I wish in this essay to address two concerns: (1) reflexive or theoretical knowledge and the possibility of its production in a cultural location such as ours, and (2) the largely unexplored nexus between the concepts of gender/sexuality, and nation-ness. While Western-derived knowledges and categories are routinely adapted to the concrete particularities of social studies in the Philippines, very little thought is given to the social and material conditions that make the idea and project of social studies possible and plausible in the first place. Thus, even as Foucauldian-style analysis or “genealogical critique” — that is, the speculative tracing back of instances of “truth” and “common sense” to the moment of their historical production within a discursive regime or practice — is becoming the darling of many a discipline in local academia, little focus is being brought to bear upon the question concerning the social and material conditions which must be present locally for this form of self-reflexive knowledge to be credibly imagined and produced. I tend to think myself that one such condition would be the immanence and stable operation of a discursivity — the so-called “epistemic field” or “Foucauldian archive.” So if, say, the American feminist philosopher Judith Butler, undertakes a genealogical critique of gender and sexuality in contemporary Western culture, she is able to do so because she knows she can draw from the discursive riches of the biomedical, psychoanalytic, philosophical, political disciplines that have developed in her own American culture. But the existence in her specific social location of extensive and detailed empirical representations and rationalizations of everyday life (from the time at least of the Enlightenment) may have no real counterpart in such locations in the non-West as the Philippines in particular. For, notwithstanding four hundred years of Western hegemonic influence and rule, the Philippines retains a highly oral — as opposed to textual — culture. I am reminded of this every time I am overtaken by the impulse to hit a
few good books in the library for what they may have to say about who or what I am as Filipino, or about what Filipino gender/sexuality and nation-ness is, and then discover anew that the material I crave hardly exists. It remains to be produced by people such as myself and my disciplinary colleagues — which makes me think of Judith Butler's concept of the *performative*, of the wish that remains wishful if only because it is never quite satisfied.

What incited the above reflections was my participation at a recently concluded international conference on sexuality and human rights in Manchester, England.¹ Besides the amazing bargains at the local market of this rather nice and queer-friendly city, what was extraordinary about the experience was the overwhelming presence at the conference of academics and other sorts of professionals who had succeeded in so thoroughlygoingly textualizing everything about their social and cultural environment’s past, present, dreams (in the form, hugely, of that academically lucrative enterprise called “critical theory”), that whenever they spoke, it was with the complete and unflappable confidence that such an achievement brings. (Such self-assurance is apparently portable: there were not a few white anthropologists in the Manchester conference who spoke with just this kind of confidence about societies other than their own). Coming from where I come, I was in no position to display the same “discursive confidence” in speaking, say, of Philippine “subjectivity.” For while there have been a number of attempts by local nationalist researchers to piece together a theoretical account of an indigenous “Filipino self,” none (owing, in most cases, to their rabidly nationalist pedigree), have resulted in a convincing tropology for use in referring to the forms and nuances, and material components, of a Philippine subjectivity. Whatever other elements one would include in such a tropology, the element of the “psycho-spiritual,” would surely need to be one of them, given the importance of religiosity for most Filipinos. The proponents of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) assumed as much in the early 1970s, when they came to the decision to denote the Tagalog-Filipino psyche, “kaluluwa,” the

¹The conference was sponsored by the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society. The second of its kind, it brought together around a hundred researchers and scholars (mostly white) from all over the world.
transliterated meaning of which is "soul." As much as this particular construction might strike the rational mind as "superstitious," it does coincide with social fact. As an example of this: when a Filipino claims to be "hearing voices," his family, invariably, brings him to a manghihilot or albularyoa, as opposed to a psychiatrist or some other member of the psychological profession (although, for the families who can afford it, this could happen in time). While this might, in part, be due to the fact that the Philippine population as a whole is not as decisively "psychiatricized" as populations in the West, the deeper reason, in my view, is that Filipino conceptions of selfhood persist in being intricately in the language and idioms of Folk Catholic symbology. To my mind, locally performed and mediated Catholicism may well be the only "discourse" — which is to say, textual discourse, with accompanying ritualistic performances — capable of providing most Filipinos with a stable and more or less uniform set of significations. Indeed, historians Reynaldo Ileto and Vicente Rafael, in different but related studies, refer to the power of religious texts to shape the contours of Philippine popular "psychology." Let me point out that, notwithstanding Ileto and Rafael, the various ways this religiosity functions have not been fully examined by any of the social sciences, not even by such indigenizing and nativistic schools of thought as Sikolohiyang Pilipino and Pilipinohiya.

What implications might this hold for the study of Philippine gender/sexuality? Permit me at this juncture to provide a reading of one of the most cogent and provocative attempts to rethink the problem of

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3One such relatively stable structure, both textually and orally obtaining in the Christianized regions of the Philippines, seems to be the religiously denominated Tagalog-Filipino loob/labas. See my Philippine Gay Culture: the Last Thirty Years (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), pp. 97-107, for a detailed discussion of loob/labas and bakla identity.

identity and gender/sexuality in the West today — not because I think a homology exists between this particular account of Western gender/sexuality, and our own attempts to account for our own sex/gender system, but because I would be happy to see its critical deployment in local interrogations of Philippine gender/sexuality. Following the appearance, in the early part of the 1990s, of Judith Butler’s immensely influential book, *Gender Trouble*, the discussion in the West of gender and sexuality underwent a crucial transformation.¹ No longer was sex a biological template, a “given,” upon which gender rests — as its random and oftentimes inequitable elaboration — but a performativity. Sex, gender, and sexuality (and the identity they collectively evoke and represent), according to this view, are the effects of repetitive performances of acts and discourses which retroactively produce their subject, precisely, as their effect. Thus, according to Butler’s thesis of performativity, identity is constituted by what ones does, not by what one is. (Or perhaps a better way of saying this is: what one is is what one does.) In other words, the “I” comes about only through and in performance within the matrix of gender. There is no prior subject who chooses or expresses its gender, which is nothing if not a “reiterative and citational practice”: the compulsory repetition of norms that animate (subjectivate) and constrain (subject) the gendered subject. The interesting thing in all of this is that the very same conditions that constitute the subject provide as well the resources for subverting or resisting the subject.

I shall not address here the intricacies of Butler’s theory. Suffice it to say that it has enabled countless dissident projects in lesbian and gay studies, particularly in relation to lesbian and gay mimicry or “camp.” Butler looks at camp as an ironic allegorization of heterosexual gender, “a parodic repetition [that] exposes... the illusion of gender as intractable depth and inner substance.”² Thus, although not subversive per se, camp tends to engender subversion precisely to the degree that it literalizes the ambiguity or slippage attending the repetitive scheme that is gender: the discontinuity between the ideal and the event; the

²*Gender Trouble*, pp. 146-47.
inevitable failure of the performance to live up to its much prefigured and promised achievement.

A crucial component of Butler’s genealogical account of identity-formation is what she has termed the “heterosexual matrix” — that is to say, the mode of intelligibility, the signifying structure or regulative discourse which renders certain acts and performances intelligible, while denying this very same intelligibility to others. She divides this matrix, already familiar to feminist thinkers, into three constituent parts, each of which functions, to all intents and purposes, as an ineluctable binarism: sex (male or female); gender (masculine or feminine); and sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual). We all know the ideal combinations: male, masculine and heterosexual; female, feminine and heterosexual.⁷

This second part of Butler’s theory is a crucial one, since to my mind, it grounds her idea of performativity in historical and culturally specific conditions. In trying to distance her theory from social constructionism, Butler concedes the existence of a realm of acts that do not become constructed by this matrix.⁸ This strikes me as another way of saying that the matrix itself, as Butler thinks of it, is not an essential universal signifying system in any way, but a contingent and culturally variable one.

I am drawn to Butler’s formulations because her idea that identity is always a matter of doing — and, therefore, that ontology is an illusion of ritualistic or repetitive performance — presents what in my view is a valid trans-cultural perspective on the matter; likewise, her insight concerning power’s productivity, that exercises of agency are themselves always forms of negotiations with existing norms. Beginning with her account of the constitution of Western identities by means of norms that, while repetitively performed or acted out, are never fully embodied or achieved, a Filipino researching his culture may yet come to an altogether different matrix within which such performativity functions — a matrix of power within which some performances signify coherent identity, while others do not. Of course, Butler’s argument that the “matrix of intelligibility,” that is, the structure within which these performances achieve coherence, become sensible, differs from culture

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⁷Gender Trouble, pp. 17.
⁸Gender Trouble, pp. 9.
to culture, and, within a culture, from place to place, presents a daunting challenge to any cultural — especially cross-cultural — study. Given the pre-textual orality of Philippine cultures, perhaps the best way to describe this matrix is by combining textual interpretation of the available discursive material with serious ethnographic work.

In the case, for example, of local constructions of gender/sexuality, attention could be given to their enforcement and naturalization on the level of the everyday, by means of both representation (popular images on media, in folk or oral knowledges, etc.) and practice (ritual performances of gendered personhoods at the home, inside the workplace, etc.). In this connection, one of the most obvious differences between Western and is the absence of an indigenous homo/hetero distinction of sexual orientation. This has, in fact, been an important focus of the work I have done on the “bakla/homosexual dynamic,” in which I have argued that the confusion of local categories of gender with Western categories of sexuality obscures the fact that, for most Filipinos, their socialization remains only superficially influenced by biomedical discourse. Local identity isn’t primarily referenced as sexual, to begin with. Filipino males, for example, in contradistinction to their counterparts in the West, will not necessarily interpellate their participation in homosexual sex, even if this happens on a regular basis, as “homosexual,” for as long as certain protocols and provisos are clearly in place: for instance, that the masculine males in question are the insertors; that they remain emotionally detached from their partners who have to be unmistakably bakla or effeminate; that money, not pleasure, be their primary interest in the affair; and that they commit homosexual acts fully confident of the future fact that they will finally outgrow the whole thing, and will at the appointed time be happily married with children.

I have recently been thinking of another example. While there is a bipolar male/female (lalake/babae) sex categorization in the Philippines, there may in fact be more than the gender binary of masculine feminine. Lilia Quindoza Santiago, Filipino feminist, poet, and critic, has pointed out that the word for gender in the Philippines is kasarian, a word that semantically affords a little more flexibility than its inescapably bifurcated Western counterpart. Sari-sari in Tagalog means “all and

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9See the Introduction to my Philippine Gay Culture: the Last Thirty Years.
sundry.” This hints at the kind of diversity to gender emblematized by the playful nonsense rhyme: girl, boy, bakla, tomboy that many Filipinos remember as one of the forms of children’s play. A nonsense rhyme, this song nonetheless establishes, in the Filipino child’s imagination, images of four distinct genders, as well as of their hierarchical positioning relative to each other. Thus, despite this allowance for the bakla and tomboy, they are merely to be seen as inferior forms of the “girl” and “boy” against which they remain juxtaposed and continue to be defined. If Filipino selfhood is indeed by and large figured in terms of local modes of psycho-spirituality, then we might perhaps conclude that an ontological heterosexuality of desire is adamantly assumed by the Philippine sex/gender system. Hence, we can see that an allowance for gender diversity, in our case, doesn’t necessarily amount to an escape from heteronormativity.

To repeat a rather vital point: the norms of Philippine gender, instead of being rigidly and textually inscribed in sexological language within uniform or temporally and spatially stable hegemonic discourses are, for the most part, orally signified and performed ritualistically and in a largely prereflective way. Because of this, a researcher wishing to undertake their study and theoretical elaboration may need to do more ethnographic observation than simple discursive or genealogical critique. Needless to say, these sorts of observations have yet to be made, the few studies which already exist being, in my view, provisional and preliminary at best (and therefore highly contestable).

I would like now to come to the second point I want to make in this paper. Theories of gender, including if not most especially Butlerian performativity, can prove to be rather insightful as well, when used as to explain an imaginary thing like Filipino “nation-ness”—which is to say, one’s identity as nationally significative, one’s selfhood as Filipino.

Certainly, this analytic inter-facing of gender and nation has been done before. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, taking up Benedict Anderson’s rather unexpectedly fruitful suggestion that we begin to look at nationality as being as inescapable as gender — Anderson actually says, “In the modern world, everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender” — proposes that we begin to conceptualize a “habitation/nation” system, one that may be seen as analogous to the sex/gender system. According to Sedgwick, the habitation/nation sytem is
“the set of discursive and institutional arrangements that mediate between the physical fact that each person inhabits, at a given time, a particular geographic space, and the far more abstract, sometimes even apparently unrelated organization of... his/her national identity.\textsuperscript{10}

Having thus established this analogy, Sedgwick moves on to consider just how naturalized and unavoidable nation-ness has become, despite the by-now-easy probability of one’s geographic mobility: one’s national identity does not necessarily fall away from one’s person just because one has crossed national boundaries and moved to another country, for example. Likewise, the Nation-State becomes, from this analogical frame, merely one of the sites through which a certain kind of nation-ness is promulgated, in pretty much the same way that the family or school is an important institution by which gender roles are socially inculcated and enforced — but neither can the family or school be said to be the only social institutions that accomplish this very same goal.

On the other hand, much in the same way that there is no one way for gender to be conceptualized and experienced all over the world, nation-ness is likewise not a uniform or essentially immutable signifier of identity, whose material effects are necessarily comparable from one location to another. For instance, diasporic Filipinos experience their nation-ness in completely different ways from Filipinos living in the Philippines.

All this makes for very interesting and disciplinally adventurous thinking, I must admit. If anything, it demonstrates just how interesting crossings between areas of study and methodologies can be. What I wish to consider at this point is another example of theoretical cross-ferilization: the fruitfulness of deploying the idea of performativity and its identity-effects in the project of explicating this seemingly unrelated thing called nation-ness.

If national identity is a performativity, then we might say that being a Filipino is not what one is, but what one does. There is no simple and singular performance of Filipino-ness, for it is a norm that can never

be fully inhabited, only cited repetitively in a life-long process of actualization. There is thus no essentially Filipino subjectivity, only its performative production as the effect of acts and discourses that do not simply characterize but actually constitute it. Agency, or the possibility of subverting the Filipino norm, therefore lies not in a pre-social realm of any purely experienced Filipino freedom, but in the variation between the ideal and its performance — in this case, between the essential fiction of Filipino-ness itself, and its particular enactments by *subjectivated* Filipino subjects — as forms of negotiation with normative power.

Pursuing the analogy further, we can say that the matrix of intelligibility within which Filipino nation-ness signifies cannot be assumed to be the same as the matrix within which American nation-ness signifies. In fact, there is no one matrix within which one’s performances of nation-ness are made sensible or insensible: not even the Philippine Nation-State enjoys the monopoly of controlling or perhaps even producing the discourse of Filipino-ness, as Filipino-ness is as much a product of intra-national as of international political enforcements. Geographic location likewise exercises some bearing on nation-ness, inasmuch as one’s location changes one’s relationship to one’s nationalism and national identity: it’s been said that one becomes “more Filipino” when one leaves the Philippines. Moreover, the content of this matrix variably includes the motley calculus of language, sartorial self-presentation, cuisine, bodily comportment, speech and gesturality, etc., and these are also made variable depending on where the performance occurs, to which socio-economic class, gender or sexuality, religion, ethnicity, etc. the person performing his or her nation-ness belongs, who happen to be in attendance at a particular performance, etc.

What seems inarguable enough is this: the task of defamiliarizing and visibilizing nation-ness is just as difficult as the task of defamiliarizing and visibilizing gender. One of Anderson’s most insightful pronouncements relates to how nation is most profitably to be seen not as an ideology against which there exist conceptual tools with which it may be denaturalized and dismantled, but as a dimension of modern-day existence as ineluctable as gender or kinship.\(^\text{11}\) As is conceivably the

case with gender, however, the performativity of nation-ness among Filipinos staying in the Philippines evinces rather peculiar characteristics, some of which involve the mutual interimplication of gendered and national identities and their normative formation in ways that may not exist — I am almost certain — anywhere else in the world.

An example of a Philippine-specific site of performances that are, to my mind, both nationally configured and engendering may be seen in that strangely obsolescent, post-War, male-inclusive institution called "Citizens Military Training." Originally intended as a contingency measure that would bolster the reserved unit of the local armed forces during the American occupation — in light of the then-increasing militarization of Japan and its imminent invasion — the CMT may well be the only monolithic homosocial masculine institution that exists in the Philippines today. All Filipino males of a certain age and educational attainment, in theory if not in practice, are required to undergo this type training, which is as much a rite of masculine passage as a vector through which patriotism is intended by the Nation-State to flow all throughout the masculinely spectralized, national body.

What is interesting is that, officially, CMT's raison d'être can only be a national or nationalist one, even as its actual social function isn't. Notwithstanding the fact that I completed twelve units of it a full decade ago, I cannot for the life of me remember how to fire an M-16 in order to defend my country, but I do remember — only too clearly — how it was like to pass for "straight" while marching and saluting snappily, in the hopes that this would be enough to avoid contemptuous and embarrassing detection by the corps commander. (On the other hand, the clearly and unapologetically effeminate do have their roles to play in CMT: as much-reviled sissy medics or weak-wristed members of the commissary.) In the case of CMT, we therefore see an instance of Filipino performativity as being at once about gender/sexuality and nation-ness, in all its local and translocal dimensions — with the latter goal concealing and thereby legitimating the former. As any bakla who has needed to endure its attendant torment and humiliation will aver: the real purpose of CMT isn't so much to instill patriotic zeal in its conscripts, as to extol a certain normative form of local masculinity, primarily at the expense of masculinity's easily identified and abjected other (which is the bakla, precisely.)
But this doesn’t end here. Nowadays, my performance of nation-ness seems to be strictly confined to the movies — particularly, to the “last-full show,” which I find I am inclined to attend, and which is ritually inaugurated with a nationalistic pledge of allegiance to the Philippine flag unfurled cinematically to the unstoppable march of the *Le Marsellaise*-inspired anthem.

Perhaps this is where it’s best to end my paper: the performativity of nation-ness dimming suddenly from the flickering screen, the movie-house dark creeping up from all the corners of one’s sore and expectant sense ... And before anybody knows it, before its knowledge can move from mouth to text, other performances that may or may not engender identity have pleasurably taken place.