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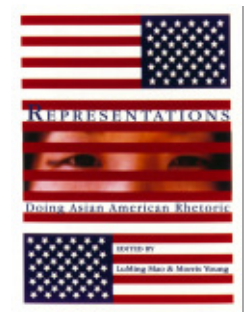
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**MARGARET CHO, JAKE SHIMABUKURO,
AND RHETORICS IN A MINOR KEY**

Jeffrey Carroll

Whenever one tries to “territorialize” a rhetoric—whether it is Soviet, for example, or conservative or male—one is, at the same time, ineluctably tying to that territory a certain population of rhetors. One can imagine a “rhetoric machine” that could uncover the vernacular examples of rhetoric that we might associate—even divorced from context—with a certain collective, while missing or overlooking other rhetoric that is intentionally in the dominant mode. If we move this tentative assumption to a rhetoric of Asian America, then we should be able to discover those dominant modes that model for its users a rhetoric that is indistinguishable from its inspiration: the vast, standard medium and method of western argumentation that is, roughly speaking, the basis for a democratic approach to citizenry in America. The proprieties, in other words, are largely encoded in everyday discourse, decoded by the discourser, and forever attended to in civic or public functions.

To discover the deliberate deviation that a Russian formalist approach might yield is not necessarily enlightening as to specific racial characteristics—for *Asian* “is a vastly heterogeneous category that masks differences in ethnicity and social and economic status” (Lee and Bean 2002, 58)—but begins to separate the core from the margin, or the dominant from the minor. A contemporary example of the rhetoric of a racial entity, however loosely identified, is the recent immigration marches by millions of mostly Hispanic Americans, which were rhetorically effective simply as *performance* or, to use a term for the fifth canon of classical rhetoric, *delivery* (following invention, arrangement, style, and memory)—as bodies in motion with intentional effect, extralinguistical in the sense that the march itself is a forward-driving argument, like a collective fist-raising that followed much rhetoric of closed spaces with the enormous sculptural dance of a collective body. This mass gestural rhetoric, an

enunciation of the collective, is at least as forceful as the words of the speakers, and recalls the words of Cicero, who writes that delivery is the “language of the body,” “which displays the feelings of the soul” (2001, 294, 295). Quintilian would take the sense of the body’s importance, beyond words, a step further; he argues that “the nature of the material we have composed in our minds is not so important as how we deliver it” (2001, 11.3.2) and references Cicero specifically in suggesting that delivery is action, citing Demosthenes, according to some the greatest orator of his time, as giving “the palm to delivery, and . . . second and third place as well” (11.3.5–6).

Yet the rhetoric of “mass gesture” is hardly assignable to any ethnic group; it is more a contingency open to all, and one that depends on a confluence of historical conditions and people who are in a position to respond. It is easier, often, to see the negative, and to derive from certain absences a rule or rules about those collectives that decline that act or functioning. One might begin, in response to the impressive collectivity of the immigration marches, by suggesting that Asian Americans do not *favor* public demonstration, even though there has been a public perception for centuries—as fantasy or Orientalist dream, it hardly matters—of an Asian “collectivity” of thought and behavior. Asian *American* demonstration—whether of the body or voice or both—is still largely unperceived by mainstream America.

It isn’t in *protest* rhetoric, however, that we need to invest too exclusive an analysis. If we look at the mass media, a similar absence exists—and by mass media I refer to those contexts that allow for a full participation of the rhetor’s identity: not by name alone, or by authorship, but by a material, bodily presence that does not allow for any easy avoidance by the audience of the rhetor’s *Asianness*. Here the rhetorical is recaptured in classical or traditional terms involving the body, the gestural or elocutionary individual beyond the mere linguistic “tip” of the communication art. This is not to overlook the accomplishments of writers like Lois-Ann Yamanaka or Maxine Hong Kingston, but to look at popular culture’s link to rhetoric as having a powerful, supplementary element of the gestural or performative.

If one accepts this stipulation, exemplars of Asian American rhetoric continue largely to elude popular perception. I am not so much interested in the Why? of this argument; rather, I want to assume the negative and argue that this cannot possibly be true to the pure degree that Zhou and Lee say it is (2004b, 17–19). I am not looking for “exceptions,” as

if a model minority of good Asian American rhetors exists somewhere in the mass media. There are, however, performers (or entertainers, to use a marketing term that is not necessarily pejorative but does locate its object in a context of pop culture) who have managed, against industry odds or racial odds, or both, to create a particular sense of the Asian American rhetorical position—a position that will be defined as these two performers' rhetoric is explored in this essay not as a way to exclude what is surely a complex of relations that exist between Asian American performers and their material and audience, but as a way to display a modality in that position that may, in fact, be a marker of what is possibly "Asian" about Asian American rhetoric in relation to the "American" of American rhetoric. One risks here a simple substitution of a binary for a unitary; if the latter is illusory, most likely the former is, too. But to begin with this double label is only a starting point for working further into the hidden complexities of cultural and social identities.

Such a complexity is hidden, for example, in our discussions of the English language—the definite article suggesting something fixed, stable, and unitary. But the language's users share the common knowledge of its being a supremely unstable medium, fluid in its textures, made up of dialects that work with and against each other in a jockeying of prestige and function. We can consider these territorial rhetorics of the Asian and the American in just such a way, with the purpose of understanding their use by individuals as a matter of rhetorical exigency.

The result may be what is a creolization of the two, as if dialects, in immediate and competitive contact—traces of both recognizable in the product—but a real instrument of communication that resists dissection or a binary analysis based on a mere conflicted double-voicedness. While creolization is associated most commonly with island cultures, like Jamaica and Hawai'i, we might extend the metaphor of islands to those performers who, in the very audiences they face (as well as in those communities from which they have sprung), seek identification with a new, organic identity, in the process of its own synthesis. Bhabha calls this process "how you negotiate between texts or cultures or practices in a situation of power imbalances in order to be able to see the way in which strategies of appropriation, revision, and iteration can produce possibilities for those who are less advantaged to be able to grasp in a moment of emergency, in the very process of the exchange or the negotiation, the advantage" (quoted in Olson and Worsham 1999, 39).

The performer's *intent to negotiate* is key here, because it is not so

much an accident of contact—as in the fact of creole or pidgin—as a rhetorical strategizing, to turn one’s disadvantage, or what Robert Young calls the “countersense of fragmentation and dispersion” (1995, 4), into a new synthesis. Bhabha insists that hybridity is about the subject who is “enunciatory” and “in performance and process,” who is not working in a “politics of recognition” (Olson and Worsham 1999, 19). The identity *worked for*, then, is not an identity to be found but to be created anew, what Mao in his work on Chinese American rhetoric calls “promising because it represents a hybrid that serves to blur the boundary and to destabilize the binary between the dominant and the subordinated” (2006, 32).

Margaret Cho would be distressed, at least for the time it takes to deliver the next line, to be called the godmother of Asian American stand-up comedy. But her turning distress into pride is a feature of her comedy, a reverse self-deprecation that is characteristic of her work since her start in the early 1990s, the heart of which is a cold-eyed, hot-voiced look at inequality and prejudice that is overcome through a rhetoric of self-delineation and pride. Her stand-up work is raucous, hyperbolic, and explicit. Cho is so firmly canonized that her television series, a disaster by all accounts, both historic and contemporary, is hardly an asterisk in her long career of recordings and staged and filmed concerts. She remains, well into her second decade of public performance, virtually the only Asian American comic of any solid reputation or “draw,” but one who has not opened up or begun a tradition the way one can clearly see, for example, Richard Pryor doing for African American comics—or Freddie Prinze for Hispanic American comics.

Cho’s first video, *I’m the One That I Want*, a filmed 1990 concert from the Warfield in San Francisco, suggests a persona that has attracted an audience looking for laughs. (As an expectation, the comic effect is one most crudely drawn in terms of rhetorical consequences: none but the phenomena of the mouth opening and the peculiar sound of laughter erupting from it, with social commentary a somewhat nebulous secondary aim whose consequences are much harder to predict, let alone imagine.) Her audiences reflect a contemporary preference for a darkness of conditions out of which laughter can be worked. These conditions—or the field or situation that the audience itself feels a part of—are contemporary America, largely middle class, of mixed neighborhoods but an idealized, assumed, almost dystopian purity: a simplicity of ethnicity or race that allows for the dramatic conflict of a good story or

tale, or episode, or song, or myth. Cho's Korean roots are shakily buried in San Francisco's famously confused hybridities in which, for example, Cho finds Koreans even meaner than whites, and where even her given name, Moran (pronounced "moron") is a joke for everyone to share and enjoy—even, in the reversal I noted above, as Cho turns the abuse into a self-anointing cry of individuality, of a process of negotiating a performer's solitude out of a solidarity with the audience's own insecurities.

Cho's comedy routines are really a panoply of prejudice, much of it about sexual identities and their everyday appearance in terms of work, dating, relationships, and marriage. In these routines Cho is not really acting out onstage anything particularly "Asian American," yet in her aloneness (or sovereignty) as an Asian American comic, she does appear in a kind of heroic pose (as she does in her posters and book and video covers, for *Revolution* and *Assassin*, especially, as a descendant of Che Guevara and Patty Hearst). Her "Asian Chicken Salad" performance in her film *Revolution* (2004) is a case in point: dressed in an antebellum gown of white, and barefoot, and with hair in a single braid, Cho delivers, even visually, a heterogeneous image of old, new, formal, informal, occidental and oriental fragments that are underscored through the comic recounting of a meal on an airplane that carries this sense of the confused dichotomy, of the contact dialect of modern American thought that is designed to undercut the simple binary of the contributing cultures, and to create a new emergent rhetoric of the hybrid. To the individual who admits that he cannot tell Asians apart, Cho responds, "Why do you have to tell us apart?" She adds, "I can't tell us apart," turning the confessional of the audience into an admission of similarity with it, a hint of identification with an audience of multiple kinds, multiple identities. After doing a comic series of Kim Jung-il's facial impressions, she remarks, "I forget I'm Asian," in contradiction to her sensitivity to that North Korean leader's visage somehow standing in for some implied insanity in the Korean heritage, or the West's perception of that heritage. The paradoxical acceptance of the face and its forgetting suggests a crisscross of competing valences, or pulls, leading to the explicitly linguistic play on "Asian Chicken Salad," a phrase spoken by a flight attendant until her Asian face requires the deletion of "Asian" when the dish is named in her presence. The deletion suggests the falsity of the label—or perhaps only its obviousness—when spoken to Cho, a gesture of simultaneous rejection and embrace by the voice of the attendant, a confusion when confronted by the factness of the Asian in view. But

the burden of this emergent paradox of response is immediately taken up by the rhetor, by Cho, who does an uber-Chinese riff on the “oriental” mask, squatting and transforming her face into an “inscrutable” meditation upon the salad. Cho finally evaluates the object by saying, “This is not the salad of my people,” in a hoarse and passionate whisper, adding “in my homeland” to drive home the absurdity of the artificial context of naming the authentic. She then caps the tirade by objecting to the absence of “crispy won ton crunchies”—a turn to the everyday English of foodstuffs that again undercuts any emerging gestalt around the impressive theatrics of this outraged Asian figure. She concludes, “That, my friend, is an Asian chicken salad!” with a delivered flourish of the imaginary sword across the body of the offending flight attendant. The syntax and delivery (the exaggerated movements of Cho’s coup de grace) recall a cooking show, throwing once again the dialect of this hybrid rhetoric into a compelling spiral of influence, of a negotiated complexity that draws meaning out of its mixed parts, its awareness of those parts, and its comic undercutting of a fixed sense of center—much as the creoles of regions recall, like mimicry, but do not copy the master or standard tongue.

The move from the colloquial narratives of prejudice and humiliation to a working out of pride and inner strength is a rhetorical turn, and tradition, that is not unfamiliar to American audiences, although they will find this turn cast in very different language, and in very different place: for example, Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, which is, at its heart, the American story of hurt and renewal, or *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The “darkness” of the American imagination that I am conjoining here across centuries and discourses may, on the surface, seem tenuous, but Cho herself understands it. Her more recent performances—and the accompanying book with the echoes of another age, *I Have Chosen To Stay and Fight*, her concert recordings *Notorious C.H.O.* and *Revolution*, her blogging for the *Huffington Post* and her engagement with the daily ups and downs of a political race for president—are further condemnations of both self and nation in a kind of scorched-earth rhetoric of complete withdrawal from any position of safety, while at the same time suggesting a settled positionality of the clear-eyed compassionate. This, too, is not a unique or new attitude—Richard Pryor comes to mind and, yet earlier, Lenny Bruce—but Cho’s racial content remains significant in her playing to mostly white audiences (who seem, as one listens to and watches reactions and responses, most appreciative of her

material on gender and gender politics) who have far less knowledge of the Asian American experience than the African American experience, by which they are entertained almost daily on radio and television, in concert, and on recordings, especially through rap and hip-hop artists. Cho still charts very much alone, so that her routine on Hello Kitty artifacts—Kitty has no mouth—comes across as fresh and funny and countervailing to the whole ideology of the comedy of social critique. A perceived absence invites a filling of the vacuum, an infusion of language that will open the mouth, a dialect of contact—of the dominant and subordinate—emerging.

Cho's modulation to a minor key of the dominant comic rhetoric of the stand-up is to feature routinely her own humiliating experiences, to disappear within the persona of the classic American misfit model—but to imbue it, loudly and with a full physical repertoire that is against type: the quiet Asian American woman. This last turn, against one's own racial or cultural learning, is the turn from the collective to the individual that Cho uses to channel the familiar into her own emerging life, that processional Bhabha suggests is the performance itself, so that she can "fight" and "stand" and "change" by her own rules.

This "minor modulation" in Cho's comic rhetoric is "getting deeper into my own heart," for which the "getting" is a critiqued experience derived from a particular racial context that has few parallels, unless one wishes to consider the literary texts of authors like Amy Tan and Yamanaka. Cho's crypto-Marxist symbology of the last five years or so does suggest an interest more in class than race, but there is really no separating content when it is delivered in this rhetoric of lived experience as "my own quest for truth" (2005, 235), an expressive *and* purposeful rhetoric that has as much rage, outrage, and heroic purpose. Cho has conjoined the classic "double evil" of Cicero's "actors or day laborers" (2001, 10) as a kind of vulgar emotionality, a "grossness" that effectively seals up conventional identifications with traditional Asian rhetorics and opens instead a new world of contact with the language of comic performance rooted in the soil of the everyday.

Performance allows the artist to underscore the force of the word with the force of the body—or to guide an interpretation of it. Such interpretations, if so guided, become more a transparent argument, a rhetorical text, so that the performer's elocutionary talents can be brought to bear on what, on paper, might appear only despairing, or ironic, distanced in some way from the consequences of one's own stories. Stand-up is a

one-person drama of the highest order, its practitioners rightly some of our favorite actor-performers. When this drama—this ability to hold and transport, to make an audience rapt with one’s tales and analyses—is achieved by the Asian American performer, the minor modulation of a small collectivity of experience is recognized as sufficient for the whole to hear and recognize. The minor key of prejudice and humiliation is suddenly familiar to all. It speaks in a dialect, a creole of contact English that springs with rare power from a situation of rhetorical complexity: hybrid audiences looking to figures like Cho and Jake Shimabukuro for texts that speak these new complexities of surprise and exigencies.

Margaret Cho may be the most familiar of all living Asian American performers in America. Her commitment to social issues make her rhetoric especially felt, recognized, and accepted by mass audiences. In American music, however, there is no such figure. There are Asian musicians like Yo-Yo Ma and Keiko Matsui who are popular, and many American bands, Hiroshima, for example, have Asian American members, yet for the numbers of Asian American consumers, there is an astonishing dearth of Asian American performers of popular music, when other minorities like Hispanics and blacks have enormous presence. It is true that not all of this presence can be considered a rhetorical one, but in the broadest sense of rhetoric as the symbolic “formulations of reality” (Berlin 2003, 34) and its significance for designated audiences (through the industry, or marketing), this Asian American presence is remarkably small.

Why this is true is not so much the focus of this essay—although the success of Cho suggests that it has to do with the elements of performance that may not be common to Asian traditions of the ensemble and the mask: the solo, naked performer is as American as pie—yet is far less familiar to Asian performance traditions. *Musical* performance is an understood rhetoric when, for example, a folksinger performs an antiwar song. This is obvious—it is lyric, melody, voice, instrument, arrayed in real time by the performer in order to communicate anger or sadness and, at times, solution, as in the folk traditions of Guthrie, Seeger, and Dylan.

The performance is less obviously rhetorical the more it moves along a continuum into the instrumental (that is, when lyrics are absent there can be less linguistic content except in the sense of the “program” offered by titles or subheadings of the work, as in the movements of symphonies). All of popular music, however, can be considered at least

partly rhetorical if one accepts the premise that popular music exists for the purpose of engendering a response, often collective, often unending, often combative—and always resulting in a social discourse about ourselves, or “uses of culture which are ‘empowering,’ which bring people together to change things” (Frith 1996, 20).

It isn't surprising to find so few Asian American voices in American popular music if one accepts the Cho analogy: Kitty has no mouth, and barely suggested hands. She cannot speak. She cannot play. Exceptions are present, of course: Mia Doi Todd, for example, is a Los Angeles-born singer-songwriter, Ivy League educated, who has been recording and performing songs with Asian allusions for years. And as soon as one mentions a Todd, a greater presence does rise up in view—Vienna Teng, for example, James Iha, Jin Ah-Yeung, Amerie—all, however, with a status somewhat better than “cult,” a potent status for any performer, yet pointing again to the near invisibility of Asian American music in popular form, and suggesting a difficult career arc.

Jake Shimabukuro is remarkable for his instrumental performances and recordings without vocals (which place him in a small circle that would include silent virtuosos like Bela Fleck in jazz and bluegrass, or Jerry Douglas in bluegrass, or Derek Trucks in blues); he is a Japanese American who, as he turns thirty, finds himself the world's greatest virtuoso of a stringed instrument, the 'ukulele, which is itself a model of hyphenation: Portuguese in origin, yet thoroughly assimilated into Hawaiian music and made popular in the greater world of pop culture by two disparate men two generations apart and a world apart in place and values: Arthur Godfrey (on television in the 1950s) and George Harrison (who would not travel without one). Shimabukuro took up the 'ukulele when, he says, he found he couldn't play sports in high school (although he wrestled) (Tsai 2006, D1). In fifteen years he has recorded a half dozen albums, performed around the world, and earned the repeated accolade of being the Jimi Hendrix of the 'ukulele.

Unlike Cho, Shimabukuro has never achieved anything like star status except in his home state of Hawai'i, where the 'ukulele has a special place in the local culture, rather like the banjo or mandolin in the mountain music of the southeastern United States. His “star” quality at home is based very much on his being a virtuoso on the instrument, meaning not that he plays *like* Jimi Hendrix, but that he has taken the instrument far beyond where it had been taken before by moving it into genres like jazz, bluegrass, smooth jazz, rock, and blues, so that

the genre conventions associated with those fields (and the audience expectations in performance context) are met in such a way as to enlarge the visual “slightness” of the instrument—and, metonymically, the performer himself—into a sound of utter freedom, possibility, and unexpected communication.

In these ways he is like Cho in that he has not so much enlarged a tradition but taken it and critiqued it, intentionally toying with audience expectations of propriety (the good Korean girl, the good Japanese boy) and then, through a virtuosity of voice, either natural or instrumental, shown a total command of the American *amplitude*: its freedoms of speech. This is a creole that is a generation beyond pidgin, or the accident of contact, becoming a legitimate language of the hybrid, working a sense of rigor, rules, and the technique of the virtuoso. His repertoire is eclectic, ranging from Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America” (Shimabukuro 2002a) to a Paganini *Caprice* (2002b) to George Harrison’s “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” (2004). He performs these particular pieces with solemn tempi and little playfulness; the Berlin piece is especially striking in its extended, nearly five-minute treatment of a Kate Smith specialty associated with flag waving and saluting. The classical piece, like the first, seems to try to establish an ascendancy for the instrument, putting it in the circle of human voice and piano. The latter piece is a tribute to George Harrison, a lover of the ‘ukulele, but whose piece is specifically about the guitar, a register and timbre that Shimabukuro subverts, or at the very least transforms, into the ‘ukulele’s trebly range—again as a rhetoric of changing the key if not the melody while retaining a formal rigor.

Shimabukuro’s stage presence is ebullient, demonstrative—in short, physical in a way that, if not recalling Cho’s love of the spotlight, shares with Cho an understanding of the need to be gestural as well as linguistic. Shimabukuro does play his instrument like a guitar—he cradles, dotes upon, and displays it—while acknowledging the audience’s expectations: the occasional pretty strum, simple chording, and melodic familiarity. Built around, or upon, this formal base is a wildly imaginative enlargement of the instrument’s possibilities, moving its rhythmic and melodic features into the realms of improvisation, a feature that may draw Shimabukuro close to the stand-up routines of Cho.

While improvisation is a keystone of jazz performance, it has also a strong traditional presence in comic performance, especially stand-up, in that it appears, or sounds, spontaneous, and is unforeseen. It takes

from the audience's knowledge of music and song and gives it back, "improv"-ed and, as expected, improved because of "instantaneous decision-making in applying and altering musical materials and conceiving new ideas. Players distinguish such operations during solos from the recall and performance of precomposed ideas, those formulated outside the current event in the practice room or in a previous performance. From this standpoint, unique features of interpretation, embellishment, and variation, when conceived in performance, can also be regarded theoretically as improvised" (Berliner 1994, 221–222).

Improvisation is a rhetorical gesture meant to throw off, while simultaneously acknowledging, the past, the expected, and to underline the momentousness, the "now" of the act of communication, fresh and deliberate in the moment in this place, between you and me, a moment of the creolization of musical language, not only as the audience understands it, but as the rhetor shapes a performance out of a repertoire of gestural and extralinguistical choices that will suggest, performance to performance, that "endless and excessive transformation of the subject positions possible within the hybridised" (Griffiths 1995, 241).

From this severe sampling of Asian American performance, one is hesitant to draw any generalizations about millions, but one can venture to assert that a rhetoric that both acknowledges and critiques tradition, one that is identified with one's very body and voice (or its instrumental surrogate), is interested in a self-revealing individuality and pride. There is always that: the individual speaking to many, a classical concept that elides modern understandings of self, so that Cho and Shimabukuro, if they were to speak to each other, might see many in one, in fact: these hybrid presentations of many roots, voices, techniques, and purposes that are emerging formulae for finding meaning in these times.

What is "minor" modulation in Cho is the descent into a nightmare of identity politics as she negotiates her way out of a tangle of Korean roots so that she can literally feel them and use them as a key to mastering them, or at the least interrogating their presence, their hold on her thinking and feeling. For Shimabukuro, a modulation into specific Asian musical performance is more subtle, since he stands before (and behind) a tradition of western music and uses the 'ukulele to voice this modulation, this sense of the hybrid musical voice (rather than, for example, a thoroughly Asian musical tradition like the *shakuhachi* or the *koto*). Shimabukuro gives us a transparent example with his composition, and performance, of "Ehime Maru" (2001).

This solo piece for ‘ukulele was composed in response to the sinking of the Japanese training vessel the *Ehime Maru* by the USS *Greenville*, a U.S. Navy submarine off the coast of Hawai‘i in February of 2001. It was performed a month later by Shimabukuro for the families of the survivors of the nine men who were lost in the accident: “The song is meant to give the listener insight of what it must have felt like to be aboard the fishing ship during the tragic accident. The song is based on ‘minor add 9’ chords to represent the missing four students, two teachers, and three crewmen. It begins subtle and unsuspecting, then transcends to an intense middle section. As the song progresses, the intensity grows symbolizing the crashing of the two vessels, the chaos and confusion before coming to a climactic halt. The final section of the song includes subdued tension becoming very melancholy to symbolize the unfortunate fate of the *Ehime Maru*” (Shimabukuro 2001, liner notes).

While “program music” such as this is a western as well as an Eastern tradition, what is most strikingly rhetorical about its initial *performance* is that Shimabukuro kneels directly in front of the survivors’ families, and plays it solo with head bowed. The posture is associated with Asian traditions. One doesn’t *see* this in the recorded performance on compact disc (offered as a gift to the families, and also marketed to raise funds for them), but the specificity of the program is also surprising: the retelling of the accident is, for western observers, a far cry from the western rhetorical eulogy that typically employs devices of past exploits, triumph, glories, and lasting legacies—in short, an avoidance of the actual demise of the eulogy’s subjects. Also, the “minor add 9” chords are, for a layperson, probably unidentifiable, but Shimabukuro, a virtuoso musician, has chosen them to indicate how the language of music can itself hold figures, a rhetorical force, that transcend themselves: the ninth note, the nine men. The interval created by the addition of this note “can produce chords of startling beauty, especially on the guitar” (Denyer 2001, 130).

That startle is the audience’s gift to the performer—a bodily response, unreflective, whether from tragic or comic thrust: what one can see and hear with accomplished performers like Cho and Shimabukuro, an “unforeseenness” that is anticipated and yet unknown, the modulation from the key we know, from that of convention, the usual voice of the traditional voicings, to the sudden relocation to the unseen roots of a San Francisco childhood, or death in American waters. The rhetor turns

a compassionate yet unflinching eye upon the self, the event, the audience, and does not give it only an aesthetic gloss (but which virtuosi in voice and instrument can do) but an unforeseen immediacy, an improvised integration of the public and the personal, in which, in Bhabha's words, is not recognition but surprise and "a moment of emergency." It may be in this ability, and this need, to modulate from the major to the minor, from the standard to the dialect of hybridity, that Asian American rhetoric finds its beauty and strength.

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