

practices and the resurgence of craftivism to further elaborate on how the “second look” exposes accumulative logics. We live in a time where the supposed transparency of a commodity’s production is considered politically ethical and has become a marketing strategy to sell more commodities while obscuring the accumulative practices inherent in their production/consumption. However, if we look past the assumption that Syjuco’s works are a form of “craftivism” and take a “second look,” we can see how Syjuco’s analogue “crafts” rely on digital resources and applications, much in the same way craft artists rely on social media and platforms such as Etsy to sell their works and make a (barely) livable income in a time of increased unemployment. This “second look” is an important practice because it allows us to see how accumulative logics proliferate, even in spaces that are avowedly anti-accumulative.

Perhaps the most important intervention that See makes is her call to imagine other forms of relationality and knowledge production outside of accumulative epistemologies. For example, within Filipinx/American studies, the invisible, erased, or forgotten Filipinx is a common trope that often ignites a desire for recuperation and recognition. Though scholars within Filipinx American studies have been critical of this fact for some time, See’s argument here adds to this critical conversation by reminding us that the will to knowledge, to be knowable, is not only a project of empire, but is also made possible by the Filipino primitive. In other words, recuperating the invisible Filipinx is part and parcel with American imperial knowledge production and accumulative epistemologies. See’s work, therefore, offers anti-accumulation, mimesis, irony, and illiteracy as a platform to further rethink Filipinx American ways of knowing and being in the aftermath of empire and the university. More broadly, for scholars and teachers working in the university amidst the COVID-19 crisis, See’s provocation to consider anti-accumulative alternatives is most relevant and prescient. How do we proceed with our scholarship and with our teaching in a time of loss, lack, fear, and the unknown? Perhaps we need to take a “second look” at our own frustrations and desires to return to “normal” and develop ways to create knowledge and communities that resist an epistemology of accumulation that relies on the racial primitive.

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***The Nightcrawlers*, directed by Alexander A. Mora. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Documentary Films, 2019. 40 mins.**

During his run for the presidency, Rodrigo Duterte vowed to launch a war on drugs so ruthless it would overwhelm the country’s funeral parlors. Filipino voters gave him a mandate in 2016 and, as Alexander A. Mora’s *The Nightcrawlers* shows in harrowing pictures drenched with blood and neon, the self-nominated butcher from the

Southern Philippines has over-delivered on his campaign pledge. The film notes in a title card that the body count may have already reached 27,000 in less than three years. Many of the victims hailed from the lower classes.

Alexander A. Mora's short documentary takes its title from the moniker given by social media users to an informal group of Filipino photographers and professional photojournalists covering the killings. The film's title also recalls *Nightcrawler* (2014), a neo-noir and black comedy featuring Jake Gyllenhall as an unethical videographer peddling videos of accidents and crime scenes in Southern California. Unlike Gyllenhall's character, however, the subjects of *The Nightcrawlers* come across not only as fearless but heroic. Raffy Lerma, one of the most accomplished members of the group, articulates their laudable mission halfway into the documentary. He says: "Now, I'm looking for a powerful photo that can really stop this, but I know it might cost a life. Even our lives, but we have to do whatever it takes."

Much of the documentary is comprised of direct cinema footage observing Lerma and the other photographers—not all of them named—at work and while speaking out against the killings. Though inherently voyeuristic, the direct cinema mode (alternately called *cinéma vérité*) implicitly rationalizes its intrusiveness and sensationalism with the promise of an unfiltered view of reality. True crime shows lean on the credibility of direct cinema footage to get away with depicting gruesome violence on mainstream television platforms, and this happens to be the case with *The Nightcrawlers*. The film is replete with pulse-pounding footage of photographers arriving at squat wooden or concrete dwellings to document fresh kills. The camera's unflinching gaze at blood-drenched corpses and audio of the wailing newly bereaved catapults viewers into new corners of Filipino hell. The film also lingers at wakes for the victims, interviewing mourners and catching glimpses of bodies in open caskets.

The impression of unmediated reality occasionally fades, as when the photographers and the loved ones of the recently deceased glance at the filmmaker's camera, as if waiting for a cue to say or do something else to accommodate the filming. This issue is not unique to *The Nightcrawlers*. As is ironically the case with all *cinéma vérité* in the age of reality shows, truly candid moments (those in which subjects seem devoid of self-consciousness in front of the camera) are rare, especially among ordinary people who are not used to being filmed all the time.

It is worth noting, however, that the film's stylized cinematography and editing, along with the techno-inspired musical scoring, provide a welcome counterpoint to the aura of objectivity that *cinéma vérité* footage exudes. The film is packed with time-lapse footage of the grimy metropolis and its human and vehicular traffic, flash-cuts that compress the duration of events and match the trance-like rhythm of the electronic music, and much cross-cutting between talking-head interviews and various media representations of the same topics. This

stylization signals that the film is not merely letting reality unfold onscreen, but rather weaving an intricate narrative about a fraught topic. The slick audio-visuals also hint at the film's foreign authorship, implying a considerable distance between the documentarist and their subjects. In the absence of voice-over narration identifying the filmmaker's subject-position as a Westerner with no prior ties to his subject matter, these elements would have to suffice in acknowledging the imperialistic gaze of the National Geographic-backed documentary.

The crime scene footage alternates with stills taken by the nightcrawlers. As the documentary acknowledges, those widely seen pictures figure the brutality of the Philippine situation with breathtaking clarity and emotional power. Moreover, stills generally provide a depth of detail and an opportunity for contemplation that exceeds the capacity of the video medium. Every photograph and the details inscribed therein could be read as evidentiary material, as socio-political commentary, and even as artistic distillations of history. The tense juxtaposition of the sensationalist video footage and ghostly but also sublime photographs somewhat elevate *The Nightcrawlers* from something resembling hip public affairs reportage on the Global South done by the likes of *Vice* or *60 Minutes* to a more ambitious documentary essay about the irresistible revival of authoritarianism and the role that art and the fourth estate must play in such perilous times. The documentary reflexively explores this angle by asking Lerma to discuss the poetics of representing death in his pictures. Sadly, this portion is underdeveloped.

Despite its title, the documentary does not consistently adopt the perspective of the photographers. The storytelling opens up instead into a wide-ranging description and assessment of Duterte's murderous project by various political and social actors. More surprisingly, the film begins with and periodically returns to a band of mercenaries purportedly hired to dispatch targets that were off-limits to cops. In a self-aggrandizing move, their leader calls himself "Bato," appropriating the nickname of police chief (now Senator) Ronald Dela Rosa who spearheaded the "drug war." The mercenary—let's call him "Bato II" to avoid confusion—boasts not only of multiple kills but of enjoying the protection of the authorities. The filmmaker's choice to begin the documentary with Bato II snorkeling in the waters of a picturesque cove while rattling off his murderous deeds assigns him a place of prominence in the narrative. Bato II and his gang function as the villains of the story, embodying the culture of impunity that fuels the killings. Despite their braggadocio, however, the skinny young men and their lone female accomplice come across as mere low-level rural players in the national "drug war." And with their faces shrouded by full-faced motorcycle masks to conceal their identity, they seem less menacing than they claim to be. Some of them also sound inarticulate—and less authoritative—in the Filipino language, which does not seem to be their mother tongue. The provincials are thus poor surrogates, not only for the government forces often linked to the killings, but especially for

Duterte, who appears intermittently in compelling bits of news footage, upstaging the mercenaries with his undeniable charisma and even more outrageous claims about his moral authority and power to cull Filipino citizens with impunity.

Bato II and his mercenaries create ethical problems for the documentary as well. The camera follows them on several operations, including one in which they stalk their prey and another in which they ostensibly pull off an actual hit. The documentary uses shaky hidden camera footage (some of it taken in green night vision mode) to depict those events, but the killings are either conveniently postponed or not shown on camera. The aftermath of their crimes is omitted as well, along with corresponding news footage or newspaper headlines about their hits.

The decision to avert the camera's gaze from acts of killing and to refrain from directly linking the mercenaries to specific crimes make sense from ethical, legal, and safety standpoints. This predicament of the documentarist's possible complicity in a crime recalls the controversy surrounding Jon Alpert's *The Philippines: Life, Death, Revolution* (1986), which showed communist forces ambushing dozens of soldiers. Alpert may have had some advance knowledge of the attack but perhaps did not have the means to forewarn the government troops. He covered the siege from a safe distance but took closer shots of the grisly aftermath. Though Alpert faced scrutiny over his ethics, the compelling piece earned him an Emmy award. In the case of *The Nightcrawlers*, one wonders why the documentary spent so much time on the mercenaries and their operations if it could not show or validate their role in the "war."

The Nightcrawlers is the first filmmaking credit for London-based Mora, a graduate of two elite universities (Oxford and Yale) who trained as an architect and has done public policy work for the United Nations. His choice of topic and expressive use of visuals recall Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), already a canonical work of the postmodern documentary. The scant 40-minute running time does not allow *The Nightcrawlers* much room to develop and resolve its thematic and stylistic elements, but the work never falters in communicating the urgency of its subject matter. If Duterte's Philippines is a bellwether for the global resurgence of murderous despotism, what Mora's film offers is a vicarious experience of the nightmare that may lie ahead for fallen democracies.

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Asian Americans. Renee Tajima-Peña. San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2020. 270 min.

Asian Americans is a five-part documentary produced by the Center for Asian American Media that was broadcast on PBS stations