

## POSTCOLONIAL SUFFERANCE

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Instantiating a postcolonial rupture within the discourse of colonialism as a civilizing mission, Salud Algabre, a leading light of a social movement against the Americans in the 1930s, apprehends – or, better still, beholds – the colonial church and the dominion within its pale as a “culture of terror and space of death:” It is an old town – a very old town. In fact, there is a golden bell...During summer, when the water was clear, you could see down through the depths, down to where it lies. The reason they disposed of it was because mothers – early in their pregnancy – would give birth prematurely upon hearing it toll.

One of the reasons my ancestors rebelled was to protest against the church that possessed that bell. When the Spaniards came they forced the people to build their church. Many were killed by the Spaniards – flogged to death, there on the shore where the church was built. (Flores, 1998)

If we are to consider the category of aesthetics as the encounter between the body and the world along with the social engagement of the senses, Algabre’s memory revises not only the imagination of colonialism, but the very condition of its possibility to make worlds appear; to make colonial worlds materialized in specific embodiments of sight (“golden bell”), sound (“toll”), action (“forced,” “killed,” “flogged to death”), and feeling (“rebelled”). This same memory may also “dispose of” colonialism in this flash recollection made in a summer of epiphany “when the water was clear (and) you could see down through the depths.” Nicholas Dirks states that “if colonialism is a cultural formation, then also culture is a colonial formation.” (Dirks, 1992) Algabre’s narratives can speak only at once of the re-presentation of the colonial discourse and of its instantiation as a rupture that *aborts* (“give birth prematurely”). The colonized body prefigures termination and *postness*; the “colonial” is always placed *retroactively* (Foster, 1996) and *preposterously* (Bal, 1999), under duress to renew itself at the moment of “death” on the “shore where the church was built.”

In discerning the postcolonial inflection in Philippine contemporary art, we read Alagabre as a passage of suffering. In Alagabre's fiction, colonialism is suffered; suffering proves to be a salient sentiment in postcolonial subject making. To dramatize the performance of suffering, art criticism and history converse with the discipline of anthropology in order to re-transact the problematic of aesthetics with a specific consciousness of "art" which reproaches issues on premises of distinction and discrimination.

### *Theoretical Interests*

Constance Classen in the essay "Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses" peels off layer after layer of impediments to the *rapprochement* between anthropology and aesthetics: the notion that senses are precultural; the primacy of sight as access to the world of senses and the acme of the human faculties; and, the conceptual frameworks based on speech and aurality, orality and literacy or verbal skills taken as governing operations of meaning. Classen's critique inevitably uncovers the moral economy of aesthetics as it was contemplated by its founding fathers and its long line of heirs; she quotes Friedrich Schiller: "as long as man is still a savage he enjoys by means of tactile senses." (Classen 1997, p. 405) More telling is Edward Long's observation that Africans' "faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less is their commerce with the other sex; in these acts they are as libidinous and shameless as monkeys." (Classen 1997, p. 405) Surely, aesthetics as a category of experience is not simply related to the senses, or to a construction of culture or society; it is also, as W.J.T. Mitchell argued, when it relates to a gaze at "a foundational moment in the construction of the social." (Mitchell 1995, p. 293)

At the heart of these reconsiderations is the category of suffering as a conjunctive emotion that coordinates the structure of pain and is at the same time the structuring and structured conditions wherein pain bathes itself. Social anthropology has modified the terms of the debate predicating suffering as an agency in everyday life, rather than seeing it as an essentialist estimation of will. Veena Das points out that Leibniz in 1517 was the first scholar to systematize explanations of suffering based on the knowledge of theodicy, picking up the thread via Weber, who had thought of suffering as a God rationalization, connecting it with explanations of the unjust distribution of suffering in the world. Such mindset finds its most predictable solution in an eschatology or salvation after life, which means in death. Clifford Geertz sees suffering as "the experiential challenge in whose face the mean-

ingfulness of a particular pattern of life threatens to dissolve" (Das 1997, p. 564); as a contention therefore that seeks adjudication not in the evasion from suffering, but in its sustentation in religion. Its indispensability derives from "systems of meaning and patterns of sociality" (Das 1997, p. 564) offering itself to those who must suffer to make their lives meaningful or culturally intelligible. From these studies, Das argues, suffering comes into play, in a climate of tension, between, on one hand, its structuring power to organize people around moral communities in search of salvation and spiritual refinement, and, on the other, with the indictment of this power; the indictments inflict pain through bureaucratic remedies, which in the last instance only supplement the lack of justice and law and therefore perform the repetition of its inversion. With a sensitive approach to the "political economy of injury and compassion" to which the lives of the amputees on the Thai-Cambodia border are subjected, Lindsay French comments on how theodical knowledge collapsed in the face of "scarce resources and overwhelming political priorities," so that "suffering often seemed only to bring more suffering, in a downward spiral. Karma...seemed to close in on amputees with a sense of immutable destiny." (French 1994, p. 92)

We venture into this territory to resettle the discussion of aesthetic production and its semiotic habitat with its performative arena of experience. Das defines suffering as the "assemblage of human problems that have their origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that social forces inflict on human experience." (Das 1997, p. 571) Arthur Kleinman regards suffering as the dialectical twist to resistance (Kleinman 1995, p. 126); the resistance to the practice of experience of life's flow. This disruption of well-being comes in the form of "contingent misfortunes, routinized forms of suffering, and suffering resulting from extreme conditions, such as survivorship of the Holocaust or the atom bomb or the Cambodian genocide or China's Cultural Revolution." (Kleinman 1995, p. 1010) Coming from such definition, Das posits that suffering is socially inscribed, executed through writing, law, and the body. Inasmuch as suffering implicates both the self and the world, Das is willing to steer through the gap between private pain and collective good and action. In other words, while we are in favor of this idea, hoping that suffering may coordinate collective struggle against manifold forms of oppression, we must remain at the same time skeptical about how the state, religion, the market, and media can re-functionalised this collectivity and transcode it in a common sacrifice for the so-called "common good." Das gives us a cogent example:

"In the case of bio-medical technologies, new and experimental technologies are often tested on such populations as terminally ill patients, prison



populations, prostitutes – in other words on those who are defined as social waste – in the hope that the technologies would increase the well-being of people in the future ... lesser harm can be inflicted for future greater good. In giving precise definitions to harm and good, however, science and state may end up making an alliance in which the suffering of those defined as social waste is appropriated for projects of a good society in the future.” (Das 1997, p. 570)

Still, such a predicament will not deter us from exploring the possibility of commiseration, a contentious and contested solidarity premised on “shared” pain. Das remarks: “In the end one can only say that while the ownership of one’s pain rests always with oneself – so that no one speaking on behalf of the person in pain has a right to appropriate it for some other use (e.g. for knowledge, for justice, for creating a better society of the future) – there is a way, however, in which I may lend my body to register the pain of the other.” (Das 1997, p. 572)

Suffering, according to Das, posits pedagogy. It is a disciplinary practice that deconstructs the constitution of the social mandate through acts of legitimation and illegitimation in the production of labor; it is a mode of action and practice that compels the suffering agent to prepare itself for a possible dissemination. This is the *cause* of suffering. Das buttresses this reflection by citing Pierre Clastres, who frames suffering sustained in torture as a ritual of initiation: a mark of belongingness, membership, and investiture. Durkheim asserts that the body is a site not only of subjection, but of its very subjectivity, not only of a realization of the violence, but the very stuff that convulses as it is “transformed violently in initiation ritual.” (Das 1997, p. 565) Marx insisted that the “body is placed within the political economy determining the conditions under which suffering is produced and distributed.” (Das 1997, p. 566). The already quoted Durkheim, points out further that suffering as an inscription in and of the subject does not flesh itself out to “represent an object, but to bear witness to the fact that a certain number of individuals participate in the same moral life.” (Das 1997, p. 565)

In this overview of recent theory on suffering, it is worth paying heed to Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s adamant position that suffering makes sense only within a cultural economy. Her study of mothers who do not weep for their dead children in Alto de Cruzeiro in Brazil alters our most cherished assumptions of “maternity,” “woman ethos,” and filial “bonding.” She cautions us that the negations of these assumptions should not be seen as “unnatural, inhuman, or unwomanly, but rather as reasonable responses to unreasonable constraints and contingencies.” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, p. 400) Proceeding from an unequivocally materialist perspective, Scheper-Hughes deals with how

this aspect of Brazilian culture gives importance to the conception of having many children that is rooted in the expectation that only few will survive, with investment in those with the best chance to make it. She contends that raising children in the eyes of Brazilian mothers is not governed by free-market mechanisms which array investments in this or that child in balance sheets. Raising children is always seen as an act balanced against the potential for loss and survival, which comes to terms with the ever-present possibility of death, as a destiny in the ubiquity of everyday life. Crucial in her study are tropes of suffering and the aesthetic of confronting it, in an active negotiation of grief. She points out, for instance, that the dead child is transformed into an angel and that a belief persists that weeping delays the flight of the child from earth to heaven. We have to be reminded here of Fenella Cannell's probe of the "language of bereavement" in a Bicolano community in the Philippines, which posits that pity expressed in weeping, ritualistic or as individual grief, constitutes danger for those who perform such an act and for those who receive it. The repression of weeping forms an absence of grief, while the inability to weep engenders illness. But, on the other hand, if grief is given full play, it likewise induces illness in the form of soul-loss: the person seized by grief becomes like the dead person. Pity, therefore, is the root of danger: "The dead pull the living towards them, and the living must resist." (Cannell 1991, p. 271) The possibility of loss, reiterated by pity and practiced in memory, is resisted by a form of bereavement that aims to "forget the dead, avoid their intentions, and to separate from them except in occasional encounters." (Cannell 1991, p. 266) These encounters do not lead to a teleology of the afterlife as a final abode, but to the practice of dis-membering through loss, and re-membering through leaving: death is "not clearly focused on the afterlife," but rather on "relations between the dead and the living, between the permeability of barriers between the two, and the problem of achieving a correct separation." (Cannell 1991, p. 269) How can grieving people effect such a separation in the context of an encounter? Cannell suggests that pity can be converted through redemption and gleaned in the cult of the Dead Christ, which, because he "has overcome the grave" (Cannell 1991, p. 305) has resisted the pull of the dead and is able to negate such a danger. The Dead Christ, therefore, lives as a public image and transforms pity from an agency of danger to an agency of transformation: "It is not only a process of a devotional contract...in which the sharing of suffering produces the return gift of healing; it is also a process of *mangarog*, of becoming like Christ, Mary and the other figures, taking on their clothes, gestures and words, and so transforms oneself." (Cannell 1991, p. 306)

Kleinman strikes the vital vein of this survey of anthropological literature



on suffering with the politics of experience, which is the “felt flow” of the “intersubjective medium of social transactions in local moral words.” (Kleinman 1995, p. 97) Kleinman, in his reflection on the intersubjectivity of experience and local moral worlds, which pertain to a universe of certain claims to human dignity, has even extended the reframing of culture as a logic of experience to the germane issue of practice and ideological intervention. Defining suffering as “the result of the processes of resistance (routinized or catastrophic) to the lived flow of experience,” (Kleinman 1994, p. 174) Kleinman reconsiders the term resistance as a “weapon of the weak” and opens it to the charge of multiple energies. Swinging from the register of passive resignation ordained by theodical knowledge to the partisan acknowledgement of bearing pain as packing the power to disconfirm prescribed “cures” of different forms, allows Kleinman to argue that suffering as “resistance,” along with its intersubjective experience, can be “so various, so multileveled, so open to original inventions that interpreting it solely as an existential quest for meaning, or as disguised popular critique of dominant ideology, notwithstanding all the moral resonance of those foci, is inadequate.” (Kleinman 1994, p. 190)

In Philippine scholarship, a modest contribution is foregrounded by Reynaldo Ileto’s resourceful interpretations of the culture of Christ’s passion and how it is reread as a narrative of revolution, as a “grammar of dissent.” From his watershed work *Pasyon and Revolution* to more recent reflections on the martyrdom of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, the husband of former President Corazon Aquino, who put an end to the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos, Ileto talks about the politics of pity and commiseration (*damay*) as it acquires local accountability in a specific struggle. Ileto’s exploration of the term *damay* qualifies suffering as a post-colonial idiom that stirs the people or community in, quoting a metrical romance or *awit*, “pathetic weeping, tears, sighs, and dying of the country.” (Ileto 1977, p. 129). Such grief or *dusa* mobilizes feeling to take action, to act on, “in a rushing manner,” the condition that makes grief possible. *Damay*, therefore, becomes “a social experience, a Katipunan (collective) experience. Since *damay* is a manifestation of whole and controlled *loob* (inner sense), the Katipunan’s *loob* radiates heat and flame, just as Christ and other individuals of exemplary *loob* radiate *liwanag* (light).” (Ileto 1977, p. 136) The reappropriation of Christ as a suffering agent constructs the practice of the sufferant or Christ’s co-sufferer; in this case the struggling post-colonial subject of the Katipunan participates in suffering, remaking the *pasyon*, or Passion of the *bayan* (nation).

In this brief review of the literature, we have sought to demonstrate the polyphonic conversation between suffering and an aspiration to address certain obligations of kinship with an aesthetically produced agency like an other,

a god, or a nation. In the domain of art, such a network of signals creates access toward the reconception of pain or *onus* that is shared in the private/public sphere as a matter of the collective ritual of restitution. The work of Das on how women in India interpose institutional claims by performing their pain in public by way of mourning is very helpful:

“In the genre of lamentation, women have control both through their bodies and through their language – grief is articulated through the body, for instance, by infliction of grievous hurt on oneself, ‘objectifying’ and making present the inner state, and is finally given home in language. Thus the transactions between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. This is one path towards healing – women call such healing simply the power to endure.” (Das 1996, p. 69)

Annie E. Coombes, meditating on the aesthetic of incarceration and detention in contemporary art making, suggests that one way of achieving well-being is by overcoming trauma, which is re-expressed in the material form of “art.” Quoting research on trauma (Felman and Dori Laub), she posits: “As a way of ‘mastering’ trauma the survivor needs to objectify it and that this can only occur ‘when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside.’ Thus we may be unwittingly become a step on the road to translating traumatic memory into narrative memory through our uncomfortable viewing of this collection of objects-becoming-exhibits and the unbearably poignant testimony to which we necessarily give witness.” (Coombes 2000, p. 52)

Based on this research, I will chart our investigations on Philippine contemporary art as a *body* of work, a corpus of feelings, an ecology of agencies and reciprocities, following as well what Salud Almagre called a *disposition*.

### *Devotion to Nation*

The Philippines commemorated its national centenary from 1996 to 1998, celebrating the revolution against Spain and against the American imperialist interlude of half a century thereafter, as well as exposing the continuing struggle against varied forms of hegemonic presence in the country. Such attempt at reckoning the revolution in light of sustained nation-building projects in the time of globalization refers to the colonial discourse and its attendant historiography as a way of controlling imagination. Ileto, describing his unsettling feeling as he witnessed the massive throng that flocked to



the centennial spectacle on Independence Day in June 1998, captures this post-colonial nostalgia for Hispanic history: "Milling through the crowds that threatened to block the passage of the floats up Roxas Boulevard, I felt there was something familiar about the event. Could it be the national version of the many religious processions I had seen in Manila – the procession of the Black Nazarene immediately came to mind – and in the provinces particularly during holy week? Just as the story of Christ unfolds in Good Friday processions, the grand parade reiterated the dominant narrative of the Filipino nation." (Ileto 1998, pp. 239-240) This calvaric aesthetic that choreographs processions in Philippine life is best caught in the centennial mural of Antipas Delotavo, which stages a march of struggle through history, leaving in its wake death and setback, but ever advancing toward an unfinished revolution. We thus stage at the outset the encounter between the modernity of nation, on the one hand, and the postcolonial critique that makes it possible, on the other.

This parade to which Ileto refers – who has studied the local narration of Christ's passion and reads into it a revolutionary, due to salvational/salvific reasons, utopia – took place after the election of Joseph Estrada, a movie star who became the country's centennial and millennium President. Estrada was deposed in the year 2001 through an uprising supported by the military establishment. The central place of the revolt was a Catholic monument called the EDSA Shrine, which was built in memory of the 1986 upheaval that toppled almost two decades of the infamous Marcos regime. The symbols of the anti-Estrada protest were decidedly Catholic; the stage, which was the site of fiery speeches – prayers and masses led by priests and nuns, and the oath-taking of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo – denouncing the massive corruption and amorality of Estrada, was set against a gargantuan sculpture of the Virgin Mary. Months later on the evening of Estrada's arrest, millions stormed the same shrine but in support of a fallen leader; the Catholic church felt that the presence of Estrada loyalists from the poor urban regions desecrated the holy ground. The seemingly absent Catholic representatives from this "other" largely mass-based mobilization was very telling, but is a story that properly belongs to another essay. What is significant to note in these two cases of "people power," as this is termed in the Philippines, is the denial of the Catholic, evocatively colonial sign system, to legitimize or delegitimize initiatives of social movements.

In the context of the agenda of rendering these particular events aesthetically possible, *tropes*, or figurative devices, articulated in an expressive discipline and through a technology of meaning making, mark the colonial moment and pursue its specters. This paper also discusses the production of these tropes in contemporary Philippine art.



Amid the frenzy of staging the centenary, the Generalitat Valenciana of Spain organized a travelling exhibition of contemporary visual arts seeking to reflect on the fallout of the Spanish Empire when it lost the colonies of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico in 1898. The project was specifically significant for the Philippines as its current culture was placed against various streams of criss-crossing interactions with the Hispanic Empire in the Americas, the Caribbean colonial ideology, and the Southeast Asian indigenous and modern histories.

The guiding line of the curatorial endeavor of the exhibition, entitled *Cien Años Despues* (*One Hundred Years After*), was the interpretation of the “loss” of the “colonies” in the particularly vital contexts of an emergent U.S. imperialism, along with present-day socialist societies and within a climate that preserves colonial tradition, sustained by a wide range of forces from religion to a globalist mass media. All these proceed, however, along with a determinate and discernible postcolonial imagination that grapples with both, the retention of coloniality, as a material condition, and the rupture of resistance against it, seen as a transformative aspiration. Surely, the “post” in the term postcolonial prefigures a terminal as well as a contingent continuity, as the term *post* may mean something “rear” or “later.”

The colonial thus posits a limit that may come in discrepant forms as an anti/post colony, protectorate, or nation; the different political experiences and artistic expressions of artists from the three former Spanish colonies track precisely these traces of colonial destiny; the “empire” contracts along with a lack or an incompleteness that is condensed in the act of the “mother country” leaving *her* children who had been reared for a long time on progress and civilizational missions; contemporary Spanish art, which was the part of the exhibition, had to wrestle with this demon of “loss and leaving,” and this is probably why there was melancholia in this sort of ambivalent dispossession, as well as rightful indignation against inequity and struggle for freedom.

From the art projects of the Filipino artists in the exhibition – Santiago Bose, Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, Alfredo Esquillo, Jr., and Manuel Ocampo – we can sketch out the content and contour of the contemporary colonial aesthetic as embodied in the work of other Philippine artists. This coloniality is shaped by various



Manuel Ocampo, *Abstract Painting* (1996)

discourses: the Hispanic conquest of the Philippines for about 400 years and the subsequent American occupation until 1945; the Southeast Asian culture that negotiated the conquests; the folk articulation of that negotiation; and the contemporary inscriptions of colonial culture in Philippine society. It is hoped that the thematic clusters proposed here can help round out the aesthetic of a contested coloniality in contemporary Philippine art. I define the colonial as an instantiation of the domination of a power over an entitlement and the resistance against it. An "imperialist" project, which characterizes American rule in the Philippines, may fall under "colonial," but this idea needs elaboration that this paper can not perform. The inherent contradiction of coloniality as, to amend the reference of Walter Benjamin, a document of culture and a document of barbarism, inscribes within culture its intrinsic limit and ineluctable postness.

### *Memory as Archive*

The concept of memory as an active, or even activist, nostalgia for the past is rooted in history and historiographic retrospection. Official history, in documents and other literature, can be challenged within Philippine contemporary art that rethinks the terms with which colonialism is made effective as an aesthetic culture.

Santiago Bose puts up collages juxtaposing historical pictures, blown up through photocopying technology, betraying the seams of Third World "imitation" and "repetition" with drawings of talismanic icons. In "Colonizing



Santiago Bose, *Contemplating Infinito Dios and Vermeer* (1997)

Taste" (1998), the pictorial coherence of a tableau of Filipino Mickey Mouse bubble gum agents proudly posing in their American suits in front of the neoclassical Executive House, is disrupted by written incantations of millenarian prayers and with the almost wraith-like intimation of a potent figure appearing as omen. Here, and in his other works, the colonial intersects with the imperialist moment and with the global capitalist extensions. (Hobson; Lenin; Shumpeter) Bose's oeuvre harnesses the Filipinos *bricoleur* mindset which refunctions tools and doctrines of domination into carnivals of hybrid meanings. The artist practically ransacks the propaganda of history, catechism, and even of art, to render it vulnerable to the



hauntings of animism, globalization, and political struggle in the present. Bose's art reminds us of the works of Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi, who likewise violates the pictorial coherence of established images to ferret out of the woodwork personages and movements lurking in the cracks of the so-called parchment curtain. Tequi appropriates Renaissance paintings and repossesses them in order to yield political tableaux of topical resonance, in the same way as Roberto Feleo reinvents colonial iconography as a source of popular culture.

A specific aesthetic recasts the characters of the tarot card and by retelling the narrative of fortune, marks the achievement of Brenda Fajardo as both chronicler and seer of history. Perhaps taking to heart the idea that the future is not a ship that arrives, but rather is prophesied as a material condition to be claimed as a rightful legacy, the artist plays the role of a visionary who takes certain risks to shape the present in the image of the "impossible:" that which is yet to come because it is "not yet possible," but already heralded. In her fourteen panels on Philippine history titled "Baraha ng Buhay Pilipino" ("Cards of Philippine Life," 1998), she surrounds historical scenes with the energies of localized tarot cards presented in a folk form to resignify a critically inherited past, a possible unfolding, an emergence of a historical wish adumbrated in its possibility in art. For instance, the magician in the tarot becomes Uncle Sam, who is the agent of U.S. imperialism's sorcery.



Alfredo Esquillo, jr., *Daang Ligid Krus (Maze)* (1996)

### *Remastery of the Code*

The master narrative of colonialism is reread and decoded in a new semiotic scheme of possible meanings and practices of meaning making. A different grammar is spoken through the parodic doublespeak of postcolonial language. The latter ambivalently plays out within the context of colonial rules, and is relearned in the instance of its pragmatic utterance.

Imelda Cajipe-Endaya reinvents the tradition of Maria devotion by investing the woman figure, which is in Philippine art usually portrayed with the traditionally dolorous and passive rendering of the Mother and the Vir-

gin, with contemporary significance and ideological rounder. In “Not Paper Maché,” the paper mache dolls (*taka*), made by Filipino women in the Southern Tagalog town of Paete, suggest the traffic of female labor across the globe; and in “Inay, Ineng, Kalayaan ay Inyo Rin” (“Mother, Daughter, Freedom is For You”), *sawali* (woven splits of bamboo used as walls for huts and shacks) frames women who must struggle against the indignity of being homeless and the threats to their maternal role as keepers of hearth. Cajipe-Endaya’s representation of the maternal persona revises the discrepant roles of the Filipino woman. From the Maria imaginary, she becomes a symbol of the nation cast in paper maché techniques. As craft, “she” is exported abroad, her labor, as is the labor of the women who fashion her, is commodified. As a migrant commodity, she is a mother who leaves her children at home, to elsewhere take care of other children, and/or a young woman who becomes a mail-order bride. She grieves the loss of the family and the absence from her kin, but is declared a “heroine” by the nation-state for the dollar remittances she dutifully sends, keeping in such a way the economy afloat.

In one of his projects, Mark Justiniani creatively reuses parts of the *jeepney*, the country’s mass transport which was resoldered from World War II vehicles left by U.S. soldiers, to comment on the follies of the Filipino character and on the situations that give rise to these. The artist’s mixed-media work ingeniously integrates the critique of colonial values with the patriarchal and paternalist codes of popular culture.

Manuel Ocampo, who is currently based in Berkeley in Southern California, has blasphemed institutional religion in very fierce ways. Ocampo tampers with, revamps, mocks, cuts up, and tears asunder the pressure points at which coloniality begins, ends, and is extended. The fragmentation of bodies, for instance, leaves a trail of relationships among floating forms, details, motifs, and iconographies. Striking in this imagined scape of meaning is the media through which culture is made popular in multiple ways, from state-sponsored propaganda through religious mass production and to global capitalist fetishization. The artist builds his critique and reconstruction of colonial culture around the themes of excess and defacement as part of the broader project of repositioning the politics of the baroque, migration, and the very idiom of painting. In a heady and hectic *mélange* of allusions to disease, cannibalism, decapitation, fascism and faith, dismemberment, profanity, mutilation, and excrement, Ocampo’s hysterical painting violates the modernist sterility of the canvas, examining in such a way the entrails of purity and property within an aesthetic of filth and abjection. As one critic puts it: “From the *postcolonial pathology* (the abject status of the colonized body)...we arrive at this *e/sc(h)atological painting* which includes the sediment both of the megaloma-



nia...and of the impotence of a painting that *makes a homeland*... Something stinks of rot yet, paradoxically, it stands before our eyes and *is only paint*." (Castro Flores 1996, 29)

Another Filipino expatriate artist in the United States is Paul Pfeiffer, who ponders the design of sexuality in the architecture of the religious edifice. In his investigation of the archaeology of the body as a temple of the familiar through which a polytropic Man is transformed, he deconstructs the treasured humanist credo that Man is the measure of all things. In his art the body becomes a colony that mediates its subjection to a vernacular practice, that is, a subversion of the colonial rule. Pfeiffer argues: "To attempt a racialized, sexualized vernacular out of a heroic, patriarchal geometry is an illegitimate production that speaks of resistance." In one work, Pfeiffer collects images of pornography and ethnographic photographs from the computer and re-encodes them as floorplans of canonical church architecture like St. Peter's Basilica and S. Giorgio Maggiore.

### *Defensible Survival*

The everyday history of contemporary Filipinos is a narrative of personal and political survival. But this survival is not just a subsistence, it is a struggle that is waged against versatile modes of coloniality in the local moral worlds, where getting by does not only mean eking out a living, but pursuing a defensible personhood, taking the risk it bruisingly entails.

Alfredo Esquillo, Jr. gives the colonial argument a new turn by discussing contemporary Philippine society in terms of a labyrinth in which an icon standing at every turn and religious tableaux, mocked by violence and neurotic adulation, lines the route. This can only give us a sense of surplus, of bulimic idolatry in a season of deprivation and hopelessness. The artist's "Daang Ligid Krus" (Maze) is an allegory of Philippine Catholic life that transforms a particular event, the Feast of Souls and Saints, into a sustained discourse on the Filipino Way of the Cross. The stations in this social itinerary are marked by religious statuary, a crucifix, and the Black Nazarene borne on a stand studded with talismans. Winding their way through a stone maze, women in veils, a brass band, lovers, and bystanders are trapped in an iterative scheme. In this social still life, seen from the wall of the cemetery, a vantage point that affords the witness a multi-planar lay of the land, the grids, delineated by panels, stand out, stressing the presence of alarming images. The fascination with faith in the gods of prosperity inspires irreverence; the cross is carried as both burden and luxury. This can be viewed in the cabinets, boxes, and cases

of Norberto Roldan which harbor goods and market-day merchandise of folk Catholic devotion, from luminous crucifixes and rosaries through amulets and candle effigies to devices of local healing. This colonial repertory of propitiations usually intersects with images of the mass media and social turbulence that are foregrounded in the works of Nunelucio Alvarado, Elmer Borlongan, Emmanuel Garibay, and Alwin Reamillo. Their art summons the spirits of the colonial pantheon but reconfigures their presence within discourses of peasant revolution, class attrition, urban hemorrhage, radical theology, and struggle against capital in whatever guise it dwells.

Sanggawa was an art collective that used to do murals for towns and churches, as well as for galleries and museums. The work entitled "Second Coming" is part of a series of editorial artworks documenting in a satirical mode the key events and dramatic personae which defined the news in Manila in 1994 and in early 1995, including the visit of the Pope, that proclaimed the Philippines as the only "Christian nation in Asia." Sanggawa portrayed these events under a carnival tent and with the trappings of the circus. The group identified religion and entertainment as the win pivots to which the events of that times had turned.

Devotion as a colonial gesture initiates suppression and supplication. Asked about his vision as artist, Jose Legaspi unburdens himself and calls his art confessional, a personal disclosure of unconscious misgivings and leave takings within a proscriptive Catholic culture. The artist regards his images as autobiographical half-truths flowing through a stream and arising from secret bedmates. A recurring trope is the constricted space: a bed in a room, an alley, a void dappled with stars. The work "The Flood," consisting of 1,200 pastel drawings on bond paper, is similar to the point of tearing down the surface of "walls" and "overwriting" them with a proper visual diary of a history-in-progress. He confesses that as a young boy, he defiled the family altar, crowning the Madonna with the devil's horns to express his anger toward his mother; the Mother and the Madonna would later become one. The artist relates that he begins the toil of evoking the past with the images of the "killing of the child" and of the "birth at the urinal," which he imagines as the site of his own expiration before death. With these scenes of terror, he rummages through a trope of traumas to "make sense," leading him to intuit his pre-symbolic world of what could have been, a reckoning of a prospective and retrospective past that is born in regret (what should not have been) and not in hope (what could have been possible). From here, Legaspi sets sail into an inclement journey from birth to childhood to old age and finally to a prefiguration of a suicide as he testifies to his seething sexuality.



*Critical Inheritance*

With these artistic agencies and works in mind, we can say that the contemporary colonial figuration through its main tendencies in Philippine art – memory as archive, remastery of the code, and defensible survival – permeates much of the aesthetic and moral culture today in the Philippines. These representations of the colonial are not mere vessels that contain content, but are modes of materializing form and feeling in order to constitute an aesthetic practice that creates political possibility. Pierre Macherey, through Derrida, leads us to the phrase “critical inheritance” which he explains thus: “In fact, one does not inherit only from the past of the past, and it must even be said that, from that which is dead once and for all and cannot return, there can be no inheritance. Rather, one inherits from that which, in the past, remains yet to come, by taking part in a present which is not only present in the fleeting sense of actuality but which undertakes to reestablish a dynamic connection between past and future.” (Macherey 1999, p.19)

I re-motivate “critical inheritance” in this paper to stress the chances of reconverting the colonial aesthetic into a redemptive transfiguration of a postcolonial future for the Philippines.

Such “critical inheritance” finally renovates suffering into sufferance. Lexically, sufferance may mean the “act or a state of suffering,” or the “patience or endurance under suffering.” We stand by the term as a means to explore the possibility of reclaiming the affect of sufferance as an emotional economy of struggle that engages the suffering agent, or, more appropriately, the sufferant, to exceed “the power by which it is enabled.” (Butler 1997, p. 15) The generative impulse of subjectivity emerges from subjection, rendering agents not solely compliant to or complicit with power, but rather co-operators in the process of its generation. The politics of resistance can be made only if it is carrying multiple loads of commitments within discrepant social fields of practice, and when resistance as a condition of sufferance is made accountable to a moral economy or to a local moral world in which life is justified by criterions of a defensible humanity and native dignity. (Kerkvliet 1991)

There is political interest in deploying the term sufferance in relation to suffering, which has attracted considerable interest in established medical, psychological and anthropological writings, but which may also be construed as reactionary and passive and, in fact, prone to the manipulation of fascist persuasions. In this respect, suffering as a pervasive aesthetic in popular culture and in Philippine social representations may also be linked to the discourse of melodrama and its attendant excess and oftentimes hysterical ex-

pressiveness that is rerun in movies, literature, radio, television, and related media. To deal with the banality of sufferance as a contemporary colonial and mediatizing trope, therefore, is to engage in the politics of redeeming it. In this project, sufferance, owing perhaps to the wordplay insinuated by the suffix *ance* and to its possible Derridean circulation, recuperates this perceived state of inertia and reenergizes its transformative potential. This is a necessary ideological act that need not be seen as a teleological turn, but rather as an aspiration to situate theory in social practice and within the processual constitution of human agency. Sufferance as some kind of a political vector is fraught with tension and moves along a contested passage in a nuanced spectrum of possibilities, from grief to melancholia to indignation to struggle, and, back and forth, in the continual testing of limits and extensity at the edge of a fully catholic salvation.

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