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Five of the texts in this issue are responses to the question "What is bare life?," one of the topics offered by the *documenta 12* magazine project essayed in our third issue (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp/issue3.pdf>). A dialogue amongst 70 journals and online media from all over the world, *documenta 12* invited *Ctrl+P* as one of these journals to join in the debate by contributing texts, or whole issues focusing on one of the three key topics: Is modernity our antiquity?, What is to be done? (framed within the issue of education), and What is bare life? This last topic problematizes the 'subject': "the exposed nature, powerlessness, and defenselessness of the subject fuels many current philosophical and aesthetic debates. This is accompanied by political considerations and artistic demands for a new self-empowerment of the subject. The forms of representation of such considerations, and questions related to the status of the subject in contemporary art, provide the thematic framework for this particular project topic." Roger M. Buerger, Artistic Director of *documenta 12* writes, "This second question underscores the sheer vulnerability and complete exposure of being. Bare life deals with that part of our existence from which no measure of security will ever protect us. But as in sexuality, absolute exposure is intricately connected with infinite pleasure. There is an apocalyptic and obviously political dimension to bare life (brought out by torture and the concentration camp). There is however, also a lyrical or even ecstatic dimension to it – a freedom for new and unexpected possibilities (in human relations as well as in out relationship to nature or, more generally, to the world in which we live). Here and there, art dissolves the radical separation between painful subjection and joyous liberation. But what does that mean for its audiences?"

Neal Oshima's photographic essay *Squatter Settlements in Metro Manila*, Neferti Xina M. Tadiar's *By the Waysides of Globopolis*, Patrick D. Flores' *Brocka Does Marcos* and *Paskil*, a short story written in Filipino by Tony Perez, all take up the *lumpenproletariat* as the subject living in the slums of Metro Manila. Dwelling places of the majority of the nine million who live in the city and referred to by urban planners as "informal settlements," the euphemistic term for occupancy of land without having ownership or security of tenure, these godforsaken places are *prima materia* for spawning the barest of lives. In their introduction of *Deleuze and Space*, editors Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert refer to Edward Casey's work *Getting Back into Place* where he "defies us to imagine a world without a place. It is impossible to do, he says, citing as proof the very terror such a thought evokes." Further, they cite Heidegger's concept of man as "'a place-being' and that in his later work, he turned more explicitly to the theme of 'dwelling,' finding ways of articulating it as an effect and precondition of existence."¹ Thus, to be human is to have a dwelling place in which to be human.

Yet these bare lives lived in inhumane conditions, in extreme abjection, make up the biopolitic that, as essayed by Tadiar and Flores both quoting Giorgio Agamben, ironically have "the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men." Literature, film, and the visual arts, although mere mediating practices in their signifying of bare life, place us in a "dialectical process of seeing" (Tadiar) if only to confront our own complicity in the hegemonic processes of rendering life bare. And, if art "can at all be a medium of hope and jouissance," Marian Pastor Roces in *Dakar / Cubao* reminds us that it "will have to bare all. Including the feeble register of whatever power it might have."

Written in 1992, *Paskil* is reprinted and translated into French as *L'Annonce* by Héloïse Magannon. Recently founded, *Ctrl+P* is looking for ways to enlarge the number of its readers by commissioning the translation of works in Filipino into other languages. Elena Rivera-Mirano revisits *Paskil* and discovers a resonance fifteen years later. A college professor who deals with her students' "struggles to emulate the complexities of the language" and the academic jargon, she shares in the protagonist's despair over his sheer inability to make sense of things or in this case, bare his grief, bare his life through words. And finally, Jose Tence Ruiz is also despondent. His *Determined Despair* is a re-think of our agency as artists living in the Philippines. Easily overtaken by market forces and the new mediating technologies, our production and circulation of art are in danger of being co-opted as mere fodder for and instruments of capitalism. Perhaps it is an imperative to willfully despair over this co-optation in order that we see things clearer and regain hope from a distance.

End note:

1. *Deleuze and Space*. Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert, eds. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, 1.

Squatter Settlements in Metro Manila

NEAL OSHIMA

These photographs were made over the past five years as part of a survey of the architecture of informal settlements in Metro Manila. The study had city planning, architectural and economic components and resulted in the soon to be published *Lungsod Iskwater, The Evolution of Informality as a Dominant Pattern in Philippine Cities*, by Alcazaren, Ferrer and Icamina. The survey grew out of a comment by the Cuban-American urban planner, Andres Duany, who, in a lecture about the metropolis, noted that the solutions for Manila's myriad urban problems would more likely come from the squatter settlements than from the exclusive enclaves that Manila's elite inhabit.

As I made these photographs, I was struck by the contrast between the trepidation that non-squatter residents would express about their neighbors and the whole-hearted welcome that the settlement residents would greet me with when I asked to photograph their homes. I came to realize that most of the squatters were there by choice. More often than not, they paid rent to someone who had connections with local authorities, were building on tiny plots of untitled, marginally-habitable land and had made a carefully considered choice to live on the edges of what was legal and prudent. I found that invariably, they had created communities that were self-governing and humane, pockets of sanity in a city of three hour a day commutes through blinding pollution in the chaos that is Metro Manila.

Informal settlers face the same urban problems as others in the city, of course, with the added dangers of violent eviction, sweeping fires that can raze entire communities in minutes, institutionalized crime, and sanitation problems characteristic of an urban sink. On the other hand, in many communities I visited, shoes and sandals are left out on the doorstep without fear of theft, and young children play without danger, supervised by all neighboring adults. I found that people were highly aware of and genuinely concerned about their neighbors, expressing a sense of cooperation and tolerance that is often rare in formal communities. In addition, I found that the architectural solutions were often surprising in their use of materials and space, often redefining the limits of human habitation.

It is not my intention to romanticize life in these communities – by any standard, it is a tough, hand-to-mouth existence every single day: tiny, flimsy, untitled dwellings constructed of discarded materials, without proper water, sewage or electrical connections, alongside fetid drainage canals or an arm's length away from raging commuter trains. Yet, as we become increasingly aware of the damage we, as a species, have done to the planet and as the prospects of long-term human survival dim, I wonder if these photos aren't an optimistic glimmer of the future of the human species on earth.



Top: Holy Spirit, Metro Manila
Bottom: Holy Spirit, Metro Manila



Top: Holy Spirit, Metro Manila
Bottom: Leveriza, Metro Manila



Top: Leveriza, Metro Manila
Bottom: Leveriza, Metro Manila



Top: Leveriza, Metro Manila
Bottom: Bangkal, Metro Manila



Top: Sipac Almacen,
Navotas, Metro Manila
Bottom: Sipac Almacen,
Navotas, Metro Manila

By the Waysides of Globopolis

NEFERTI XINA M. TADIAR

*A sower went out to sow his seed:
and as he sowed, some fell by the way side;
and it was trodden down,
and the fowls of the air devoured it.*
Luke 8:5

*Not so very long ago, the earth numbered
two thousand million inhabitants:
five hundred million men,
and one thousand five hundred million natives.
The former had the Word; the others had the use of it.*
Jean-Paul Sartre

In the metropole, the global-political horizon appears to be drawn. Dystopic visions of a world in the throes of death of modern civilization and democracy abound everywhere, while a widespread acknowledgement that we are living in a permanent, global state of exception, in which the distinction between peace and war no longer holds and the suspension of the rule of law has itself become the rule, sweeps the ranks of the progressive intelligentsia. Forty years before the U.S. decision to make homeland security and the global war on terror the basis of its practice of government, in the midst of France's war against Algeria, Sartre tolled the death-knell of colonial Europe and decried the "fresh moment of violence" with which Europe answered the decolonization of the Third World as the desperate attempt of Man to hang on to the exclusive privileges of its racist humanity.¹ In this realization pressed upon Sartre by the raging struggles of the wretched of the earth, neo-colonial war was nothing less than a war for the West to remain human in the face of the monstrous barbarism that the Third World revealed to be but the West's own. Decolonization posed the question of what it might mean to become human, in the wake of the destruction of colonial, racist humanism, a half-forgotten question for which history has yet to provide an adequate answer.

Today, neocolonial wars have resurfaced with a vengeance, in the name of the civilizing influence of neoliberal democracy. These wars have renewed long-waning metropolitan attention to the continuing legacy and generalization of the politics of colonial sovereignty whose most accomplished form Achille Mbembe argues can be found in the contemporary, late-modern colonial occupation of Palestine, and now, one would have to add, in the imperial U.S. occupation of Iraq.² In these exemplary contexts of what Mbembe calls necropolitics – the subjugation of life to the sovereign power of death – where "vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*," the problem of new forms of cordoned off humanity looms large.

If such "bare life," or "life that can be killed but not sacrificed," is, as Agamben argues, the originary element of modern sovereignty, the exclusion of which founds "the city (*polis*) of men," it is not only in the security zones of militarized occupation or "extraordinary rendition" where it exists; nor is it only conventional weapons of mass destruction that produce contemporary forms of disposable life.³ Widespread deracination and economic dispossession brought on by neoliberalist policies of structural adjustment have created a whole other category of "bare life" in the form of a global slum population whose life-threatening conditions of poverty and hazardous and radically uncertain settlement attest to their subjection to the ever-present threat of death and their expulsion from the emergent global *polis* of the capitalist world economy. Comparing the processes of neoliberal globalization to "the catastrophic processes that shaped a

‘third world’ in the first place,” Mike Davis ponders the political future of this billion-strong surplus humanity “warehoused” in slums, wondering whether this “true global residuum” of disincorporated labor could possibly become part of a global liberatory political project or whether it will merely regress to the politically-pliant behavior of the pre-industrial *lumpenproletariat*. “Or,” Davis muses, mimicking the prophetic tone of anti-colonial struggles of the last century, “is some new, unexpected historical subject, à la Hardt and Negri, slouching toward the supercity?”⁴ Embodying the very limit of contemporary global politics, how could this surplus humanity not assume some apocalyptic, beastly form?



Photographs by Neal Oshima
Top: Sipac Almacén, Navotas Metro Manila
Bottom: Pandacan Bridge, Metro Manila

On the outskirts of the twenty-first century *globopolis*, in Metro Manila, a metropolis somewhere between, in Davis’ terms, a megacity (more than 8 million) and a hypercity (more than 20 million), we glean the outlines of this catastrophic vision and worldly parable of “bare life.” What, here by the waysides of the *globopolis*, does the Word, “bare life,” portend? In Manila’s phenomenal urban excess – its “floating population” of unregulated, informal labor, their bodily presence, their settlements and the

artifacts of their activities – we not only see the continuing history of today’s surplus humanity and its relationship to necropolitical power; in this human debris of global sovereignty and modern, metropolitanist development we also find races of living beyond disposable, “bare” life that recast the question of what it means to become human as a question of how to survive and what it might mean to thrive.

The sublime representation of Manila’s slums is the image of Smoky Mountain, “a Dantesque vision from hell turned postcard of global poverty,” an immense 40-year old heap of garbage on which entire urban communities, tens of thousands of people, survive.⁵ Reproduced over and over again, and circulating globally, the most photographed garbage dump in the world has served to mirror the disastrous failure of the authoritarian developmentalist schemes of the Marcos dictatorship, the excesses of consumption and corruption of that regime and its ‘democratic’ successors, and now the human refuse of globalization and its paragons of wealth. It is, undoubtedly, a spectacular image of surplus humanity, equal to the most dystopic visions of a world in permanent war.

War has, in fact, long fueled the exodus from the countryside. Enjoying the largesse and license bestowed by the permanent global-U.S. war on terror, paramilitary and military forces of the current necropolitical Philippine state have, in the last five years, carried out an unending spate of extrajudicial executions and forced abductions of human rights activists, political dissidents, and leaders and members of labor, peasant and women’s organizations and other cause-oriented groups, in a bid to eliminate any and all perceived threats to the state’s authority and right to exist. Combined with the dispossessing and immiserating effects of aggressive resource-extraction and agribusiness, this “total war” waged by the Philippine state on its own people, a war which it inherited from the dictatorship and now attests to its own status as an occupying force, has created extensive zones of insecurity and immanent death for those on the very periphery of metropolitanist national development. Although they would seem to be altogether outside of urban life, already rural populations live on the splintering edges of the growing national urban network, the provincial corridors of which current Philippine President Arroyo has proposed to expand into superhighways of global capital expansion, in plans that promise to surpass Marcos’ project of building roads as developmentalist instruments of counterinsurgency.⁶ Fleeing the condition of statelessness (abandonment by the state, suspension of rights, expulsion from a polity) and liminal existence into which they have been thrust, the refugees of this political and economic war pour into the metropolis, flowing into the already vast pool of surplus people scavenging for better lives on the waysides of the nation’s capital.

Photograph by Neal Oshima
Philippine National Railways Compound,
Metro Manila



Squatters, scavengers, beggars – these figures of the urban excess have served as important, politicizing images of social contradiction in the vigorous Philippine tradition of protest in literature, film and art from the 1960s to the present. Even when they functioned as images of the commodified spectacle of poverty in ironic and satiric representations such as Emmanuel Torres' 1972 poem, *Another Invitation to the Pope to Visit Tondo*, and Mike de Leon's 1992 film *Aliwan Paradise*, images of urban squalor have been pressed into the service of awakening political subjects of change. For those who were part of this tradition, the urban excess signified the country's abiding failure to achieve the promise of a liberated nation, the imagined community that was to emerge in freedom and prosperity after the chains of colonialism were broken. The human refuse of postcolonial developmentalism and modernization were, from this perspective, potential subjects of a future nation, yet to be achieved.

While the state has continuously tried to contain and eliminate this refuse, through periodic violent demolitions and relocations of its ever-mushrooming informal settlements, its facilitation of neoliberalist economic restructuring through policies of both outright war and emergency powers of repression (while maintaining its own foothold in crony capitalist ventures) has all but guaranteed the presence and growth of Metro Manila's floating population. At the same time, the informal labor provided by the floating population subsidizes the metropolitan economy as a whole, making this "surplus" indispensable to metropolitan life. As the nation's capital and its fully enfranchised classes embrace the universal promises of globalization, Manila's new metropolitanism entails more and more technological pathways of circulation and communication that can transcend and bypass, rather than completely dispose of, the engulfing sea of social contradictions embodied by this surplus humanity. For Metro Manila's metropolitan classes, surfacing from the mire of third world underdevelopment as emergent globopolitical subjects, the urban excess can, indeed, only signify "bare life," as the necessary condition of permanent exclusion from the polity of the world economy.

No longer an aberration of national development in the metropolitanist imaginary, squatter settlements burgeoning on the waysides of new as well as old urban pathways now merely embody the global problem of homelessness. In the planetary consciousness of more progressive globopolitical subjects, such homelessness is the defining situation of a new category of inhumanity – illegal immigrants, refugees, women and children working under conditions of neoslavery, prison populations, peoples under military occupation, religious-ethnic minorities under a genocidal majority, cropless and famine-stricken peasant farmers, slum dwellers – whose terrible fates exemplify the radical, insurmountable insecurity of our times.⁷ Announcing a new epoch of human disposability, surplus humanity appears as an environmental disaster, both in scale and in form of agency. Although ultimately attributed to human action, this disaster is mediated by a nearly unfathomable agglomeration of social systems whose totality can only be grasped by the physical finitude of the earth, making the notion of 'accountability' a paltry exercise of primitive thought. The sublime image of surplus humanity produced in the globally-circulated photographs such as those of Smoky Mountain (as postcards of global poverty) hence produces in the globopolitical subject an apprehension of the magnitude and character of human destitution, of human lack, of unprotected, sheer existence, that the same globopolitical order on which this subject's "humanity" rests, creates. As the crystallization of dehumanization as privation or suspension of human status, "bare life" stares back at globopolitical "humanity" like a mirror, rendering the latter's supreme power over the planet a chimera or catastrophe – a veritable humiliation of human sovereignty.⁸ Like the "transcendental homelessness" expressed by the modern European novel, the bourgeois epic of "a world abandoned by God," images of "bare life" confront globopolitical "humanity" with an existential homelessness created by all the forms and practices of human abandonment operating in this global order, that is, by global sovereignty's abandonment of the world, which remains.⁹

End notes:

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2005).
2. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11-40.
3. "In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men." Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, 1998).
4. Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat," *New Left Review* 26 (Mar-Apr 2004), 5-34, 28.
5. Pepe Escobar, "Poverty, Corruption: The Ties That Bind," *Asia Times On Line* [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South-east_Asia/FJ05Ae01.html]
6. Rommel Rodriguez, "Cassus Beli" in *Kontra Gahum: Academics Against Political Killings*, ed. Sarah Raymundo and Roland Tolentino (IBON, 2006).
7. Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (South End Press, 2005).
8. On "the idea that humanity is a matter of endowment, declaration, or recognition," see Samera Esmeir, "On Making Dehumanization Possible," *PMLA* 121.5 (2005):1544-1551.
9. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*. Translated from the German by Anna Bostoc (Merlin Press, 1962).
10. Estrella Alfon, "Man With A Camera," in *Readings in Bilingual Contemporary Philippine Literature: Short Stories*, ed. Visitacion R. De La Torre (National Book Store, 1978), 1-6.
11. Now the parable is this: the seed is the Word of God. And they by the wayside are they that hear: then the devil cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved." Luke 8:11-12.
12. Gopal Balakrishnan, "Future Wars," Public Talk, University of California, Santa Cruz, February 21, 2006.

In Estrella Alfon's 1958 story, *Man With a Camera*, written in the period of that earlier universal humanism bequeathed to postcolonial urban Filipinos, the monstrous evil and hate captured by a cameraman's prize-winning photograph of a beggar is shown, through the image of the beggar weeping at the theft of his humanity and in the female character's disturbing question about the source of the cameraman's own contempt ("You know this man?"), to mirror the cameraman's own corrupt soul.¹⁰ The mirroring function of the image in this story, which Alfon repeats by telling the same story from the beggar's point of view in a companion piece, *The Photographed Beggar*, enacts the dialectics of seeing, of Self and Other, that shaped the relation between Europe and its colonies, and made possible the decolonizing world's own claims to selfhood and humanity. This dialectics of Self and Other continues to animate, with undiminished force in world of voided meaning, the progressive search for some overall political meaning in surplus humanity that would redeem it. Fallen by the waysides of the globopolis, however, the Word of Man – the promise of reclamation of humanity – is devoured by the fowls of the air, the princes of global human sovereignty, who "cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest believing they be saved."¹¹ For Gopal Balakrishnan, the sighting of this figure constitutes the fundamental politico-ontological question posed by the present global state of affairs: "Is it possible for a new militant figure to arise in this milieu of radical homelessness that would concentrate and universalize its billion fold grievances?"¹² But salvation by one political subject slouching towards the slums of the supercity to be born is itself an apocryphal event.

Neal Oshima's ten photographs of Metro Manila's squatter settlements featured in this journal as a photographic essay and originally taken for the soon to be published *Lungsod Iskwater, The Evolution of Informality as a Dominant Pattern in Philippine Cities* do not invoke this dialectics of seeing, nor do they cast a saving eye over the milieus of abandoned humanity. What they lead us to consider is not the radical homelessness that mirrors humanity's own radical insecurity in the face of the present global state of emergency. Rather, in these photographs, we see informal settlements as public spaces – spaces beneath an interchange, by the side of a road or the railroad, along a canal – made into dwelling-places of "stolen" domesticity, like stolen time, time "borrowed" from the unforgiving speed of capitalist accumulation and circulation imaged in the empty urban pathways that bypass them. We sense this passage in the televisions, which people watch from the sidelines. As the vanishing points of these images, the televisions catch our eye in a loop of seeing that puts our own spectatorship on display, on the sidelines, like theirs. But there is nothing extraordinary here; no epiphany is reached. It is in fact the banality of these scenes, their domestic familiarity, that allow a fuller regard.

Focusing on these informal settlements as "architectural solutions" to the problem of living, of making homes, on the precarious edges and out of the flimsy sides and sheet-materials of formal buildings, Oshima's wide-angled still lifes make room for all the bits and pieces, and things, with which people house themselves. Here we find no spectacular representation of destitution, no sublime images of sheer, unprotected existence. Instead we see a whole range of interiors and exteriors of living spaces, which remind us of the heterogeneity of this class of life as well as of the singularity of living. For those who make, clean, and sustain the homes and at-homeness of globopolitical humanity, the question of life is a daily, ordinary, though often also painful, violent, and laborious, task of making shelters for living. Clothes drying on a line, plastic containers of water, a metal pot, a mattress, a fan – these are not just means of surviving, of sheltering against "bare life." They are the accoutrements of making lives, of making homes, in a world that would otherwise leave them bare.

PATRICK D. FLORES

Lino Brocka's *Gumapang Ka sa Lusak* (1990), roughly translated in the imperative mood as "grovel in the muck," begins with a filming of a rape scene from what could well be a soft-porn outing set during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. This tangential reference initiates us into the main film narrative in which a kindred star, or the starlet Rachel, is the mistress or *querida* of the town mayor named Edmundo Guatlo. The shift from the status of a worker in cinema who acts out fantasies to a mass audience to a courtesan who performs probably the same fantasies for more or less a similar, albeit exclusive, client lies at the heart of the director's thesis about power in the Philippines: that it is obscene to the degree that it overinvests in prowess and potency and that it releases itself in nearly irrational ecstasy.



Acclaimed Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka gained local recognition through melodramas and international notice through films depicting the searing social conditions in the Philippines during the Marcos years in 70s. His projects foiled the idealized image of Manila as a thriving, developing nation-state, contrasting it with scenes of squalor, inequity, and the rage of the poor. He was an activist; he fought against censorship and advocated the rights of the dispossessed. He was a personality in international film festivals, a figure of Third World cinema. In his last years, he further explored melodrama, a genre that was closest to his heart and at a certain level more vital than his social realism. Image taken from <http://www.dmc.keio.ac.jp/en/review/images/lino-brocka.jpg>

Brocka's explication of this argument takes us to either the slum or the small town in which the tragic lumpen and the reconstructed, liberal humanist cacique, respectively, become the heroes of a failed revolution; *Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila in the Claws of Neon, 1975) and *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (You Were Weighed But Found Wanting, 1974) are paradigmatic in this respect. Surely, complicated problems inhere in this scheme, and this has been discussed in a previous essay. What is salient in *Gumapang* is its allegorical stance toward the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos who ruled the Philippines from 1965 to 1986, a thread that runs through as well in the guise of melodrama in *Babangon Ako at Dudurugin Kita* (1989), or "rise and pulverize," *Hahamakin Lahat* (1990), or "to forsake everything," and *Sa Kabila ng Lahat* (1991), or "in spite of everything." If one were to make a cursory semantic scanning of the titles, one will get, on the one hand, a sense of abjection in these invocations and an impression of exceptionality, on the other. The latter is germane with regard to the subject of "bare life," as elaborated by Giorgio Agamben because it homes in on an excess and an exception. It is thus uncanny that if one were to relate Marcos with the mayor, one might be led to the filmography of the *bomba*, a genre flourishing before and in the early years of the Martial Law period (declared in 1972) that presented softcore sex; the regime inevitably repressed it, only to unleash a variant in its twilight years through the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, which waived censorship rules for the precursors of what in industry parlance were christened *pene* films, a contraction of penetration. *Bomba* is also bombast, an inflated oratory, a bombshell, a scandal, a controversy that is set off to generate mileage. The mixture of two surpluses of performance is instructive, affirmed by the work of Vicente Rafael in *Patronage, Pornography, and Youth: Ideology and Spectatorship during the Early Marcos Years* and John Sidel in *The Philippines: The Languages of Legitimation*.

Agamben states in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* :

The inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if not concealed – nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power. In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception. Place biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern State therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life, thereby reaffirming the bond (derived from a tenacious correspondence between the modern and the archaic

which one encounters in the most diverse spheres) between modern power and the most immemorial of the arcana imperii.¹

A possible intersection between the modern, and by extension the current neo-liberal ethic, and the archaic is the charisma of the *anting-anting*, a talismanic impetus of masculine power in which a concubine condenses a seminal aspect of legitimation and authority; this was evident in Marcos with the putative fling, the American starlet Dovie Beams who had audio-taped her lovemaking routine with Marcos, and in Joseph Estrada, the action star who became president in 1998, with the Filipino starlet Laarni Enriquez. Into this fray sorties a character who regulates the promiscuity by projecting the archaic image of the mother, the mythological *Maganda* in *Si Malakas at Si Maganda* (The Strong and The Beautiful) mythology of Philippine origin, the primordial affective agency of the native priestess who ordains well-being in the realm of “culture” and presides over rituals at temples, or edifices dedicated as “sanctuaries of the Filipino soul.” Imelda is First Lady, mother of the nation, the official wife of the president, the legitimate woman. In the film, the Imelda figure, from coiffure to couture to the customary singing in the hustings, importunes her husband about political strategy, warning him that the mistress might undermine their aspirations to send him to Congress and making it clear to him that their hopes can never be dashed by a prostituted lover from Manila’s old suburb: “makating babae na taga-Pandacan.” Indeed, Imelda in this incarnation is a rabid, seething conspirator, a creator of life and a created life herself. Accounts have disclosed that at the beginning of her career as Marcos’s First Lady, she could not respond to the rigors of a hectic, if not byzantine, political tenure and suffered a nervous breakdown. She went to the United States for psychiatric sessions, and as the story goes, she came back to the Palace a totally different individual: this was a veritable make-over of a “life.” And this is not to say that she was bereft of her own flirtations; she was rumored to have been more than a friend to the actor George Hamilton. When asked about this, she replied: “I’m no hotsie patootsie.”

Both Marcos and Imelda peddled personas of bounty, of blessedness and blessings or *biyaya* at their disposal. In a sense then, since in Agamben’s formulation, following Foucault, that governmentality and technologies of self making are immanent in the form of life and that it is life itself that is at stake, most particularly in this era of mediatization, we can aver that the subjection of the mistress, in *Gumapang* and in other occasions, proves to be her subjectivization, too – or her competence to deconstruct the artifice of the norm; and this transpires within the conjuncture of state power and the domicile of cohabitation that is home to her and the mayor, on the stage of politics and in the bedroom of a liaison, in clandestine and narcissistic expositions of affection for a material possession, be it economic survival, political office, or the body of a woman, of a movie star, whom the mayor had “bought” and put under surveillance.

All this finally becomes public, when Rachel tells the truth about the affair and the lurid details of machination, prompted by the fact that the mayor is also after her.

This falling out starts when she seeks a favor from him to get Levi, her first boyfriend, out of prison; and the mayor concedes, but hires Levi to kill his political opponent, whom he taints as a Communist. Levi, a stunt man from the movies who could be a surrogate to Benigno Aquino’s (Marcos’s arch rival murdered on the airport tarmac in 1983) assailant Rolando Galman, executes the plan accordingly; and, for obvious reasons, the mayor would want him and, upon the prodding of the wife, his once docile mistress silenced.

In a political rally organized by Edmundo Guatlo, Rachel climbs up the stage, wrests the microphone from politicians, and lays bare the biopolitical life that had made her illicit but at this fully pornographic moment, renders her explicit, explicitly evidentiary. She is then shot. Agamben might be moved to conclude here that: “A life that cannot be separated from its form

Still photo from *Gumapang Ka sa Lusak*.
Image taken from <http://www.3continents.com/cinema/films/images/f830.jpg>



is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself...in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power.” This is a species of life of human beings as the only beings “for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose lives are irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness.”²

When Rachel expires, she leaves a trace of a beatific smile in the true spirit of an *artista* or actress who has become a heroine, almost like indexing an epiphany as witness to and voice of truth, conveyed through the machine of lies itself, the cannibalist mass media that could not resist, well, the sensation. Like her, a young man who had learned to love her, has also professed a possibility of life beyond this muck or morass of politics, at one romantic instance consoling each other with their class histories and quaint dreams in, of all places, Manila Bay, shrouded by the orange sunset and sitting at the edge of the water and the city, at the border of nature and Imelda’s terrain of reclaimed territory of culture. Again, Agamben: “The state of exception, which is what the sovereign each and every time decides, takes place precisely when naked life – which normally appears rejoined to the multifarious forms of social life – is explicitly put into question and revoked as the ultimate foundation of political power. The ultimate subject that needs to be at once turned into the exception and included in the city is always naked life.”³

End notes:

1 Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 6.

2 Agamben, Giorgio. 1996. “Form-of-Life.” *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press, 151-152.

3. Agamben, 1996, 152-153.

Dakar / Cubao

MARIAN PASTOR ROCES

1

Out in the sun along the coastal promenade outlining Dakar from the Atlantic, is a long line of beds, wardrobes, dressers, tables, and chairs with upholstery wrapped in plastic against the elements. Arrayed somewhat like giant drying fish, the furniture are indifferent to the salt spray and are perhaps impervious to the droppings of 20-odd hawks circling above Senegal’s capital during its 7th biennale. Facing motorists and pedestrians who seem un-inclined or unable to purchase these varnished offerings, the wares perform hieroglyphically. They form phrases about a will to capture a special, however elusive, *élan*.

By happenstance coincidental to the biennale, this perennial furniture display is not so local it would be unlikely anywhere else. Spontaneous exhibits are virtual everywhere. The more disconcerting the goods and the more incongruous the alignment of domesticity and the sky, the more ubiquitous these spatial events seem to be. That ubiquity—that common-ness—at first pass seems distinct from the rarefied status of a biennale. But not for long.



Photo credit: Marian Pastor Roces

The two displays get mixed up in the mind. The banner coinage, 'Dak'Art,' prompts the conflation of city and art event; recalls that biennales, performing to the project of magnifying city, articulates a will to take up and amplify all arrays of goods, experiences, and people within its reach. In any case, Dakar was at surface homogenous: all is tenacious, crumbling, yellow, worn, reeling, mournful, suspicious. The art on show bore striking resemblances to the fish-furniture. Decay and grace so co-exist, one could only have desired some transcendent flight into the monomaniacal imperatives of art; some relief from the dull ache produced by the often artless simulacra of social struggle in biennales.

Stirred by these desiderata, the spectator is perfectly happy to construct a metonymic (rather than dialogic) relation between this fish-furniture show and this biennale, which is also spread out along a foreshore where, so to speak, oceanic flows lap against local grit. The fish-furniture seems so very available to anyone inclined to extrapolate bare life into world art currents. And this, like all biennales, seems poised indeed to dissolve the raw stuff in its swirls; to produce—for and as art— thickness, viscosity, perhaps even substance.

But we would be wrong to figure this imagined relation as more than the spectator's fish tale.

2

In Quezon City, capital of the Philippines, a number of art spaces, bookshops, and one shop selling extraordinarily competent and unlicensed reproductions of emblematic chairs (Eames, van der Rohe, Gehry, name it, they can copy), materialized in a 'shoe expo' in the district of Cubao in the first years of the new century. The U-shaped building was popular in the 1970's as an outlet for local footwear, the shoes hand-crafted in a nearby municipality named Marikina. Ramshackle at the end of the 90's, the building drew young art enthusiasts with the word 'alternative' on their lips and the notion 'artists run space' roosting in their imagination.

End of January 2007, the bohemian cachet having been produced, and with Cubao somewhat restored to its reputation as a space for inexpensive cultural experience, the artists can no longer afford the spaces, and are readying to ease themselves out of the shoe expo. A demise party was held. Rock bands played, so it was a Filipino kind of wake, a pleasant night out for the kids.

It is so Filipino, in fact, and quite thoroughly insular, that no sustaining flows to and from international waters buoyed up the alternative spaces. Whatever the personal links between and among the erstwhile Cubao art crowd and their friends across the seas seem, at this juncture, far too incipient to conjure power over landlords and urban developers.

Meanwhile, the nearby fish, meat, and vegetable market remains big as ever; busy, lively, and financially viable. One is tempted to say that bare life— verified by the smell of fish, the succulent sight of meat, the way vegetables offer a thousand tactilities, all of which redolent with the violences produced by markets and distribution circuits— produces its own artful, masking performances. Does not need artists. Is indifferent to art. Is the ocean to the puddles made by artists.

This Cubao market sells food to upscale restaurants and rich families. The fish entrails that assault the cooks and matrons are washed away even as they procession with determined steps shod in appropriate clogs through the fluorescent-lit galleries. Bloody, amputated flesh is exquisitely desirable here. Class encounter is a daily ritual and all perform a theater of mutual support and need. The deep layers of under-classes that supply and live off this stage are visible, in somewhat de-focused ways, in the peripheral vision. Because this is theater (and the roles are acted out with precision and flair), no one need be overcome by the ephemeral manifestations of grief. Here, one stays focused on the splendid osso buco that the cow bones will become within the day.

We might entertain the thought that this organic artmaking—the artifice that markets need in order to thrive with élan—could use real artists who will fish out the entrails and offal from the canals; stuff these in the consumers’ masked faces; protest the indifference to refined, critical art.

But we would be wrong to imagine such grandiloquent entrail-art as any more than an artist’s fish tale.

3

Oceans apart, Dakar and Quezon City are nonetheless pulled—distended—by the same undertows that travel through great submarine arcs from the world’s epicenters of power. Like all other places thrown together under the contemptuous euphemism ‘developing world,’ both sites are jelly *vis à vis* shock waves. But it is not so much the vulnerability of these places to global forces that bears remarking, as the unity of the world as a single ocean of irresistible currents. Dakar and Quezon City are oceans apart, but, simultaneously, they are, as everywhere else, islands in a unitary fluidity. They exist (perhaps only now wholly, within the postmodern Empire described by Negri and Hardt) in an all-encompassing sea of power relations.

Given this totality, it would be barren indeed to understand ‘bare life’ as excess of suffering alone. Quotidian, repetitive, slowly crushing, soporific, or glee-inducing violence—vaguely perceptible at the Cubao market theater, for example, or at the Cubao shoe expo with the alternative spaces, or at the Dakar fish-furniture display, or, indeed at the biennale so close to the white robes of supplication for transcendent states—suffuses the human condition. To imagine that art can perform an elevating magic on bare life, is no more promising than the hope that the cries of mothers and the pious bombast of priests can call forth any resurrection.

Art—its seductions often issuing from perverse transactions, its frequently paltry and compromised gestures in the face of power, the repetitive defeat of its utopian longings, its vainglorious audacities, and the metamorphosis of longings to conceits—transpires *as* bare life. Art does not occupy a realm separate from the fishmongers’. If it can at all be a medium for hope and jouissance, art will have to bare all. Including the feeble register of whatever power it might have.

4

In a second-hand bookshop in Perth, Western Australia, is an art history series, handsome for its time but aged and nearly rubbish now. The prehistory volume brings together articles and pictures of cave art in southern Europe and African art. Among the back pages is a brief article by Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906 – 2001), pre-eminent poet and first President of Senegal. An unsurprising, if unusual, inclusion: Senghor had a special relation to art and the politics of decolonization. The book/*objet trouve* is of course an artifact of the moment the notion of negritude, articulated by Senghor and Aime Cesaire, held sway in the imagination of the anticolonial thinkers in the Francophone world. The book is also a mnemonic device that brings back the Dakar-Djibouti expedition of 1931-1933, and the extraordinary travel writing of anthropologist, surrealist, writer, and expedition participant Michel Leiris; which writing, moreover, began to develop intellectual density around the word ‘hybridity.’ Artifacts collected in this first major French scientific expedition into Africa, deposited at the Musée de l’Homme at the place du Trocadéro, would diffuse into High Modern artmaking.

In the same bookshop are National Geographic back issues, one of which has the cover story of the most celebrated ‘primitive tribe’ of the 20th century. The Tasa-day, supposedly discovered bare and in utter cave-dwelling innocence in the Philippine island of Mindanao, have subsequently been made rubbish of by anthropologists who found the whole business of discovery no more than an elaborate hoax—perpetrated, they collectively argued, by no less than the Filipino dictator Ferdinand Marcos and

his cohorts. The Tasaday, whether characters or not in a malefic theater, are alive but destitute today. No one knows what really happened. No one cares enough to speak to them.

Traceries of all these moments are sinking into the depths of rubbish bins. Bare life is, precisely, raw and vulnerable to the extent that it is quickly severed from history.

Denizens of Senghor's Dakar will remember the moment of arrival of Africa in the imagination of 20th century European intellectuals. The Dakar Biennale itself is a mnemonic device in this wise. But today's artists, contriving to rivet imagination beyond the seas, yet again, re-sounding the pitch and plea and desire for graceful arrival, seem to be working against currents that dissolve memory.

Meanwhile, young Filipino artists, such as those who are now moving out of the Cubao shoe expo building, appear to be collectively inclined towards enactments of re-discovery of self as indigenous being, as their pitch for entrée into the global sphere of art-and-identity politics. Contriving to rivet imagination beyond the seas, yet again, re-sounding the pitch and plea and desire for graceful arrival, they, too, seem to be working against currents that dissolve memory. And that make them behave, for all the world, as though they were, simultaneously, the Tasaday, their discoverers, and the sellers of second-hand books and fabulous fakes.

5

In Paris, the Musée du quai Branly opened during the same mid 2006 period of the riots in the suburbs involving spectacular torched cars and very angry youth from migrant families. The museum, a breathtaking meta-plinth for primitive art, incorporates a good part of the collection of the Musée de l'Homme, including items from the Dakar-Djibouti expedition. A number of contemporary artists were commissioned to create works in response to primitivism and the fact of this new edifice to world art and French hubris.

A little before the Paris opening and the riots, visitors to the Dakar Biennale took the inevitable tour of Gorée Island, where the business of exporting slaves persisted, in clandestine fashion, until 1848, well after this trade supposedly ended. Slipping into a rather scholastic voyeurism, the tourists connect with torments suffered long ago at the edge of the ocean. There, suspended between knowledge and flickering interest, between anaesthesia and sharpened sensation, they try the art of finding subtle pleasures and moral lessons from picking at scabs.

Scabs and wounds are always available to the purposes of artful witnesses. That scabs and wounds can be licked deliciously on occasion, offers only banal insight. But it may be useful to observe that this deliciousness—and indeed even moral outrage and all other sensations produced by the sight of rapacity and folly—can only dissolve art into bare life.

In Dakar, it is clear that the ocean exceeds any of its representations. In Cubao, there is the deepest unknowing of the oceanic currents that resonated from the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, to the Trocadero, to the Tasaday rainforest (now almost non-existent), to today's artists' narratives of tribal identity, self-discovery, and self-exposition. In Paris, the historical investments in anthropology and primitivism have not prevented the riots that still burn in the mind; notwithstanding the new museum's splendid tribute to the Other. In Perth, the currents slip through the cracks.

Xerox machine operator si Dodong, sa eskinitang Malvar. Puwestong-sulok lamang iyon, pagkat minabuting pakinabangan ng building manager ang makitid na puwang sa gilid ng service stairway. Ang resulta ay ang E-Z Plasticraft/Xerox/ID/Passport Lamination/Biodata for Sale/Telephone P2.00 3 Minutes Only, sa halip ng mesa, log book at security guard na sadyang pinagbukod ng lugar ng matandang arkitekto ng gusali. Palibhasang nasa bungad at daanan ng tao, ang E-Z Plasticraft ay umahon at di naantala sa pagpuno ng upa kailanman, at naging abala si Dodong, mula Lunes hanggang Sabado, sa pagsalang ng papel sa mga tray at sa pagpindot ng mga butong Start (green), Stop (orange), at Print Density, Adjustment at Job Interrupt (gray).

Binata si Dodong, at nangungupahan ng silid sa Zambales Street, kasama ng kaniyang ina. Pagkat may edad na, hindi na tumatanggap ng labada si Aling Merle, at naglilinis na lamang, nagluluto, at nagsusulsi ng mga butas na kamiseta at briip para sa kaniyang kaisa-isa. Si Dodong naman, sa paniwalaan o hindi, ay maituturing na uliran. Matapos maikandado ang hawlang bakal ng Xerox machine tuwing hapon ay umuwi na siya sa kanilang tahanan. Di tulad ng potograpong si Bay, na nagmimiron pa sa basement ng New Farmers' Plaza, at ng plastic cutter na si Joel, na mahilig umistambay sa mga beer garden at sinehan. Walang bisyo si Dodong. At pagkat nilalakad lamang niya and kanyang pinapasukan, and bawat sentimo ng sahod niya ay sa ina binibigay. Mapalad si Aling Merle; lagi niyang nasasabi sa sarili na bagamat gayon lamang ang kanilang kapalaran, ang buhay sana ay wala ng katapusan.

Ilan ng tag-ulan at tag-init ang lumipas mula nang iguho ang cinema theater sa kanto ng Malvar. Ang kabuuan ng lote ay binakuran ng sawali upang tabingan ang nakaluluhang excavation na ginaganap doon. (Ng huling sinilip ni Bay ang hukay na iyon, ang bida niya 'y sinlalim na raw ng impierno.) Iyon at iyon lamang ang naging tanawin mula sa gilid ng service stairway, sa tapat ng loteng iyon: ang mataas na sawaling tadtad ng mga newsprint na paskil. Mga paskil ng boksing. Tupada. Anibersaryo ng GMA Supershow. Walt Disney's World on Ice. Mga paskil na bigla na lamang naroon isang umaga, tabi-tabi, hile-hilera, tumatawag ng pansin, nililingon at nalilingatan, at maaaring pagkat gulagulanit na 'y di na binabalikan ng sinumang nagsabit sa kanila. Iyon at iyon din and naaabot ng paningin ni Dodong sa tuwing sisipat siya sa kabila ng daan, upang iwasan ang matinding silab ng optic lamp na wari 'y ibig sumulagpo sa ilalim ng gomang platen cover ng makinang pinaandar niya.

At sapagkat likas na mabait si Dodong, hindi niya winawalang-bahala ang anuman, maging ang mga paskil. Lagi na lamang, sa upuan niyang kahoy at bakal, ay pinagmamasdan niya at sinasaulo at hinahanapan ng kahit anong ganda ang mga paskil na iyon. "Lahat ng bagay," bulong ng kaibuturan ng isip niya, "ay mayroong silbi at dahilan," at kabilang diyan ang mga paskil na iyan. Oo 't mga pirasong papel lamang na dinikit sa sawali sa kabila ng eskinita datapuwat sa tapat ng kinalalagyan niya. Upang makita niya. Upang mabasa niya. Upang magbigay ng kahit katiting na kahulugan sa buhay niya.

Kayat isang araw, si Dodong ay dumating at nagkalas ng hawlang bakal at nag-charge ng makina at nagpunas ng mga istante. At habang nag-aabang ng kostumer ay muli niyang tinanaw ang sawaling dingding sa kaniyang tapat, sa kabila ng daan. At nakita niya ang bagong paskil na naroroon. Itim, pula at puti sa primerang dilaw. Isang batang babaeng ang buhok ay tinalian ng laso.

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“Dalawang nars ang tumingin sa 'kin, 'tapos, pinatawag nila iyong duktor. Dalawang beses nga lang sa isang linggo kung nandodoon iyong duktor, e. Suwerte ko 't nagkataon.”

“O – ano raw?”

“Kailangan daw 'patingin sa ospital.”

“Sa me papuntang Murphy, Nanay. 'Di ba, doon din nagpatingin iyong asawa ni Mang Canor? Sasamahan ko kayo ro'n.”

“Ako na lamang at masasayang lang ang oras mo. Patitingin lang naman.”

At kinabukasan, habang tumatawid siya sa EDSA patungong Malvar ay pahapyaw niyang nirepaso ang nakaraan. Ang naging madalas na pagbanggit ng matanda tungkol sa pananakit ng mga balakang niya. Sakit na di na makuha sa aspirin at Omega. Hanggang sa resetahan siya ng botika ng diclofenac sodium. Nagsimula sa 25 mg, at nauwi sa 100. At kamakailan lamang ay di na rin tumalab ang gamot na iyon. “Grabe talaga iyang rayuma. Palala ng palala. Kung minsan, hindi na ako makabangon.” “'Patingin n'yo kaya sa Barangay Health Center. May duktor do'n. Libre naman do'n. At kinabukasan ng araw na iyon, lingid sa kaniyang kaalaman, ang Nanay niyang dating walang tiwala sa duktor ay nagtungo nga roon. At heto siya ngayon, kinabukasan ng kinabukasang iyon, muling naglalakad papuntang trabaho. Di makapagkunwari na karaniwang araw lamang iyon, pagkat ng araw ding iyon ay sasakay ng dyip ang Nanay niya. Patungong Murphy. Upang 'patingin sa ospital. Kay-bilis ng panahon!

Pagdating niya sa puwesto 'y mayroon nang tatlong estudyanteng nag-aabang ng xerox. Bahagyang lipad ang isip niya habang inaasikaso ang tatlong estudyanteng iyon. Nalihis sa guhit ang ilang kopya. Ang ilan naman ay kulang sa bilang. Bahagyang lipad ang isip niya nang buong araw na iyon. Binati ni Bay na naging lubos siyang tahimik at wari 'y namumutla. Ang tukso naman ni Joel, malamang ay napuyat siya nang di inaasahan kagabi, at siya 'y umiibig.

Kayat upang aliwin ang sarili 'y madalas niyang tiningnan ang bagong paskil sa sawali, sa kaniyang tapat. Quality Is Our Recipe. May katangahan kaya ang mga nars na iyon? WENDY'S. Ano kaya 'ng nakita ng duktor? America's No. 1. Bakit kailangan pang 'patingin sa ospital? Cubao, Express, Delivery. At bigla siyang kinalabit ng isang munting katotohanan. Call 922-67-01, 58-48. Hindi siya nagpumilit na samahan ang Nanay niya bilang pagpapanatag sa kanilang kalooban, na ang karamdamang iyon ay rayuma lamang, at hindi na hihigit doon. Itim, pula at puti sa primerang dilaw. Isang batang babaeng ang buhok ay tinalian ng laso.

Ang paskil na iyon lamang ang tanging nakaalam ng isip at damdamin niya noong araw na iyon.

Datapuwat pagsapit ng uwian ay saka siya dinatnan ng gilás sa kaniyang gawain. “Ang bilis mag-seroks, a. Eksperto ka talaga.” At nang sarahan, tulad nina Bay at Joel ay halos di matapos-tapos ang pagsusuklay ng buhok sa harap ng maliit na salamin. At nang yakagin siya ni Bay na magmiron sa basement ng New Farmers’ Plaza (“Me promo ngayon ang Colgate, ang dami raw pamumudmod!”) ay nag-atubili muna siya bago tuluyang tumanggi. At nagtaka siya nang di siya tinanong ni Joel kung ibig niyang mag-dalawang bote muna bago umuwi. At sandaling sumanggi sa isip niyang manood ng sine ngayong gabi.

Para namang ginapos sa hollow block ang mga paa niya nang siya’y naglakad na patungong Zambales Street. Pagliko sa kalsada’y pinilit niyang pasiglahin and mukha niya, sa di mawawaang dahilan. At pagpasok sa paupahang silid ay naroon nang naghihintay ang Nanay niya.

“O – ano raw?”

“Naku, Dodong. Hindi rayuma e.” May lungkot ang tinig. May kaba. May kalatog na wari’y nagmula pa sa sinaunang panahon, noong unang nagkaroon ng ina sa daigdig, noong unang nagkaroon ng anak, noong unang may-namagitang sakit at kamatayan.

Hindi siya nakatulog nang gabing iyon. Tahimik siyang lumuluha sa hihigan, nagtalukbong ng kumot at nagtakip ng unan sa mukha, ngunit kahit paano’y nasaksihan din, maging ng kadiliman, ang payak niyang paghihinagpis.

Kayat matapos sumikat ang araw at nakahain na ang munting agahan ay pilit siyang hinarap ng kaniyang ina.

“Nag-isip-isip din ako, Dodong. Noon nga, ang gusto ko, huwag na sana akong mamamatay. Pero lahat ng tao daraan diyan. Kahit sino, hindi maliligtas diyan.

“Isipin mo na lamang na mapalad tayo. May trabaho ka. Nakakakain tayo. Nakapundar ka ng kalan. Bentilador. Kasangkapan. Masaya na tayo nang ganyan.”

Ngunit hindi masaya si Dodong. Araw at gabi ay lihim siyang nagtangis: kung araw, sa siping ng gumagaralgal na xerox machine sa harap ng paskil; kung gabi, sa ilalim ng unan at sa kubli ng dilim.

Nagdaan ang mga araw at gabi, at nagpatuloy ang excavation sa loteng binakuran ng sawali. “Mas malalim na ngayon sa impyerno,” minsan, ang bida sa kaniya ni Bay. Lumatag ang tag-ulan at sumiklab ang tag-init, at ang paskil sa tapat ng E-Z Plasticraft ay unti-uting nanilaw, at unti-unting namula, at unti-unting kumulot sa mga gilid. Kinapusan ng mga kulay. Napilasan.

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Isang gabi, dinapuan ng isang mataas na lagnat si Aing Merle. Humiling siya ng paksiw na bangus na may maraming luya, subalit nang nariyan na 'y wala siyang ganang kumain. Nahimbing siya at nanaginip. Hibang siyang nagtanong tungkol sa isang kuwintas na ginto na may palawit na krus at puso, na di naman alam ni Dodong kung saan naroroon. Bandang madaling-araw ay umaapoy pa rin ang kaniyang katawan, ngunit di na siya tumutugon sa anumang katanungan, at makatlong ulit siyang napaihi sa hihigan.

Isang araw, tulalang nakaupo si Dodong sa kaniyang silyang kahoy at bakal, sa siping ng humuhuning xerox machine. Nagtanong si Joel: "Pards – me problema ka ba?"

At saka lamang siya lumuha. At saka lamang siya humagulgol. "Pards, bakit?" ang dugtong ni Joel, at sabay dagdag ni Bay, "Pards, ano ba?"

Datpuwat patuloy lamang siyang humagulgol, at wala siyang masabi-sabi. (Bakit? Bakit ako lumuluha? Bakit ako humahagulgol?) Di niya maatim na balingan and kaniyang mga kasamahang nagtataka 't walang kaalam-alam, kayat napatingin siyang muli sa gulagulanit na paskil sa sawaling dinding. Sa katangi-tanging sandaling iyon ay saka lamang niya natanggap ang katotohanan. Ng buhay. Ng daigdig. Ng kapalaran. Ngatog siyang bumangon sa kaniyang pagkakaupo, at natumba sa sahig ang silyang kahoy at bakal. Tumawid siya sa eskinita, at lumapit siya sa sawaling dinding. At bagamat nanlalamig at nanginginig ang kaniyang mga daliri 'y maingat niyang tinuklap ang mga nalalabing bahagi ng paskil – ng paskil na iyon – ng kaniyang paskil. Nang buong-awa. Nang buong pagmamahal. Marahang tiniklop at sinilid sa kaniyang dibdib. Upang iuwi. Upang itago. Upang pangalagaan. Kalakip ang hinagpis na kay-tagal niyang ayaw harapin. Hinagpis na aywan ba 't ngayon ay may-halong galak na ibig manaig, pagkat nasasakaniya na ang sagot sa bugtong ng tadhana, na waring siya lamang – siya lamang ang nakababatid.

Note:

Paskil is reprinted with the permission of the author. It was first published in 1992 in *Cubao 1980 at Iba Pang Mga Katha: Unang Sigaw ng Gay Liberation Movement sa Pilipinas*. Camacho Publishing House.

L'Annonce

TONY PEREZ (TRADUIT DE FILIPINO PAR HÉLOÏSE MAGANNON)

Dodong est un opérateur de photocopieur, dans la ruelle Malvar. C'est un coin de boutique, un espace étroit sur le côté d'un escalier de service dont le gérant de l'immeuble voulait tirer profit. Au lieu de l'habituelle table pour l'agent de sécurité avec son cahier de registre prévus par le vieil architecte du bâtiment, se trouve Façon Simple Photocopie/Photo d'identité/Plastification/Formulaire pour CV/Téléphone 2.00 peso 3 minutes seulement. Situé à l'avant de l'immeuble, exposé au passage des piétons, le commerce de Façon Simple fleurit, et jamais il ne lui manque de quoi payer son loyer. Dodong y est très occupé du lundi au samedi, à charger le papier dans la machine et à opérer les boutons Prêt (vert), Stop (orange), Qualité d'Impression, Agrandissement/Réduction et Interrompre impression (gris).

Célibataire, Dodong vit avec sa mère dans une chambre qu'il loue rue Zambales. A son âge, la mère Merle n'accepte plus de linge à laver, elle fait le ménage, cuisine et reprise les chemises et les slips de son seul et unique fils. Dodong, qu'on le croit ou non, est un modèle de vertu. Chaque après-midi, après avoir cadenassé la cage en fer contenant le photocopieur, il rentre chez lui. Il n'est pas comme Bay, son collègue photographe, qui va mater au niveau -1 du New Farmers' Plaza, ou comme Joël son collègue expert en découpe de plastique, qui aime s'attarder dans les bars à bières et au cinéma. Dodong n'a aucun vice. Il va à pied à son travail et donne chaque centime de son salaire à sa mère. La mère Merle a de la chance. Elle se disait toujours que même si telle est leur fortune, la vie pouvait s'écouler ainsi sans fin.

Plusieurs saisons sont passées depuis que le cinéma au coin de Malvar a été détruit. Le terrain a été entièrement entouré de palissades en bambou formant un mur, afin de cacher à la vue le trou vertigineux en train d'être creusé. (Selon Bay, la dernière fois qu'il y a jeté un coup d'œil, le trou était aussi profond que l'enfer). C'est la seule vue à contempler depuis le côté de l'escalier de service : ce haut mur de bambou estampillé d'annonces sur papier journal. Des annonces de match de box. De combat de coq. De l'émission anniversaire du « Supershow » de la chaîne télévisée GMA. Du Monde sur Glace de Walt Disney. Des annonces qui apparurent là un matin, côte à côte, alignés, attirant l'attention, regardés puis oubliés, et qui une fois en lambeaux ne préoccupent plus celui qui les a affichés. C'est la seule vue aussi qui s'offre à Dodong, chaque fois qu'il tourne la tête vers l'autre côté du passage pour éviter la puissante raie de lumière de l'ampoule optique qui surgit de sous le couvercle en caoutchouc du photocopieur mis en marche.

Et parce qu'il est de nature aimable, Dodong porte son attention à tout, même à ces annonces. Assis sur son siège en bois et métal, il les observe tout le temps, les mémorise et leur cherche une beauté quelconque. « Chaque chose a une raison d'être », lui murmurent ses pensées profondes, et par exemple, ces annonces. Oui, ce ne sont peut-être que des morceaux de papier collés sur le mur de l'autre côté de la ruelle, mais ils sont là, devant lui. Pour qu'il les voit. Pour qu'il les lit. Pour qu'ils donnent à son existence ne serait ce qu'un tout petit peu de sens.

Ainsi, un jour, après avoir défait les chaînes de la cage en fer du photocopieur, chargé la machine et essuyé les comptoirs, il se mit à nouveau, en attendant les clients, à regarder le mur de bambou en face de lui, de l'autre côté du passage. Là, il vit une nouvelle annonce. Noire, rouge et blanc sur fond jaune. Une jeune femme aux cheveux attachés par un ruban.

La qualité est notre recette

WENDY'S
Hamburger

No. 1 américain

Cubao

Livraison
Rapide

Appelez le
922-67-01
922-58-48

Cette annonce resta imprimée dans sa pensée. Les différentes couleurs, la taille et la forme des lettres. Les numéros de téléphone. 922-67-01, 58-48. Cet après-midi là aussi, par coïncidence, sa mère était allée au Centre de Santé communal. Elle en revient au moment où Dodong rentre chez eux, rue Zambales.

« Deux infirmières m'ont examiné puis elles ont appelé le docteur. J'ai eu de la chance car le docteur ne vient plus que deux fois par semaine. »

« Et... alors ? »

« Je dois aller à l'hôpital me faire examiner. »

« C'est du côté de Murphy, mère. C'est là qu'est allée la femme du père Canor, n'est-ce pas? Je vous y accompagnerai. »

« J'irai seule, tu vas perdre ton temps. C'est juste une consultation. »

Le lendemain, traversant EDSA en direction de Malvar, il essaie lentement de reconstituer le fil des événements passés. Sa mère s'est de plus en plus souvent plainte

de douleurs aux hanches. Des douleurs que ni l'aspirine ni l'huile Omega ne calmaient plus, jusqu'à ce que la pharmacie lui prescrit du sodium diclofenac. D'abord 25 mg, puis 100 mg. Mais récemment ce médicament ne faisait plus effet. « C'est terrible ces rhumatismes. C'est de pire en pire. Parfois je n'arrive plus à me lever. » « Allez vous faire examiner au Centre de Santé communal. Il y a un docteur là-bas. C'est gratuit là-bas. » Le lendemain, sans qu'il le sache, sa mère qui avant ne faisait pas confiance aux médecins, s'était rendu là-bas. Et le voilà aujourd'hui, au lendemain de ce lendemain, qui va à pied à son travail et qui ne peut faire comme si c'était un jour ordinaire. Car ce même jour sa mère prend le jeepney pour aller à Murphy. Pour se faire examiner à l'hôpital. Comme le temps passe vite !

Lorsqu'il arrive à son stand, trois étudiants attendent pour des photocopies. Il s'occupe d'eux, mais son esprit est à moitié ailleurs. Plusieurs pages sont de travers, d'autres manquent au décompte. Son esprit est à moitié absent ce jour-là. Bay remarque qu'il est complètement silencieux et qu'il a l'air pâle. Joël blague qu'il a veillé la nuit passée sans qu'il s'y attende, et qu'il est amoureux.

Alors, pour se distraire, il regarde souvent la nouvelle annonce sur le mur de bambou en face de lui. La qualité est notre recette. Seraient-elles idiotes, ces infirmières ? WENDY'S. Qu'est-ce que le docteur a bien pu voir ? No. 1 américain. Pourquoi a-t-elle besoin d'aller à l'hôpital ? Cubao, Livraison, Rapide. Il eut soudain une faible prise de conscience du réel. Appelez le 922-67-01, 58-48. Il n'avait pas insisté pour accompagner sa mère car pour se rassurer ils se disaient que ce qu'elle sentait ce sont des rhumatismes et rien d'autre. Noire, rouge et blanc sur fond jaune. Une jeune femme aux cheveux attachés par un ruban.

Seule cette annonce sut ses pensées et ses sentiments ce jour-là.

Ce n'est qu'à la fin de la journée que l'énergie lui revient. « C'est qu'il photocopie vite, dis donc. Un vrai expert. » Après la fermeture, il n'en finit plus de se coiffer comme Bay et Joël, devant un petit miroir. Lorsque Bay l'invite à aller mater au niveau -1 du New Farmers' Plaza (« Y a une nouvelle promo chez Colgate, ils distribuent plein de trucs ! »), il hésite d'abord avant de refuser. Il est surpris que Joël ne lui demande pas s'il veut boire deux bouteilles avant de rentrer. Et pendant un instant il lui vient à l'esprit d'aller au ciné ce soir-là.

En se dirigeant vers la rue Zambales, ses pieds lui semblent comme encastrés dans du béton. Arrivé au coin de la rue, il se force à rendre son regard souriant, sans raison particulière. En entrant dans la chambre qu'il loue, il vit sa mère qui l'attendait.

« Et... alors ? »

« Oh Dodong, ce ne sont pas des rhumatismes. » Sa voix est triste. Emplie d'anxiété. Venue de ce temps immémorial quand pour la première fois il fut au monde une mère et un enfant, que la maladie et la mort vont séparer.

Il ne dort pas cette nuit-là. Il pleura en silence dans son lit, recouvert par le drap, sa tête cachée sous l'oreiller, et pourtant l'obscurité restait témoin de ses lamentations.

Au lever du jour, après avoir préparé un petit déjeuner, sa mère le força à lui faire face.

« J'ai réfléchi, Dodong. Avant, ce que je voulais, c'est ne pas mourir. Mais tout le monde passe par là. Personne n'y échappe. »

« Considère qu'on a de la chance. Tu as un travail. On a de quoi manger. Tu as pu acheter un réchaud. Un ventilateur. Quelques affaires. On est heureux comme ça. »

Mais Dodong n'est pas heureux. Il pleure jour et nuit, en secret: le jour, à côté du photocopieur grondant ; la nuit, sous l'oreiller, dans l'obscurité protectrice.

Les jours et les nuits passèrent, le terrain muré de palissades en bambou continue à être creusé. « C'est devenu plus profond que l'enfer, » raconte parfois Bay. Les pluies de la mousson vinrent, puis le soleil brûlant de la saison sèche, et l'annonce affichée en face de Façon Simple devint petit à petit jaune, puis rouge, ses bords se recourbèrent. Elle perdit ses couleurs. Fut déchirée.

ité est notre recette
ENDY'S
bur

No. 1 éricain

Cubao

Livrai
Rapide

Appelez le
922-
92

Une nuit, la mère Merle est prise d'une forte fièvre. Elle demande un plat de poisson bangus avec beaucoup de gingembre, mais quand on le lui apporte, elle n'a plus envie de manger. Elle se rendort et fait un rêve. Dans un délire, elle s'enquiert d'un bijou en or ayant comme pendentif une croix et un cœur. Seulement, Dodong ne sait où il est. A l'approche du jour, son corps est encore fiévreux mais elle ne répond plus aux questions qu'on lui pose, et par trois fois, elle urine dans le lit.

Un jour, Dodong, le regard perdu, est assis à côté du photocopieur ronronnant. Joël l'interpelle : « Hé mon pote, 'y a un problème ? »

Alors seulement les larmes lui viennent aux yeux. Et il se met à sangloter. « Hé, qu'est-ce qui 'y a mon pote ? » ajoute Joël, en même temps que Bay demande « Qu'est-ce qui t'arrive mon pote ? » Il continue à sangloter et ne sait quoi dire. (Pourquoi ? Pourquoi est-ce que je pleure ? Pourquoi est-ce que je sanglote ?) Il ne peut endurer d'être devant ses compagnons qui s'inquiètent et qui ne savent rien. Ce n'est qu'à cet instant précis qu'il accepte enfin la réalité. De la vie. Du monde. Du destin. Défaillant, il se lève de son siège en bois et métal qui tombe par terre. Il traverse la ruelle et s'approche du mur en bambou. Et quand bien même ses doigts semblent froids et tremblent, il décolle avec soin les restes de l'annonce – de cette annonce-là – de son annonce. Avec toute sa compassion. Avec toute son affection. Il la plie délicatement et la serre contre sa poitrine. Pour la ramener chez lui. Pour la garder. Pour en prendre soin. Comme le chagrin auquel il ne veut faire face depuis longtemps, mais auquel il ne sait pourquoi se mélange maintenant une joie prête à éclater, car la réponse à l'énigme du destin est la sienne seule, et seulement lui peut la comprendre.

Notes:

1. Grand centre commercial à plusieurs étages situé à Cubao, Quezon City, Metro Manila
2. WENDY'S est le nom d'une chaîne de fast-food américain implantée aussi aux Philippines.
3. Nom d'un district à Quezon City, Metro Manila.
4. Nom d'une commune de Cubao.
5. Abréviation de: Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue.
6. Véhicule de transport public à la carrosserie inspirée de la jeep militaire américaine utilisée aux Philippines pendant la Second Guerre Mondiale.
7. Milkfish (Chanos chanos), espèce de poisson communément trouvé en Asie du sud-est.

Revisiting "Paskil"

ELENA RIVERA MIRANO

As my fingers pad softly over the keyboard, the words appear, one by one, on the screen. The pleasure they invoke in me is familiar. Playing with words and phrases, manipulating them, turning them inside out, polishing them, savoring them and the thoughts and images that spring to light in the process is a writer's delight. For mastery of the word is also mastery of the world, or at least my vision of it. As de Saussure notes:

our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs, we would be unable to make

a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.¹

To find the right word, to situate it in a suitable place in one's writing is a joy. But often there is also strain in the search. I wrestle to pin a nuance down. I stretch to contain warring concepts in a single metaphor. I struggle to convince myself that others will understand.

It is because of my pleasure and pain in the word that Tony Perez's short story "Paskil" awakens such a lingering sense of sadness. It reveals this almost illicit delight, this almost exquisite despair in words, meanings and those that seek to own them.

We have something in common, Dodong and I. Like me, Tony's young xerox operator lives on the phenomenon of words. He causes them to appear on blank sheets of paper. He makes a living reproducing them. Day after day, from his cage-like kiosk, words, phrases, pages and pages of text are disgorged. People praise him for his speed, his skill in pushing buttons and aligning margins. But for Dodong, this is not a source of much pleasure. For he himself is literally a man that possesses very few words. He probably cannot write. Perhaps he can barely read. Although he is aware that words have a certain almost magical power, to him they are simply mysterious markings on pieces of paper, the deeper meanings of which, he cannot fathom.

The paskil of the title underscores this fact. Seeking relief from the painful reality of his mother's imminent death, Dodong becomes obsessed with an advertisement for Wendy's hamburgers pasted on a sawali wall in front of his kiosk. He scours the poster for its content – the image (girl with red braids), the slogan (Quality is our recipe), the name (WENDY'S), the telephone numbers (922-67-01/922-58-48). He blots out his fears, which he cannot express to anyone, by focusing on these markings on the poster, which is swiftly decomposing under heat and rain. In the end, he is left with disjointed fragments of words – ENDY'S..., bur..., Delive..., that he continues to try to decipher as if they held the meaning of life and death.

Dodong cannot share his grief, even with his closest companion, Bay. It is unrelieved because he cannot describe it. He lacks the words to bring it to light, to make it real. A sympathetic Bay tries to comfort the weeping Dodong, asking him what has happened. In the end, all he can reach out to is the poster, now a torn and faded fragment, tenderly peeling it off the *sawali* wall and folding it close to his heart.

Pondering the pathos of the story, it seems almost inevitable that my mind should also wander into the familiar territory of other young people I have encountered as a college professor – students thrown helter-skelter into the "inter-discipline" of art studies without the benefit of a high school background in the arts. Their struggles to emulate the complexities of the language, or perhaps more accurately, the jargon of the trade of post-modernism often give rise to sincere but clumsy attempts at reports and papers, poorly conceived and badly written, that entirely miss the point of Barthes or Berger or whatever writer has been assigned. Reading and listening to these efforts often bring me to the edge of despair. Unlike Dodong, the students unleash many words, stringing them along and pasting them together to form what seem to be sentences, paragraphs, essays. But the torrents of words signify nothing. Or to be more accurate, they signify the writer's possession of the desired words and phrases, even if he or she cannot understand them. Like Rizal's 19th century indio congregation, indulging in what Vicente Rafael has described as an act of, "fishing out discrete words from the stream of...(Fr. Damaso's) sermon," in Noli me Tangere, the 21st century students, "arbitrarily attach...(the words)...to their imaginings...because... (the readings are)...almost incomprehensible...(to them)."²

Dodong, my students and I find our kinship in the enchantment and enthrallment of words. We strain to find them, to capture them, to decipher them, to own them, to use them, to find meaning in them. Sometimes, we succeed and it is a source of deep satisfaction. But many times, we fail, and we cannot even begin to describe our sorrow.



I frown at the screen in frustration, unable to continue. The fluidity of words, the smoothness of thoughts, the easy transition from me to Dodong to my unnamed students has eluded me for days, and the passageway to the end of the writing exercise is blocked. What, I ask myself, do I really want to say? Or, is there really something I want to say in the first place? Why have words failed me? Or why have I failed them? I sit here in distress, holding the jagged bits and pieces of what promised to be an essay and try to piece them together.

End notes:

1. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, 111-112.
2. Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000, 2.

Determined Despair (a long drawn mantra for coping)

JOSE TENCE RUIZ

Operational specifics have taken hold of contemporary imagining to the exclusion of the Grand Pronouncement. Gadget manuals have taken readership away from philosophic tracts. Last-gasp echoes of rhetoric all but scrape ocean bottom drowning in the cacophony of blips, beeps, quacks, droplets and what manner of ringtone or command prompt built into the latest miniature toy/machine. One senses that 2007, as have the last 10 years, will push programmed obsolescence into ruthless hyperdrive and that objects entering the 'antiques' market will waive a 50-minimum year tenure in exchange for 18 months. Georges Bataille's prognostication that expenditure articulated power has toothlessly morphed into credit card pitch. Accompanying the Age of Information (if not pointless but oil driven bit transfer) is the Age of Dissipation.

To those who have no taste whatever for zero-sum logic, scroll on away. Your time is better spent panning away at YouTube for the next short video nuggets.

To those for whom it still bears a key to a faint dream of equilibrium, bear with me. The turn of the Millenium has fascinated us with magical science beyond many expectations. Organic shaped mega-multinational museums clad in discounted Russian titanium and libraries with polyluminous synthetic skins, which incidentally may do less to encourage actual reading rather than feed the untethered egos of Euramerica's architectural elite are both symptoms of unprecedented expansion and its undermentioned but just as constant shadow, dissipation.

Centers of culture are ballooning, but culture itself is dissolving, so that at a certain point, the building of grand cathedral/hangars of accumulation will have worn away resources that it may have coveted, that it would have contained. In concrete terms, one might visit the video library of the breathtaking durian-inspired Singapore Esplanade and realize that the fiscal and political conservatism on which this awesome architectonic marvel was founded is also the same force that will exclude an entire section of world video under the general caveat of undesirable, pornographic, or even risqué, thus a threat to architectonic stability. Any form of subversive, nay even corrosive thought that might deepen a discourse, if not provide its natural riposte would have to be swept out as a corruption of grand constructs and constructions. Yet these very constructs remain partly emptied, denied by this very exclusion.

Thus, we would break the accumulation deadlock by disinterest, maybe not totally but at least partially enough so that preoccupation with accumulative processes does not choke us, as this is one inevitable default of the logic of avarice. Calibrated accumulation is built with escape valves that are sensitive to mounting pressure to let go. Performative expression as opposed to the consistent manufacture of commodifiable objects has followed this prescription. But one must watch that the performative is not sucked back into the collateral object, not completely at least. It is one thing to observe an artist execute a live proposition, but one notices that with every act of performance, there is a growingly irritating cluster of gadgets, cameras, camera phones and photojournalist posturing substituting for actual observation. Again, in concrete terms: At performance art events held in the last year in Manila, it is not unusual that once the artist/subject begins her/his motion, the audience, at least 10 percent of it, responds by whipping out a mini-DVD, a cell-phone cam, a small video, a broadcast quality video all in a macabre contemporary choreography with the act that proposes ephemera and is met with even more documentary reification. All has been preserved save for memory, for the ability to recount, for our unvarnished focus on the poetic act, for a deep and personal stake in the collective exchange or for actual moments of emotional connection.

More interestingly, and this rears its distorted head as bastard by-product of this entire mediation, an actually unpoetic, nay downright dismal performance might find itself surrogated in the community imagination by a dramatized photographic record. Currently, there is a systematically spaced circulation of a particular image of an electric guitar player that inspires recollections, maybe, of Wally Gonzales, Jimmy Hendrix, Resty Fabunan, guitar virtuosos all, but in actuality sounds like a privileged high school freshman scratching away at an amplified instrument equipped with 10 gadgets that serve only to vary and iterate an excruciating but ear-splitting rant. One might argue that the industrial rant was the nexus of the performative, and I might argue back that I prefer the theatrehouse and not death row or the pavilion of the criminally insane if I were to seek out discourses on angst. It is not new that the simulacrum has taken over the genuinely poetic, but we must every now and then guard against its claims to craft, whether abetted by capital, public relations or complementary alcohol.

Allied to this, a gathering or an audience more involved in posturings of documentation and mediation might not have been listening at all, in the first place. Hence a tango of the legless ensues, where the amputation does not preclude the disabled from presuming grace. Both performer without performance and audience that does not watch, embrace in a knee-jerk valse.

And we move to another facet of the quandary. Has the act of artistic articulation been subsumed under articulation for the artistic? Regularly enough, art as a practice seems not to exist except as a mediated postscript or prologue. The actual moments that art takes hold have come under attack from furious compression. Megamall shows last less than two weeks. Museum exhibitions in Manila have come closer and closer to less than a month, duration most likely a function of rental paid than of the show potential merit for its publics. One recalls a depressing example of a recent exhibit in a grand new cosmopolitan space premised on an ode to a major river of Manila. It turns out the exhibit focused on this river not because of a river's significant ecological value to the city it cuts through but because the patron of the exhibit had a nostalgic affinity to an institution that happened to be amidst said river. The show therefore mainly focused on a nostalgic, if not phantasmagorical recollection of said river dovetailing with a view of it as telon for a patron's personal *zarsuela*. A river we have to save is a river reinvented as saved by candy-toned flashback/hallucination. Indeed, such malls and museums are our foundational art houses.

Some community collectives have ridden the internet to attempt development outside the glass and steel of institutional rental. Networking, NGO-like solicitation,

linkages of individual initiative across several Asian boundaries has opened up a system labeled by a shared ending – the IPAF. Thus there is NIPAF, TIPAF, BIPAF, PIPAF–IPAF being International Performance Art Festival, N for Nippon, T for Taiwan, B for Bangkok and P for Philippine. What holds one’s interest in these congregations is the focus on networking and potluck sharing of resource and organizing as an antidote to being at the mercy of capital and its excesses. Not that the IPAFs have no use for infrastructure, but that infrastructure is no longer the only leverage where larger capital stages expressive acts on.

Painting and its allied static wall works assume a function interestingly analogous to the concept of hard copy. In the light of the electronically ephemeral zooming across barriers at fiber-optic speeds and performative networks conjuring ephemeral if sometimes overly documented moments, painting, prints, digital outputs, giclees and all their fixed tangible optical cousins offer a durably substantial reassurance of moments and concepts frozen in mid-thought, in reassuringly reified form to offer pause and occasions of pause that may be repeated, even savored. It complements the ephemeral endeavour with a negotiable currency that translates into logistic source. Put more succinctly, it is not uncommon for an artist involved in performance to look for funds to underwrite such non-profit activity with interior friendly compositions that assuage horror vacui and “pera”-vacui at one go. The performative, fleeting but still, at best, capable of the sublime, may be fed by the decorative, not-as-sublime but definitely tradeable and sympathetic to speculative wagering and other market forces.

A romantic throwback to the 70s might find this accommodation incongruously disgusting, but a quick scan of the landscape might find that the entire landscape has disgustingly been layered over with all manner of incongruity. Recent reports about Google’s ability to trace one’s search patterns, if it bothered to, call into focus the fragile and illusionary liberty of the Net. Imagine that when it might matter, as in when an individual might challenge power structures, this individual’s private (or some of us still believe as we websurf in the insulated solace of our homes) search patterns may be used against them. Artists are often expected to be at the forefront of most things netbound. But periods of anarchic withdrawal, even a guerilla-like ludism may provide them havens from most of that which is corporate dominated. They are reorganizing themselves back into tribal units relatively liberated and untaxed so that even well connected *barkadas* might allow to be themselves. Such a state is the result of a determined despair, which allows them coping mechanisms to negotiate conditions with the powers that control capital’s expansion, the same powers that oversee its capacity to consume its consumers. The haven may not be geographic, it may not even have topography. It would have to be an ability to distance oneself from seduction, an ability to kick-afloat furiously awash in a tsunami of sensations never before offered for seemingly so little. This elevation of despair into applied determination may be the stroke needed to metaphorically stay afloat in the deluge of dissipation which has unavoidably begun to flood in.

About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp>)

Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Contributors write gratis for *Ctrl+P*. Circulated as a PDF file via the Net, it is a downloadable and printable publication that takes advantage of the digital medium’s fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. *Ctrl+P* provides a testing ground for a whole new culture and praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art writing and criticism in the Philippines.

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Her new book, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Literature, Historical Experience and Tangential Makings of Globality*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. A current project, *Discourse on Empire: Living Under the Rule of Permanent War*, is underway. | **Patrick D. Flores** is Professor of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and Curator of the Arts Division of the National Museum of the Philippines. He has done researches on colonial art and the history of contemporary curation in Southeast Asia and is the author of *Sites of Review: Critical Practice in Media* and *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art*. He has a Ph.D. in Philippine Studies. | **Marian Pastor Roces** has been developing a critique of international art exhibitions, that analyzes the spaces currently being constructed to present and produce these events. Arguing that these spaces and events are conservative creations, ideologically tied to the 19th century universal expositions. Pastor Roces seeks to expose the structures by which the libertarian and avante-garde claims of artmaking are rendered inutile. The essay *Crystal Palace Exhibitions* in the anthology *Over Here* (MIT Press, 2005), and the 2005 Power Lecture, Sydney University, entitled *Biennales and Biology*, pursue her interest in the subtle domains where art is absorbed in tenacious imperial imperatives. Her recent curatorial work includes the major contemporary art exhibition *Science Fictions* which investigated truth systems validated by science, in four venues in Singapore: Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore Art Museum, Earl Lu Gallery and the Esplanade. *Sheer Realities: Power and Clothing in the 19th century Philippines*, was presented by the Asia Society of New York City at the Grey Art Gallery of New York University. The corporation which she founded – *edge* – develops social history museums with the involvement of conceptual artists. In 2006, she convened an international roundtable discussion on *The Politics of Beauty*, funded by the Prince Claus Fund. | **Tony Perez** is a creative writer, playwright, poet, lyricist, psychic journalist, painter, and fiber artist. He is one of the 100 Filipino recipients of the 1898-1998 Centennial Artists Award of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. His other awards include the 13 Artists of the Philippines, a National Book Award from the Manila Critics Circle, and the Gawad Pambansang Alagad ni Balagtas from the Writers Union of the Philippines. His published books include *Albert N.: A Case Study* and the five volumes in the Cubao Series titled *Cubao 1980 at Iba Pang Mga Katha; Cubao Pagkagat Ng Dilim; Cubao Midnight Express; Eros, Thanatos, Cubao; and Cubao-Kalaw Kalaw-Cubao* by Cacho Publishing House. | **Héloïse Magannon** teaches French in a language school in the Philippines where she is currently residing. She has been working for the past years with the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (Philippines) as a writer and research consultant on information, education and communication projects. Raised in France, she finished an MA in General and Comparative Literature at the Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, pursuing it to a Postgraduate diploma (DEA, Diplôme d'études approfondies) in Comparative Literature at the Université de Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle. Her area of research was the literary work of 19th century Filipino writer José Rizal. In connection with this interest, she worked on translation and cultural management projects for the Philippine Centennial Commission, during the commemoration of the 1898 Philippine Independence from Spanish rule. She also holds a Postgraduate diploma (DEA, Diplôme d'études approfondies) in Museology of natural and human sciences, from the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (France), where she researched on the conceptual changes taking place in museums of ethnology and on the re-foundation of their social function. | **Elena Rivera-Mirano** is a Professor of Art Studies at the College of Arts and Letters at the University of the Philippines. She has an A.B. in English, an M.A. in Comparative Literature and a Ph.D. in Philippine Studies from the same university, as well as a Master of Arts in Humanities from Stanford University. As a researcher in the traditional culture of the Southern Tagalog region, she has authored *Subli: Isang Sayaw sa Apat na Tinig and Ang Mga Tradisyonal na Musikang Pantinig sa Lumang Bauan, Batangas*. She served as research director for the Philippine Program at the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington D.C.

She served as Project Director and Editor-in-Chief of *The Life and Works of Marcelo Adonay*, a research project jointly sponsored by the National Council for Culture and the Arts and the U.P. Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development. Volume I is currently in the process of publication. In 2001, she was designated laureate of the prestigious Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development in recognition of her achievements. † **Jose Tence Ruiz** paints for a living while organizing exhibitions, doing performances and delivering lectures to community art groups. Currently, he is working with *tutokKarapatan*, a collective of artists and some NGOs on art related to human rights issues in the Philippines.

About Ctrl+P's Editorial Board Members

Flaudette May V. Datuin is Associate Professor of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines. She is the author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). The book is based on her doctoral dissertation in Philippines Studies. Datuin is the recipient of the Asian Scholarship Foundation and Asian Public Intellectual Fellowships, which enabled her to conduct research on contemporary women artists of China and Korea in 2002-2003, and Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan in 2004-2005. On her way back from Japan, she curated the Asian section of a video exhibition at EWHA University, Seoul, which she writes about in the second issue of this journal (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp/issue2.pdf>) She is currently curating and organizing an international and interdisciplinary exhibit-conference-workshop called *trauma, interrupted* to be held in multiple venues in 2007: the Metropolitan Museum of the Philippines, Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), National Museum of the Philippines and Liongoren Gallery. The first major exhibition she curated in 1999 at the CCP *Women Imaging Women* featured women artists from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines, a result of her initial research in these countries from 1994-1997. Before she left for her Nippon Fellowship in 2004, she curated *balaybay@kasibulan.net* held at the CCP to celebrate the 15th anniversary of KASIBULAN, a group of Filipina artists in the visual arts. Datuin currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the contemporary arts of Asia, art theory and aesthetics, gender issues in the arts, and special topics on hypermedia and art, among others. † **Varsha Nair** lives in Bangkok, Thailand. Her selected shows include *Saturday live* at Tate Modern London, 2006; *Sub-Contingent, The Indian Subcontinent* in Contemporary Art, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006. She performed at the *National Review of Live Art* at the Tramway in Glasgow, UK in 2006; and at the 2004 (www.newterritories.co.uk); *In-between places, meeting point*, Si-am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005 (solo-show); *Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, UK, 2004 (<http://www.video-as.org>). Nair is also co-curator of *No Man's Land*, a web project for Womanifesto 2006 (www.womanifesto.com). Her writings have been published in art and architecture journals such as *n.paradoxa*, *Art AsiaPacific* and *art4d* (Thailand). Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India. † **Judy Freya Sibayan** has an MFA from Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. She is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. The City of Manila where she lives and works awarded her the *Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinagnan sa Bagong Pamamaraan Award* in 2006. She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, (<http://www.asa.de/magazine/iss4/17sibayan.htm>) a gallery she wore daily for five years (1997-2002), and is currently curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a work proposing that her body be the museum itself. Although Sibayan's major body of work is an institutional critique of art, she has also exhibited and performed in museums, galleries and performance venues such as The Tramway, Glasgow; the Vienna Secession; the Hayward Gallery, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, The Farm in San Francisco; Sternersensemuseet, The Photographers' Gallery, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, The Kiasma Contemporary Art Center, The Mori Art Museum, The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Fukuoka Art Museum; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Hong Kong Art Centre; and at the capcMusée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. She has participated in two international art biennales, the 1986 *3rd Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* and the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale*. Also an independent curator, she conceived and was lead-curator of *xsXL Expanding Art* held at Sculpture Square, Singapore in 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon* in 2005. Both projects investigated the possibilities of developing large scale international exhibitions mounted with very modest resources. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Communication, De La Salle University (www.dlsu.edu.ph) where she has taught for twenty years.