedure , of , dissembling ,

Is , the , process , of , expiation ,  
For , the , sing , of , Nothing.  
*This , Absurdity , is — Unification.*<sup>5</sup>



## IMAGES

Top, Left-to-Right, images by author: *Troika* (1979) by Charles Ginnever. *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (2012) by Renate Lorenz. *Beyond the Nation* (2012) by Nick Joaquin. *Ephemera* No. 1, 6, and 9 (1977-98) by Ulises Carrion. Bottom-left, image by author: *Mirror Box* (1979) by Ulises Carrion. Bottom-right: 1979 poster by Ulises Carrion at Galerie St. Petri, Lund, courtesy of Institute for Studies on Latin American Art.