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ART AND ITS PUBLICS: CONTEXTS OF RELATIONS

PATRICK D. FLORES

The relationship between art and its publics produces crucial effects in the formation of the political economy of the art world. The art world is configured here not only as a clique of connoisseurs and the culturati, but also and more significantly as a community or society of the audiences of art—social agents who articulate and enact the historical discourses of culture. The dynamic underlying such a relationship is intersubjective, interactive, and therefore performative. The publics of art are not passive reflections of the texts they read: the processes of textual and reading productions necessarily implicate the field and the forces within which those processes are made possible and at times even transgressed. The hegemonic relationship holding between people and the institutions of pedagogy can only thus forge discursive interactions among artists and audiences, patrons and academics, authorities and students of art, market variables and creative expressions. Such interactions must, however, be historicized and overdetermined if the discipline of Art Studies is to discuss more rigorously the signifying practices involved in the naming and meaning of art as discursive object as well as practice, and of its publics, not construed as an amorphous mass, but as operators of social identity, knowledge, and culture.

The most salient concerns of this issue of the *Art Studies Journal* belong to this scheme of relationship. More specifically, this collection aims to discuss how academe, as a particular site of audience and art world formation, produces and sustains knowledge about "art" and its "publics." The academe as an institution in which certain social discourses are enforced is viewed as an

important locus of contradiction as well as intervention. In as much as people from the academe, no matter how incompetent and corrupt, are invested with pedagogical, ethnographic, and bureaucratic authority to speak of the "Humanities" in the name of, well, "humanity" by teaching, representing, or organizing it, the knowledge constructed in their domain and territory is rendered efficaciously legitimate. Such legitimacy and the apparatus through which this legitimacy is disseminated fall into some form of predicament, and therefore into critique.

How, for instance, does the academe make sense of "art" and "culture?" And how does it address the potential recalcitrance of a public that must continuously modify the meanings which the various bureaucracies of the institution preach, and consequently reintegrate it into and within certain situations of lived lives?

The San Diego controversy clues us into some important lessons. When Professor Josephine Acosta Pasricha questions the National Museum for allowing the "presence" of the Philippines to be elided in various ways in the Paris exhibition of Philippine Treasures, she symptomatically inscribes in the art world the skid marks of academic intervention. By so foregrounding the public transcript of the San Diego exhibition, Pasricha employs and deploys the prerogatives and powers of critique:

"Hermeneutic art criticism, precisely, analyzes not only what is given, but what is de-focused or bracketed out. Through hermeneutic analysis, such questions crop up as why a

multi-lingual approach; why English or Filipino was bracketed out as the language used in the exhibit; why the Philippines was bracketed out as provenance of the treasures; why the Filipino people were bracketed out of a contract?"

The controversy surrounding the San Diego spectacle spilled into "public" space through Julie Yap-Daza's column in the mainstream broadsheet Manila Standard. On December 22, 1994, Daza, a host of an equally popular television talk show, reported on the "findings" of Pasricha on the galleon exhibit at La Grande Halle in the outskirts of Paris:

"(1) Why were all posters, brochures and books printed about the exhibit, which was inaugurated by President and Mrs. Ramos on September 15 and will end on January 8, in the French language? Will the exhibit continue in this monolingual approach when it is toured around the world after Paris?"

"(2) Why were Manila and the Philippines, provenance of the art objects and relics, 'barely mentioned, and, if at all, in very small letters?' As she pointed out, 'One gets the impression at the end that Fortune Island belongs to France.'

"(3) Is the suspicion held by many Filipino scholars valid that '60 percent of the treasures from the underwater excavation in Fortune Island will eventually belong to France and only 40 percent, and not necessarily the best pieces, will be returned to the Philippines, as the contract...states'?"

Of course, such interventions are met with hostility and hauteur by lackeys in government. Note how a petty bureaucrat like Fr. Gabriel Casal, director of the National Museum, would preface his answer to Pasricha with a cattiness characteristic of "officials" caught "red-handed":

"I do not know Josephine Acosta Pasricha personally, nor have I heard of or about her. Neither does anyone at the National Museum." (Manila Standard, January 13, 1995)

And then states: "Every single artifact will return to Manila."

The problem is no one knows of, or is even

privy to the proper auditing and inventory procedures involved in the San Diego collection. Casal himself proudly reveals that "the contract of the excavation and then separately, that of the Paris exhibit, have never left the locked drawer of my table at my office."

It is definitely clumsy for Casal to pose cute and plead ignorance of Pasricha, if only because the Professor is fairly quite known in academic circles. And that Pasricha as an authorial arbiter of truth is beside the point here. It is Pasricha's mode of critique, the effect of her locution, and the neurosis she evokes from Casal's abundant lack that must cut through the discussion. As Pasricha comments in a letter to the same paper:

"The issue, henceforth, is whether the contract between the Philippine government and the people who excavated the San Diego Galleon projects protects the rights of the Filipino people and the patrimony of the Philippines or not. As Filipinos, we should never be faulted for asking such questions, putting the common good of our country above everything else." (January 20, 1994)

We discern here how the Filipino people and nation would be invoked in matters relating to art and culture. Verily, the rhetoric used in this debate tends to lay claim to a public that is at once absent and present, mute and vociferous, spoken for and speaking. According to Pasricha:

"Every Filipino reserves the right to question whether 'every single artifact retrieved from the San Diego excavation and on exhibit in Paris will come to Manila' until 'every single artifact will return to Manila.'"

In this exchange, discourses on the Philippine patrimony are made to operate and in fact used to bind the Filipino people -- they who are imagined as a united community sharing the same traditions and futures. Undoubtedly, how the Philippine patrimony and the Filipino people are made to conspire and thus made to be complicit in this undertaking brings to the surface specific assumptions of patrimony and people, and of the value attributed to a "legacy" engineered and unearthed by the machineries of colonialism and imperialism. We are thus prodded to ask: Are the

Filipino people really in the position to request a proper documentation and evidences of "570 stoneware and earthen jars, 1,000 pieces of blue-and-white Ming porcelain (valued at \$1 million), 430 coins, 24 Japanese sword hilts, 14 cannons, 12 skulls?" How will the Philippine government show this loot to Filipinos? What kind of museographic perspective will it adopt in its representation of this treasure? How will it speak to the people?

This journal would like to initiate debate on this kind of problematic: on how precisely does academe participate in the formation of art discourse, of the kind of knowledge that is transcoded in art theory, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. The essays in this issue attempt to expound on the intricate modalities with which academe works on the art world that works on it:

Pearl Tan-Punongbayan analyzes the conceptual categories that underwrite "reception" or, from a metacommentarist perspective, "reception" to "reception." The business/politics of reception is central in the production of meaning and taste, according to Tan-Punongbayan, because it frames the parameters of cognition and experience, in a sense historicizing the production of "sense," in all its senses, to be sure. As audiences shift and straddle those multiple positionalities invariably designated as folk, fine, or popular, they are predisposed to read through texts in specific ways within specific settings and within the conditions of power relations which govern seeing, looking, and understanding. The ideological effects of this positioning bears on the very negotiation of the artifacticity of texts, or the transformation of an object from necessity to the aesthetic and the discursive.

Ma. Victoria Herrera for her part reconstructs the scaffolding of governmental initiatives in the arts through an art historical discussion of public support for the Cultural Center of the Philippines. We learn from Herrera's essay that the now infamous Imelda fantasy had been funded by a network of patrons and sources -- all in the name of the Filipino people whose soul is said to reside in the Center. The intersection between the State, the people, and culture consolidates a moment within the art world that generates tension in the definition of these

same terms and endowments in the context of specific mechanisms and techniques of theoretico-political organizations.

Cecilia Sta. Maria's insight is more introspective in the way it questions the academic's "intrusion" into a cultural domain, weaving a kind of self-reflexive critique of academic practice and habitus. The academic is first cast as an imperialist outsider, messianic in zeal, who earnestly intends to transform the culture against which she is othered but through which she assumes political effect. Sta. Maria then competently maneuvers the technologies and wherewithal of cultural work and refunctions the constitution of the project, making different both the state of the said theatrical culture in Marinduque and the strategic pedagogical and ethnographic authority of the academic to propose ways of transforming that specific conjuncture of theater/society. The academic now is at once an outsider and insider, maintaining critical distance and social involvement -- in other words, playing out the human praxis of academe in its full complexity.

This form of engagement by academe in imbuing dimensions into reality gains a lively articulation in Rosa Maria Magno Icaasi's essay on Pangasinan folk songs. How she discerns the nuances of mediation through which the folk song undergoes testifies to the inquisitive interest of Art Studies in understanding cultural transformations or transformations in culture. She poses as problematic the ways in which "folk songs" become "popular" through media--and so become "pop songs." Icaasi monitors a series of maneuvers in the field of Pangasinan popular music, and in the process evokes issues and debates about the public of the folk, the popular, and the overlappings of both.

In the process of naming culture in history, certain social relationships are defined and strategies of othering deployed so that distinctions necessary in giving form to hegemonic arrangements are produced. Cherubim Quizon's essay probes into the tactics of rhetoric and representation involved in this production of identities in the colonial order of things. The 1886 "Colonial and Indian Exhibition" in England enflashes the ideological character of "exhibition,"

of staging "real people" from India and Africa in the drama of "work." Work as in "real people" showcased in the act of making native crafts, with the "work" viewed in the context of colonial ethic and morality as well as according to the sensibility of display. These people and the practice of producing their culture are placed within the scheme of Empire-building: of how Empire gains its imperial power at the expense and because of the natives it had othered. The "public" then in this case becomes very much "interested," indubitably entangled in the web spun by both native discourse and colonial culture.

Part of this interest pertains to knowledge. Patrick D. Flores interrogates the construction of the archive and library of colonial art/history as well as the modes of access to it. Flores contends that empiricist researches have made Philippine academe subservient to the traditional politics of the Humanities. In all this, he advocates a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the institutions of the academe and the knowledge it has produced and continues to foist on its constituencies. As Michel Foucault had once said: "It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge. It is impossible for knowledge not to endanger power."

Finally, Belen Ponferrada initiates significant

forays into the study of the institution of museum in the Philippines. She probes the problems besetting the practice and discipline, and ultimately moves on to discuss the exigencies which lie beyond the tressorial limits imposed by traditional museology.

From the imbrication of art within its publics and those publics within art emerge specific instances of resistance and affiliation, containment and transformation, creation and constraint, the totems of taboos and the hopes of broadening horizons. What the discipline of Art Studies must appropriate in these moments of intense contradictions -- drawing vast and vital resources from anthropology, cultural studies, critical theory, and new history -- are the active energies at work in the mediation and critique of the power of the institutions and the art world to value art and culture on behalf of those who are educated to subscribe to them. From colonial painting to folk theater to popular music to museum culture to fine art and on to popular expressions, the discourse of art travels the distance of knowing and engaging that knowledge in the formations of publics. This issue of the Art Studies Journal seeks to map out the ground on which people travel as they create culture and history, and a future that prefigures and preponderates with worlds and communities of art.