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"NATURE INTERVENES IN STROKES": SENSING THE END OF THE COLONY AND THE ORIGIN OF THE AESTHETIC

Patrick D. Flores

The post-colonial problematic may well demonstrate that the intuition of being free or being entitled to freedom in the representation of art is terminal and seminal: the final stage of transfer of influence that assumes a level of mastery and strategic conversion, on the one hand, and the incipient embodiment of the techniques of presence, of being manifest and manifestly different, on the other. It confirms a condition of an end to the rule of empire at the same time that such an emancipatory ideal supplements the coloniality that had been sought to be exceeded. This speculation falls within a modernity that may be described as exasperating: any transgression seems to reiterate a colonial premise as change becomes possible exclusively within a particular horizon of a universal history that seemingly cannot be transcended, perhaps because it is foundational and immanent. That the expiration of the colony is disseminated in an articulation of art that is invested with the capacity to include an "elsewhere" and an "impossibility" (because not yet possible) condenses this anxiety or anticipation. Moreover, it instills the subjectivity that beholds the imminent post-colonial moment, cherishes the consummation of the deed of art as the achievement of the national self and not the native other, and stirs the senses to respond to a (per)formative world.

Indeed, the finality of the colony can only be grasped in the origin of the discriminating/discriminatory aesthetic that "makes over"; specifically, in the affective practice of fine art that is acclaimed in a European exposition of painting as well as in the affectation to exalt this remarkable triumph that could have only been realized within colonialism and that could have been the only measure of the latter's end(s). The aesthetic here works as a process of making worlds sensible and differential, of creating the feeling of being in the world, or the yearning to belong to another one, or the conviction of having deserved to be out of it and settle beyond its realm, in an afterlife.

And so, to revive, or perhaps survive, "aesthetics" as a contemporary undertaking is to some extent to protract modernity, to delay a post-modern break so that the liberal project, importuned as it is by guarantees of renewal, could still transpire against all post-colonial misgivings. It is only through the distinction of an identity, the equivalent right to an identification, that this particular humanity in a universe of multi-cultural, affirmative selves may be secured.

Painting

In 1884, the Filipino painter-patriot Juan Luna (1857–1899) received the first gold medal at the Madrid Exposition for his large painting titled *Spoliarium*. This exalted work would take us to a distant place and moment. It was a Rome of Emperors who presided over dreadful struggles between humans and beasts, slaves and rogues. Through the door of the spoliarium passed such gargantuan creatures as elephants and rhinoceros, along with dead animals that were tossed to the beast-men. It was the chamber into which the fatalities of the arena were consigned and later burned, despoiled and dispossessed. This distance in history is paradoxically the painting's source of intimacy: the sight provokes beholders to profess their inalienable ethico-political belief, to discern the depraved impulse of an empire that leaves corpses in its wake. Its alienation is its internal critique.

But this distant place and moment was Luna's contemporary Rome, too: the city that had been his address when he apprenticed for his mentor Alejo Vera, the "taciturn painter of Roman catacombs." Rome may have been an icon of antiquity to which his art aspired, the former colonizer of Hispania or Spain, which had been his country's conqueror. The *Spoliarium* was completed here and was first exhibited at the Palazzo delle Esposizione. Madrid was its destination, although Luna had his eye on Paris as the emerging center of art in light of the waning of the Salon; in 1884, the Salon des Independents had already commenced. Indeed, *Spoliarium* would collect layers of both concurrent and discrepant time. Luna had been caught up in a cycle of provenance and future: Manila (colony), Rome (antiquity), Madrid (empire), Paris (modernity).

The Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, under the auspices of the Spanish crown, reached the Philippine islands in 1521. This initiated colonization that lasted until 1898, when the Filipino masses staged a revolution against Spain, which ceded the territory to the United States. Juan Luna entered the local art academy before he sailed for Spain in 1877 to be

schooled at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes. In 1893, in a fit of rage in Paris, he killed his wife. The court acquitted him, accepting his defense that it was a crime of passion inflamed by adultery and attributing his temper partly to the nature of his "savage" race. In 1896, he was implicated in the anti-Spanish revolt and was arrested. Before he died, he was appointed by the Philippine Revolutionary Government as a diplomat working for the recognition of the republic.

It is because of this palimpsest of relations that the *Spoliarium*, far from being a static tableau, inhabits a moving allegorical space. If allegory permits a transposition of a tale impossible to narrate and offers a moral resolution to a predicament difficult to reveal, then Luna's opus finds affinity with Francisco Baltazar's metrical romance *Florante at Laura* (Florante and Laura, 1838; 1875) in which its hero laments a failed homeland, in the guise of Albania, that is suffused with and surrounded by a regime of deceit, and thus constructing the colonial plight as a transterritorial or transnational, indeed, global disorder:

> All over the country
> treachery reigns,
> while merit and goodness are prostrate,
> entombed alive in suffering and grief.[1]

It is this allegorical device that enables *Spoliarium* to evoke a multitude of meanings beyond the anecdote that it depicts; and most of all, the sublime. It becomes a mode through which an abject disposition in another locale becomes so tangible and urgent that Luna's peer Graciano Lopez-Jaena would be so consumed to proclaim in a banquet:

> For me, if there is anything grandiose, sublime in the *Spoliarium,* it is that through this canvas, through the figure depicted in it, through its coloring, floats the living image of the Filipino people grieving over their misfortunes. Because, gentlemen, the Philippines is nothing more than a *Spoliarium* in reality, with all its horrors. There rubbish lies everywhere; there human dignity is mocked; the rights of man are torn into shreds; equality is a shapeless mass; and liberty is embers, ashes, smoke.[2]

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[1] Patricia Melendrez-Cruz and Apolonio Chua (eds.), *Himalay: Kalipunan ng mga Pagaaral Kay Balagtas* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1988).

[2] Teodoro Agoncillo (ed.), *Graciano Lopez Jaena: Speeches, Articles and Letters* (Manila:

This allegorical insight freights Luna with valor – making him the visionary, the teller of truth – as can be gleaned in paeans by his confreres, the elite coterie of illustrious Filipino gentlemen in Europe who entreated for reforms from the mother country Spain. Foremost of these was Jose Rizal's oration on the breakthrough in Madrid. The would-be National Hero conceived of heroism as a species of genius, which claims equivalence with all self-determining beings and therefore the universality of being equally human: a fulfilled self, instead of an emptied other. Rizal was in ecstasy when he declared among the *ilustrado*:

> Luna and Hidalgo are Spanish as well as Philippine glories. They were born in the Philippines but they could have been born in Spain, because genius knows no country, genius sprouts everywhere, genius is like light, air, the patrimony of everybody, cosmopolitan like space, like life, like God.[3]

Inspiring

If the aesthetic is rooted at once in a universalist conception and in a particularized, differentiated expression of bodily affect, then Rizal's pretension to the genius of Luna is key. It is salient because it is through Luna that the Philippines is acknowledged, endowed with culture as an actually existing world, a world that, because colonized, is capable of transcending its primitive, barbaric status, in other words, its "country." This elision of country in favor of "nature" is also an elision of "origin" but not of the originary stature of the genius that is natural: light and air elude history and serve as the "patrimony" not of citizens but of all; space, life, and God breach boundaries of human contemplation and drift freely as a cosmopolitan element. As Kant would contend:

> Since the genius is one of nature's elect – a type that must be regarded as but a rare phenomenon – for other clever minds his example gives rise to a school, that is so say a methodical instruction according to rules, collected so far as the circumstances admit, from such products of genius and their peculiarities – fine art is for such persons a matter

National Historical Commission, 1974). Quoted in *Zero In: Private Art, Public Lives* (Manila: Eugenio Lopez Foundation, Inc., Ayala Museum, Ateneo Art Gallery, 2002), p. 78.

[3] *Political and Historical Writings*, Vol. VII (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964). Quoted in *Zero In,* p. 74.

> of imitation, for which its nature, through the medium of genius, gave the rule.[4]

This sense of universality is entangled with a certain privileging of the sublime, and in this case, the sublime is transcoded in the painting and the reception to it. The immense scale of the painting (425 x 775 cm) is paramount. Compared with the preceding miniaturist portraiture of Philippine nineteenth-century art that sensitively dwells on the intricate details of petit bourgeois property, Luna's work practically cannot be possessed; it encompasses the potential proprietor and supersedes the domestic sanctum. Thus, because it is an expanse, it becomes a virtual landscape, a natural history. As Susan Stewart puts it: "Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it surrounds us."[5] Rizal would ratify this, esteeming a cataclysmic nature as the hand that had ordained *Spoliarium:*

> In *El Spoliarium* through the canvas that is not mute, can be heard the tumult of the multitude, the shouting of the slaves, the metallic creaking of the armor of the corpses, the sobs of the bereaved, the murmurs of prayer, with such vigor and realism as one hears the din of thunder in the midst of the crash of the cataracts or the impressive and dreadful tremor of the earthquake.
> The same nature that engenders such a phenomenon intervenes also in those strokes.[6]

The last line is instructive: nature is pictured as an artisan that is preconditional to the facture of an artifact that is valued as art, a making that vividly captures the textured sound of things and people in the charged tenor of words. Nature, therefore, does not stand as something outside art; in fact, it is an internal force that infringes on art as if it were a form of will within a will to form. This relates well with the painting acting like "natural history": the conflation of art as both natural and historical overcomes the antinomy between nature/human and object/subject. *Spoliarium* becomes an inscribing and an inscription, a stroke, and concomitantly, a signature.

Here we confront the vision of painting, or better still, following Jose

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[4] Allen Wood (ed.), *Basic Writings of Kant* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 191.

[5] Susan Stewart, "The Gigantic," in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 71.

[6] *Political and Historical Writings*, Vol. VII. Quoted in *Zero In,* p. 75.

Rizal, a distraction, a temptation, a spell, or what he terms in his novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), "el demonio de las comparaciones," or the phantasm of differences. It appears in a troubling incident involving the reformist personage Crisostomo Ibarra, said to be the surrogate of Rizal:

> The sight of the botanical gardens drove away his gay reminiscences: the devil of comparisons placed him before the botanical gardens of Europe, in the countries where much effort and much gold are needed to make a leaf bloom or a bud open; and even more, to those of the colonies rich and well-tended, and all open to the public. Ibarra removed his gaze, looked right, and there saw old Manila, still surrounded by its walls and moats, like an anemic young woman in a dress from her grandmother's best times.[7]

The Philippines and Spain in this crossroad confounded by vexing resemblances and haunting enchantments become "comparative contemporaries." In fact, Rizal's interventions tended to bleed into other texts conveying common persuasions. Two instances could be mentioned:

First, Rizal would draft a critical commentary on the accounts of the Spanish chronicler Antonio de Morga titled *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (Historical Events of the Philippine Islands, 1609). In one section, de Morga writes: "There was a list of many things and words considered extremely insulting and discrediting when uttered against men or women, which were excused with more difficulty than offenses committed against persons, or injuries against their bodies."[8] Rizal rails that the inhabitants of the islands, derogatorily christened *indios,* could be subjected to the orientalist assumption that they actually respond to shame, and that they are amenable to be violently punished rather than be shamed, justifying colonialism on the basis of a distorted humanity.

> What a high opinion the ancient Filipinos must have of moral sensibility when they considered offenses to it more serious than the offenses to the body! [...] For this reason the friars are surprised that the Indios should prefer even now whipping to a bad word or an insult and this

[7] Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere.* Ma. Trans. Soledad Lacson-Locsin (Manila: Bookmark, 1996), p. 67. Benedict Anderson translates "el demonio de las comparaciones" as "specter of comparisons."

[8] Antonio de Morga, *Historical Events of the Philippine Islands* (1609), with annotations by Jose Rizal (reprint: Manila: National Historical Institute, 1990), p. 288.

> which ought to make them think and reflect, only suggests to them the deduction that the Indio is a kind of monkey or something like an animal.[9]

The tributes to Luna and Hidalgo reprise this outlook but through an inversion of the perverted racial orientation:

> *Rizal:*
> The morrow of a long day for those regions is announced in brilliant tints and rose-colored dawns, and that race, fallen into lethargy during the historic night while the sun illumines other continents, again awakens, moved by the electric impact that contact with Western peoples produces, and she demands light, life, the civilization that one time they have bequeathed her, thus confirming the eternal laws of constant evolution, of change, of periodicity, of progress.[10]

> *Lopez-Jaena:*
> What do those precious ancient objects prove which have been found in the excavations in Pampanga, Pangasinan, and Manila – jars so highly esteemed in Japan and China, a sample of which is now found in the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin? What do they show, those perfectly preserved mummies, smelling of embalming perfume that were excavated in the caves in Samar, some of whose inhabitants still possess the knowledge of the difficult art of embalming with aromatic herbs as done by the ancient Egyptians?[11]

In the preceding citations, Rizal and Lopez-Jaena would array ethnology and fine art to validate that the Philippines had the identity of civilization before Spain usurped it, and that it is not only the habitus of a transferred artistic modality within the Enlightenment trajectory that ratifies it; the ethnological birthright accords it equivalent entitlements to civilization and the franchise of nationhood, the first in Southeast Asia. These are occasions not only of relativization, but more importantly of reciprocal critique. That said, it was also this mixture of ethnology and fine art that sustained the world fairs and expositions of the nineteenth century where painting and live Philippine people in simulated villages were mingled (Madrid in

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[9] *Ibid*., p. 288.
[10] *Political and Historical Writings*. Vol. VII. Quoted in *Zero In*, p. 74.
[11] Teodoro Agoncillo (ed.), *Graciano Lopez Jaena: Speeches, Articles and Letters*. Quoted in *Zero In*, p. 77.

1887 and Barcelona in 1889), and the exhibitionary rhetoric that guided the establishment of national museums in the colonies.

Second, Rizal might have referenced Luna's *Spoliarium* to prefigure the scene in *Noli Me Tangere* in a chapter in which the character Tarsilo, suspected by Spanish authorities of rebellion, is tortured with rigor.[12] Through Luna and Rizal, the setting of the spoliarium vacillates between discourses of fearlessness and vanquish, a rhythm that may be necessary to portray the allegory of abjection and the redemption it seeks to ensure. It is instructive to intersperse these two acts:

> *Spoliarium:*
> In the center of the large canvas, two dead gladiators are seen being dragged across the stone floor to be dumped in a dark corner along with other bodies. At the left, two elderly scavengers, hunched like vultures, greedily eye the gladiators' effects: leather boots and straps, protective metal linings, talismans, and other accessories; while beside them another Roman raises a helpless fist at the inhuman spectacle.[13]

> *Noli Me Tangere:*
> Tarsilo shook his head and they lowered him again. His eyelids were starting to close, the pupils of his eyes continued gazing at the sky where white clouds were floating. He bent his neck to keep on seeing the light of day, but he was soon submerged in water and a sordid curtain fell and shut out for him the spectacle of the world.[14]

The revolution of Luna and Rizal is thus staged as an execution, foretold by detention and torment as verisimilarly inflicted on Florante of *Florante at Laura*, wailing while tied to a tree, and on Tarsilo, bludgeoned and broken.

Performing

To reiterate an earlier point, *Spoliarium* is not only formative to the degree that it constitutes the terms by which it is understood. It is also performative because it renders the object as a spectacle and the beholding subject as a spectator, a scheme that refers to the very circumstance of the painting

[12] I am grateful to John Clark for this reference.

[13] Alice Guillermo, "Spoliarium," in *A Portfolio of Philippine Art Masterpieces* (Manila: Department of Education, Culture and Sports, 1989), p. 51.

[14] Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, pp. 495–501.

itself: of gladiators being made to perform in harrowing contests, and in their final hours are being surveilled or even pillaged. In other words, the painting is always *before* us: in the past and in the present, incessantly in performance. Owing to the vastness of the canvas, the viewer is immersed in and engulfed by this world. And it is not only the scale that creates the emotional ambience; the feeling of suffering and the manner of mourning produce an entire affective system that may be understood on two fronts: the killing that traumatizes the body, on the one hand, and the melancholy that this immolation generates, on the other.

Interestingly, the resonance is not in any high-art specimen, but in the mentality of the folk. In Esteban Villanueva's depiction (1821) of the Basi Revolt of 1787, an uprising incited by government regulation of sugarcane wine in the northern Philippine province of Ilocos, the template is Christ's passion, consisting of fourteen panels that recall the Way of the Cross. While the tone is documentary and cautionary, its spirit is ominous: a comet streaks across the sky, rebels are beheaded with the local gentry looking on, and with these episodes persecution is consummated in the name of a rebirth. This example is tangential to the performance of the Moriones[15] in the southern islands of Marinduque in which a Roman figure, Longino (Longinus), who may be either the soldier who pierced Christ's side or the centurion in Calvary afflicted with a malady of the eye who was healed when the earth trembled on Christ's death and was consequently condemned by Pilate. In Boac, Gasan, and Mogpog, a ritual proceeds from the hunt for Longino, the person disguised by a wooden mask bearing a grotesque face of a Roman legionnaire, around the town that ends up in his decapitation and a funeral procession. Mindful of this folklore, we can make the argument then that the *Spoliarium* syndrome is not remote from the Philippine temperament. The impulse is deep because it does not only pertain to witnessing an insurrection and a resurrection; it also weaves the myth of the martyr-criminal, who becomes sacramental and cultic within the performance and the continuum of "religious devotion, public spectacle, punitive justice and art."[16] The mysticism inhabits convulsing flesh and how it outlives the torment: "To see a soul 'cleansed' while 'still in the body' [...] was an edifying sight."[17] In this theater of debilitated humanity in *Spoliarium* and in the woes of Florante, Tarsilo, the Basi rebels, and Longino, a "community of suffering" is formed:

[15] Teruya Adachi, "The Morion as a Stranger," *RIMA* 28 (1, 1994), pp. 13–32.

[16] Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and Spectacle in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), p. 129.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

"the reeking gallows, splashed with the potent blood of martyrs, was its cult station, and the demolished body of the criminal its living cult image."[18]

The supplement of this suffering, captivity, and enslavement is the loss of a prospect and the longing that it motivates. *Spoliarium* is as much passage as it is vestige, thus the image of mourning is stark as signaled by the woman at the far right of the painting, who can be "Filipinas ravished in captivity."[19] This bereavement may be inflected with hope, a vigil for transformation, emancipation, or revolution. An eminent art historian reminds us in his analysis of Jacques Louis David's *Marat at his Last Breath* (1793) that the modern instinct musters force in the political whirl in which it spins, "the form of the contingency that makes modernism what it is."[20] And this contingency may well be socialist: "socialism occupied the real ground on which modernity could be described and opposed."[21] We must recall that Luna had thought of socialism, too, in his letters to Rizal.

> I am reading *Le Socialisme Contemporain* by E. D. Laveye [...] which is a compilation of the theories of Karl Marx, Lasalle, etcetera; Catholic socialism, the conservative, the evangelical, etcetera. I find it most interesting, but what would like is a book which stresses the miseries of our contemporary society, a kind of Divine Comedy, a Dante who would take a walk through the shops where one can hardly breathe and where he would see men, children, and women in the most wretched condition imaginable.[22]

Luna had asked Rizal for guidance on these concerns, but Rizal never responded. It is curious why the latter never talked about European workers and their movement, socialism, and Marx at a season when there was socialist ferment in Spain, pervading the lives of peasants in Andalusia and the workers of Barcelona. There was a Marxist group in Madrid; and Anselmo Lorenzo, the beacon of Spanish anarchism, published in *La Solidaridad*.[23]

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[18] *Ibid*., p. 157.

[19] Guillermo, p. 51.

[20] T. J. Clark quoted in J. M Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 171.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 166.

[22] *Rizal's Correspondence*, pp. 561–562. Luna to Rizal, letter no. 254 (May 13, 1891).

[23] Georges Fisher, *Jose Rizal, Philippin, 1861–1896, Un Aspect du Nationalisme Moderne*. No publication details.

Representing

The temptation to cite Edmund Burke to explicate the notion of the sublime is difficult to resist; but it is strategically implicated here by way of W. J. T. Mitchell who thinks of it politically, to be specific, as a "politics of sensibility," situated within Burke's representation of the French Revolution. Such reckoning of the sublime enables us to appropriate the concept as constitutive of the aesthetic and of its post-colonial attrition. Mitchell elaborates by referring to a tale that Burke tells about a boy:

> who had been born blind, and continued so until he was thirteen or fourteen years old; he was then couched for a cataract, by which operation he received his sight. Among many remarkable particulars that attended his first perceptions [...] the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him a great uneasiness; and [...] some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight.[24]

According to Mitchell, this narrative mediates the sublime, "as much owing to the clash of aesthetic and political sensibilities as it is to the mechanics of vision."[25] The aesthetic, therefore, is imbricated not only in the guileless description of the sight, or the compromised art of describing, but also in the natural, or naturalized, declensions of social difference and power, in the ethnological premise of things, that can be identified and interpreted. This premise is transcoded as "of nature" or partaking of an indigenous, native order: "the doubled figure of slavery, of both sexual and racial servitude, appears in the natural colors of power and sublimity."[26] The sublime may be productive in this respect in a couple of ways:

First is the belief of the sublime as terror and horror, felt as dangerous and painful only because it is beheld vicariously, from a distance, albeit within critical intimacy: "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature [...] is astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror."[27] It is intuited as wrenching and estranging, but excites delight, comprises passion, and

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[24] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 131.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Edmund Burke quoted in Walter John Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 89.

marks an ethico-political decision to preserve the self and lighten the burden of others. Burke:

> There is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity; so that whether the misfortune is before our eyes, or whether they are turned back to it in history, it always touches with delight. This is not an unmixed delight, but blended with no small uneasiness. The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer.[28]

Second are the incommensurability of the affective agency and the intractability of the sublime. Kant states that the sublime "cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns rational ideas, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible may be excited and called into mind by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit of presentation through the senses."[29] What the sublime inscribes is an "imagination of its own image"[30] that prevails but also signifies finitude, making it "at heart, both a paradoxical and intense experience. It is the sensible world in its excess which limits perceptual cognition, yet it is a particular instance of this excess which gives the scope of rational cognition such a dramatic impact."[31]

It is this lack, this "obscurity" that concretizes the sublime, "precisely because it is a frustration of the power of vision. Physiologically, it induces pain by making us strain to see that which cannot be comprehended."[32] Thus, art is created, the sublime resides in a substance called painting, in a national treasure named *Spoliarium,* born in the "tension between what is perceptually overwhelming and what is nevertheless known to be artifice."[33] The painting thus humbles: it does not end in itself, it is open-ended, or, as Alfred Gell[34] in discussing art as agency would posit, is open-endedly social. Again, Burke: "Greatness of dimension, too, is sublime, and infinity fills the

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[28] Edmund Burke, "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful" in Feagin, Susan and Patrick Maynard (eds.), *Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[29] Wood (ed.), *Basic Writings of Kant*, p. 307.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 308.

[31] Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[32] Mitchell, p. 126.

[33] Crowther, pp. 153–154.

[34] Alfred Gell, *Art as Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

mind with that 'delightful horror' which is the essential effect of sublimity, an effect which is approximated by the 'artificial infinite' of succession and uniformity (as in a colonnade), the imagination continuing beyond the actual limits of the object."[35]

This incompletion and denial of absolute intellection leads to representation: "The sublime is most appropriately rendered in words."[36] Such a latitude in theory brings this essay to its conclusion: to the corpus of hagiographic texts produced within the colonial period that saturates the sublime in the evocation of rupture. We distill this in Rizal's homage to the painting *Spoliarium* and the painter Luna, acclamations that would institute genius and link life stories of heroic art and artists with the biographical discourse of the nation. If the sublime is efficacious because it is textualized, the textualization of Rizal's destiny thrives in this hermeneutic thicket. When he was shot by a firing squad in 1896, his death sparked outrage and reverence, igniting a revolution that he did not rouse but was its fire. Some historians would later call him a pacifist who refused the uprising; others, including peasants whom he had never met, would conjure him as messianic, godlike, miracular. Rizal as sublime hence teeters on being estranged from the colonial atrocity and the uprising against it and being a co-sufferer of a collective oppression. Surely, it is the idiom of the passion of Christ, the *Pasyon* in the Philippine language Tagalog, that is the sieve of this sacrificial marvel, prompting the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno to assert that Rizal is the "Tagalog Christ suffering in the garden of Gethsemane."

And quite unerringly, we find resonance in the sermons of the Catholic friars, contrived as catechetical stagecraft that made the sublime of deliverance palpable and within apprehension. A homily on the Sunday after Easter in seventeenth century colonial Philippines by the Dominican Francisco Blancas de San Jose speaks of the qualities of a resurrected body, an insight that infuses the faithful with the hope of liberation from the corruption of a colonized body. One of these traits is agility:

> The second is what is called in Spanish *Agilidad*, and in Tagalog *Calicsihan* (agility). Even if man's body is now heavy and weak, it will not so remain, but on the contrary will become agile, and will lighten beyond comparison to all that is agile. Those so imbued will be more lively than birds in their flight, and more rapid than bullets, whether the path be upward, or downward, or from side to side without slacking [...]

[35] Burke in Hipple, p. 90.
[36] Mitchell, p. 125.

> Again and again they may court and visit each other, without fatigue or surfeit.[37]

This religious oratory coheres with the affective resources, the refunctioned means of gathering the glimmer of a redemption through representation in art and in words. Modernity here is not merely reflexivity, of producing knowledge knowingly, or autonomy from instrumentalist reason, but more engagingly is an intimation – of participating in a kindred passion as an intimate and at the same time of professing an "inclination outward" – in which the suffering and sanctified agency and subject is inspired, taking in the breath of likely freedom and fathoms the lapsed tenure of the colonial order because it has already gained a humanity, the faculty of reinvention, and, at last, salvation, a fate "without fatigue or surfeit."

This discourse on humanity is contentious; it lies at the heart of how, for instance, the Spanish transcribers (many of whom clerics) of a geohistory sensed the people of the Philippines. Antonio de Morga, whom we earlier read as a scribe of custom, is pertinent, having written a comprehensive compendium of what might pertain to a germinal Filipiniana, an "excellent specimen of the geographical relation as practiced in the Renaissance."[38] This would entail

> reliance on empirical observation, or a well-documented synthesis of primary sources, organized topically according to a method, and described in plain language for a practical aim [...] the capacity to organize information coherently and the degree of engagement with a historical perspective rooted in classical and biblical sources.[39]

It is worth noting that this copious ethnographic material amassed to depict the scale of culture of the colony, its stage of barbarism and its aptitude for civility and finesse, would be tinged with Counter-Reformation zeal and prejudice, and was in cadence with the conduct of proselytization. For instance, "quite often this ethnographic material is buried within a hagiographic discourse composed in praise of the missionaries themselves, which

[37] Doreen Fernandez, "A Heavenly Agility: Translation as a Process of Understanding," in Jose Mario Francisco (ed.), *Sermones: Francisco Blancas de San Jose, O.P. (1614)* (Manila: Pulong: Sources for Philippine Studies, 1994), pp. 411–412.

[38] Joan-Pau Rubies. "The Spanish Contribution to the Ethnology of Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Daniel Carey (ed.), *Asian Travel in the Renaissance* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 114.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

distorts the image a reader can form of a native cultural system."[40] Therefore, there is a relay between the discursive vectors of the speech of Rizal, whose sui generis erudition and nationalism in the Philippine annals is itself panegyric par excellence; the sermon of Blancas de San Jose; and the report of de Morga, all of which hold out a universal providence for all humans in history and beyond it. What must be foregrounded is the labor of translation and "productive mistranslation" that underwrites these enunciations:

> Against this, one must consider that those very ideological biases, based on the Christian understanding of universal history combined with the humanist understanding of civilization, created the intellectual framework for a largely empirical, methodically sophisticated, and increasingly systematic research on world history [...] it was in fact the tension between the principles of Christianity and civilization which conditioned the transformation of practical ethnography into antiquarian ethnology.[41]

The tilt toward the sublime ultimately is a needed maneuver to draw attention to the dread of colonialism, and also to the creative conspiracies within what anthropologists call "local moral worlds" that the resistance to this coloniality animates through the decision about what it means and takes to be human. Thus, the ideal of the universal is a distressing disruption of locality, a kind of pain, but it is nevertheless the vein of its inalienable well being. This is an exacting effort that must be worked through with perspicacity. As Drucilla Cornell advises as she re-politicizes the Kantian legacy:

> The universal is always culturally articulated [...] The task that cultural difference sets for us is the articulation of universality through a difficult labor of translation; the terms made to stand for one another are transformed in the process and the movement of that unanticipated transformation establishes the universal as that which is yet to be achieved and which, in order to resist domestication, may never be fully or finally achievable.[42]

Aesthetics as a universalizing discipline that endorses a metaphysical and ontological theory of the "aesthetic" and by extension of its normative

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 119–120.
[42] Drucilla Cornell, "Enlightening the Enlightenment: A Response to John Brenkman," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1999), p. 137.

inculcation in art and the "artistic" becomes constructively universal if it finds its interior and its clearing – verily, its nature as in the "natural history" of the *Spoliarium* – in an exceptional acumen like Luna and in an eccentric geography like the post-colony. Aesthetics, if it is vulnerable or hospitable to this constraint, could stand its ground as universal because it co-habits, represents, un-bounds, and inevitably dissolves into what Ackbar Abbas would enigmatically call a displace.[43] It henceforth becomes, if we may propose a phrase, a *tropic of undoing* in which the travail of affect is a (dis)figuration of the spoil that is the Philippines: Luna's great painting is after all a camp, a cell of plunder and, according to Rizal, is birthed in virtual catastrophe, in the "shadows, the contrasts, the moribund lights, mystery and the terrible, like the reverberation of the dark tempests [...] the lightning and roaring eruptions."[44]

It is through the aesthetic of this magnitude that the colonial is refused and reformed as a termination that may herald the fundamental sovereignties embedded in nationalism, democracy, humanism, and other vehicles of a coming totality, which are in time to be bewitched by the promise of distinction, disinterest, and indifference. If the aesthetic as constitutive of the universal is "culturally articulated," or if it were to be located, then it should be a hereafter, its ontogenesis stemming from an apocalyptic seizure of the earth and its effusive interlocutors who style themselves as heirs to the enlightenment and await the consequences of its culmination.

In the end, there is melancholy in this expectancy, in the ardor of taking risks, in facing a chance that is almost a panacea and a specter that everything may actually be a negation. This mood deepens largely because the fantasy, the memory, or the desire is at once homespun and worldwide, kindled in exile, whether the idealist were a curate on a mission to a heathen frontier, an expatriate in the metropolis, or a soul raging against damnation. The originary – the genius, the artist, the evangelist, the archivist – thus is also exilic, an unnerving attachment and worldliness with which Edward Said is wistfully acquainted: "what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both."[45] This is what a social scientist finds out in the Philippines when she grapples with the emotion – or the tropic – that permeates the singing of an English song about a foreign season, *Autumn Leaves,* in an amateur competition in a monsoon peninsula south of the capital of Manila:

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[43] Akbar Abbas in a lecture at the Sydney Biennale (2006), unpublished.

[44] *Political and Historical Writings*, Vol. VII. Quoted in *Zero In*, p. 75.

[45] Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

> It seems possible that one element in the "sentimental" and nostalgic atmosphere of the singing is built precisely out of the origins of that risk; the loss that the author signified by *Autumn Leaves* makes no immediate sense in the tropics, but the idea of loss itself does; in singing a song part of whose meaning escapes one, one evokes, among other losses, the sadness at not having completely understood, at being excluded in relation to a cultural register which, if one masters it, can open the doors of possibility and change one's life.[46]

This essay marks a return to the aesthetic not to further the discourse of culture as a cultivation of the senses or to ensconce a hegemonic egalitarian exploit crystallized in patriotism. Rather, it is to posit the realization that the history of art and nation in a vernacular locus like the Philippines converges at a moment of an otherworldly epiphany, a glimpse into the breathtaking future of freedom within the odyssey of humanity's progressive amelioration. Because of this revelation, a consciousness of lineage and possibility is ordained and the aesthetic becomes, uncannily, a post-colonial origin and the colony ends, restively.

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[46] Fenella Cannell, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 209. See also Reynaldo Ileto, *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998); and *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979). On "local moral words," please see Arthur Kleinman, "Pain and Resistance: The Delegitimation and Relegitimation of Local Worlds," in Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good et al. (eds.), *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Benedict Kerkvliet, *Everyday Politics in the Philippines: Class and Status Relations in a Central Luzon Village* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991).