



COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This work shall solely be used for academic purposes and shall not serve any personal gain or commercial advantage. Further, distribution and/or reproduction in any form or means is not allowed without the permission from the author or publisher.

departamento ng
aralin sa sining



art studies

ART
STUDIES
JOURNAL[®]

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1
DECEMBER 1994

668 100 10
OCT 1999
LIT

© All Rights Reserved.

This Journal may not be reproduced, in whole or in part
from the respective authors and the Department
UP Diliman

ART STUDIES
JOURNAL

vol. 2, no. 1 D 1994

RED

8 1/2 x 11

REMAPPING THE TERRAIN OF PHILIPPINE COLONIAL ART HISTORY

PATRICK D. FLORES

The category defining the art public operates only if it refers to the broad system of social relationships and structures which enable the products of art to circulate and be received by the social formations within the art world. It is only through this theoretical paradigm that we can competently insist on the effects of power relations in the practices and modes of knowing art by a certain public.

One such public is the academe, the institution which organizes the knowledge and sets the limits of our epistemic access to what must constitute art, or more specifically, colonial art and society.

The thesis "The History of Philippine Colonial Painting from its Beginnings to the Establishment of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura: Towards a Theory of Colonial Art History" is a metacommentary on art historical productions which, through the conventions of history, tell the story of Philippine colonial painting, from the introduction of the practice to the Philippine "islands" and "natives"¹ to its constitution as a state and academic institution of colonial rule. Inasmuch as these art histories have been contrived within specific theoretical frameworks, the thesis seeks to track down the traces of certain critical modalities underwriting these perspectives, and so marks out a course for a reconstruction of the art historical discourse through a deconstruction of the said criticisms, a metacritical activity that inevitably discloses the overdeterminations of critique which organize particular operations within Philippine colonial art history and its attendant historiographic analytic.

The thesis assumes that the category colonial art, specifically colonial painting, is an arbitrary construction of art history: when art historians, whose credentials and credibility to name and value art historical discourse are conferred by the academic market, invoke the term colonial painting, they do *not*, because cannot, refer to an *actual* colonial part within which *actual* colonial art could be recovered, but to certain memories, artifacts, representations of colonial art /history regulated by the institutions of the archive and the agencies of culture and artworld-ing.² The archaeology of knowledge that unearths data or evidence and relocates it to the ideological surface, as it were, is engineered by the imperatives of scholarship and academic practice which cannot but implicate political, because theoretical, decisions and destinations. In other words, the very perception that thinks of data as data is a theoretico-political construction and must not be occluded in the formation and study of discourse, in this case, colonial art historical and critical discourse. The attempt to gloss over the interventions of theory can only therefore be symptomatic of a kind of worldview that conceives of reality as natural and so neutral.

The constitutions of the category of colonial painting are multiform. The thesis is committed to draw them out and subject them to the problematics of mode of colonial production; as well as to inquire into the mediations of the myriad publics that have participated in the multiformation of its rubrics. What the thesis accounts for here are the discontinuities in perception, and therefore of production: of how colonial painting is/was viewed by its audiences either as religious artifact,

status symbol, historical document, commodity, and so on. Because receptions to artifacts fluctuate within the changing circumstantialities of their production and display, this thesis aims to explain the various contexts through which forms of colonial painting have been enmeshed and thus have assumed effects within distinct historical loci.

Towards this goal, the thesis proposes and presupposes that the form colonial painting takes on is not simply to be construed as artifice or a visual arts equivalent of the formalistic objective correlative. Within the mechanisms of new art history, which properly dismantles the disciplinary prescriptions that for so long a time have fettered traditional art history from exploring the possibilities of interdisciplinarity/intertextuality, form is not sociological function but political economic inscription whose power/discursive effects -- production, dissemination, circulation, and reception -- can be examined in terms of the political processes of signification and institutionalization. In this kind of terrain, colonial painting is never to be disabused from the conditions of colonialism and the constraints of art history-making in the present, as it is made to figure and rigorously permeate the manner in which the industries of art history make sense, negotiate, and invest in the discourse of colonial art history through the most interesting of post-colonial engagements.

The term post-colonial is re-functioned here from a diachronic research instrumentality to a theoretical strategy which seeks to reframe the parameters of colonial knowledge, decentering the orthodox and futile colonizer-colonized binarism and reprioritizing the transformative utopia, through struggles and interventions and revolutions, which the colonial tension had aspired to formulate in the first place. It is also reprogrammed to emphasize what "the theory of the post-colonial state suggests that the classical conception of the STATE as the instrument of a single ruling class, or, in structuralist interpretations of the Marxist theory of the State as the relatively autonomous reproducer of the social formation in the interests of the whole of that class, cannot be applied in an unproblematic way to the new conditions."³ In the colonial political economy, the state as overdetermined by church and civil authorities must

be re-analyzed as an apparatus which had not only conquered and consolidated territory, but also solicited consent from those it must have had to convert/contain.

And so, in order to differentiate the colonial from the post-colonial, the category colonial operates more of as a convenient heuristic device to designate a determinate historical period, which is in turn metacognitively conceptualized in terms of post-colonial perspectives. In the long haul then, the colonial can only be rendered real from the point of view of the post-colonial, or the knowledge grounded on post-colonial theory. Decisively reconsidered by the thesis are certain assumptions about coloniality, colonial artifacticity, colonial historiography, and colonial culturality. The thesis for this purpose appropriates Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*. It submits that the latter can best examine the nuances of competencies with which the publics of colonial art have internalized the various terms of the colonial field's valuations. Furthermore, in order to deconstruct how representations of colonial art move in and out of aesthetic registers within a colonial system's contradictory regimes of truth, the thesis predicates its trajectory on a specific mediation of Michel Foucault's notion of power: that it is "not a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body"⁴ but rather that the "grid of intelligibility of a social order"⁵ is dense with disequilibriums and differentiations. This form of argumentation on power allows the thesis to tease out the discourses of resistances through which the natives or colonial subjects (the colonial subject position as conjuncture of struggle) have articulated their agency and subjectivity in relation to a kind of visual *habitus* constructed by colonial art.

In the context of this theoretical procedure, the thesis seeks to pursue how colonial painting retexts and reengages itself within the various discourses of colonial conquest, catholic conversion, secular patronage, and aesthetic education. These processes of reimplication constitute the premise of a project that attempts to reterritorialize through the transgressive hermeneutics of new art history the narratives of colonialism, sharply underscoring the dialectical

struggles within force relations operative in colonial encounters and prefiguring therein spaces for intervention by way of alternative art historiographies, theories, criticisms, and practices predisposed to assign colonial art a confrontational position, a decentered site of profound contentions that is preconditional for transformative praxis.

The thesis, moreover, defines the stakes in colonial art history as it problematizes such practices which assume legitimacy in the name of colonial art as antique connoisseurship, the teaching of Humanities, restoration, authentication, museology, the art market, and so on. Germane in this respect is rethinking the concept of a kind of pedagogy that models the teaching of aesthetics and the discourse of art studies, which by and large still owe their justification to the belletristic traditions of the academy/conservatory. The present Humanities, in fact, continues to place the full weight of its theoretical distinctions on art's relationship with a universalized humanity that is distinguished along the plane of its otherings: humanity as opposed to *barbaritas* and *divinitas*. This re-traces itself within the double oppression of the subaltern colonial subject, who is at once pagan and mortal, substantially lacking in both culture and morality.

It is around the problematic of the Humanities that art history must build a critique against the hegemonic legacies of the institutionalization of painting as a discursive articulation of the fine arts canon within the multiple formations of the Philippine art world. It is also therefore around such an organization that art history recovers the oppositional predispositions working against this institution of legitimation which ineluctably has given rise to "a repression of differences within entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself."⁵

The most efficacious way in dismantling the infrastructure of the Humanities and exposing the *material* of its technology is to find out not only how the discipline has codified the knowledge of art, but also how that knowledge could be remanufactured and be made to assume something other than its hegemonic conscious identity. Barbara Johnson posits that the "way in

which a text... differs from itself is never simple: it has a certain rigorous, contradictory logic whose effects can, up to a certain point, be read."⁷ Thus in this light, the binary opposition between Humanities and its other/s or between colonialism and its other/s cannot break down under the pressure of reverse discourse: deconstruction is precisely the "attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition."⁸ In fact, "certain subversions that seem to befall it in the critical narrative are logically prior to it and necessary in its very construction."⁹ The site within which this thesis is being produced and "intends" to circulate is therefore consequently deconstructed, pitted against the contradictions within itself, if at all it must be remapped and there in the new mapping construct the different space in which other discourses might be permitted to inhabit.

This deconstructionist mode enables the agency which regulates the production of this thesis to foreground a symptomology of the institutionalization problematic; its history is made to reveal the theoretical foundations on which the discipline rests. Documents¹⁰ pieced together to reconstruct the history of the Department of Art Studies, formerly Humanities, bear out the notion that the Humanities as a hegemonic institution in third world cultural practice traces its founding principles to renaissance thought: that the Humanities is a "study of that which makes man more human, of his creative exploration of the human condition," so that the individual may be exposed to the "sum of the best that has been thought and said and artistically rendered." The change in name of the department to Art Studies addresses the problems of such a definition and seeks to reorient the department along the more exigent goals of a less western liberal arts canon. Still, however, the theoretical position allowing the primacy of a certain Philippine Humanities to emerge has spawned the validation of the *or* to the Euro-American *either* in the form of the nativist privileging of the non-western, thus perpetuating nevertheless the debilitating binarist analytic which has ensured the dominative effects of the Humanities and retroactively aborting the possibilities of post-colonial interventions within the constructions of coloniality.

Virginia Moreno, one of the founding mothers of the department, envisages, because more exuberantly, more acutely, the classic/classicist rationale of the Humanities as proffered to the "layman student": to understand and acquire for himself the humanistics, spiritually -- enriching values that can be extracted from the imaginative works of man."

"We had especially in mind those going to Medicine, Engineering, Fisheries, Law, Education or Nursing, since it was important to balance their professional studies with the arts that will complete them as human beings."

It is in the estrangement of art and science, of man and the machine that the Humanities claims its reason for being. This is further given credence by a statement issued by the department:

"When courses in Humanities were first offered in 1955, it was to counter the alienating effects of the ever increasing emphasis on science and technology and the tendency towards narrow specialization in the university. The purpose was to round out the student's education, especially those in the natural and social sciences...so that the student may contemplate his existence with deeper sensitivity and awareness."

Moreno is thus led to solicit the capital of the Humanities to support her vision of culture as *litterae humaniores* ("peculiarly human") and of its perceiver as the "incomplete" human who is "to drink, joyfully and knowingly...from the rich wine cup of all the liberal and liberating arts of man." The prefatory essay in one of the required textbooks for the department's standard Humanities course bolsters such polemic:

"The humanities find their characteristic subject matter in those significant achievements of the human race which illuminate and illustrate the distinctive characteristics of man as a rational and spiritual being. Man's capacity for self-transcendence in the forms of reflection, imagination, volition, self-awareness, and his ability to project his mind into the future enable him to experience a dimension of existence which, however much it depends upon the physical and sensate, has an authenticity of its own which no

reductionism can ultimately erode or destroy."¹¹

The discussion of the beginnings of the Department of Humanities and its transformations through the years scans the landscape of Philippine Humanities -- for which and through which this thesis assumes significance and pertinence -- as it swings forth and back in the path of human/non-human, civilized/barbaric, western/non-western binary opposition, a stifling dichotomic telology that can only result in either the indiscriminate celebration of foreign traditions and trends and the uncritical celebration of the allegedly non-colonial -- as if these two existed in an autonomous vacuum and within impenetrable spheres.

The hegemonic effects of this debate characterize the theoretical and political gaps in Philippine art studies, engendering on the one hand ethnocentric, nativist¹² nationalism and on the other cosmopolitan vanguardism/esthete-ism which if not nostalgic-colonial or catholic is, because formalist, problematically *moderne*.¹³ The bottom line therefore is that if Moreno can actually celebrate the enchantment of art, novelist laureate Nick Joaquin can extol the friar/frailocracy, and so structuring a conspiracy between colonialism and the Humanities, between aesthetics and the politics of marginalization and the production of the canon:

"He organized our dialects into grammars; opened up and mapped our lands; and pulled us out of the mists of folklore into the era of written history. The churches, roads, bridges, dams and irrigation systems he built, we are still using today. From any viewpoint, his is one of the great civilizing labors in the history of mankind."¹⁴

Finally, salient to the politics and problematics of the thesis is the critique of colonialism anchored on the post-colonial conception of ambivalence, which must define both the construction of compliance with colonial annexation and the strategy of transgression against it. The colonial arrangement here is apprehended as at once "a civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force,"¹⁵ something which does not constitute a binary opposition; civilization had thrived precisely because it pursued its barbarism

against cultures it deemed as needing such violence. And so, because colonialism had projected itself contradictorily as conquest and salvation, the mediation of it by the colonized constituencies cannot merely be theorized in the form of a mechanical anti-colonial reaction against an ambivalent heterogeneity. Homi Bhabha seeks to re-think the terms with which to consolidate the power of colonial critique:

"The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and the shifting positionalities of its subjects (e.g. effects of class, gender, ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonization, etc.), I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation,' appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity. Therefore, despite the play in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, I do not consider the practice and discourses of revolutionary struggles the under/other side of 'colonial discourse.' They may be historically co-present with it and intervene in it, but can never be 'read-off' merely on the basis of their opposition to it. Anti-colonialist discourse requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it." ¹⁶

The thesis winds up with a metacritique of art history and criticism of Philippine colonial painting, laying bare some preliminary recommendations on the possible interpretive schemes within which to situate the study of Philippine colonial painting -- in terms of iconography, native interventions, "sources and influences," agencies of artistic legitimation -- and assess the persevering complexities of the discourse as it intersects with and intercepts various social hegemonies through the course of lingering colonialities.

REFERENCES

- 1 The thesis recuperates the terms "natives" and "islands" from the imperialist pejorative semantics which has defined their meanings. The terms are reinterpreted to re-trace the processes of worlding, of nativizing, of demarcating the cultural geographies of "islands," and so laying bare the discourses of coloniality. Also, the words catholic, church, and empire are deliberately not capitalized. The thesis aims to de-privilege their hegemonic discursive status.
- 2 Refer to Patrick D. Flores's "Cracking the Canon, Repositioning the Other: Towards a Reterritorialization of the Philippine Visual Arts." The essay attempts to challenge the canon of the Philippine visual arts which is unmasked as preponderantly patriarchal and orientalist. Moreover, it programs ways in which the canon and its others could be re-read within a reorganized framework.
- 3 Hamza Alavi, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Societies," *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 83.
- 4 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, V.1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 93.
- 5 Foucault, *ibid.*
- 6 Imre Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 152.
- 7 Salusinszky, *ibid.*
- 8 Salusinszky, *ibid.*
- 9 Salusinszky, *ibid.*
- 10 The documents used for the reconstruction of the history of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines at Diliman were in the form of letters, memoranda, and annual reports taken from the files of the Department.

- 11 Clyde Holbrook, "What are the Humanities?" *On Art, Man & Nature*, ed. Felipe M. De Leon, Jr. (Manila: Felipe M. De Leon, Jr., 1981).
- 12 Refer to Patrick D. Flores's "The Nativist Discourse in Philippine Art." The essay discusses the ideological implications of nativism as it works through the various research discourses on Philippine art and culture. Central to the assumptions of this graduate school paper (course: Philippine Art and Society) are the problematics of nativist politics impinging on the construction of the notion of authentic Philippinicity, a category which is nurtured by as it nurtures the sort of essentialism that elides the materialist constitutions of culture and tactical options preconditional for social struggles. Another work that problematizes the concept of the native Filipino is "Is Folk Fine?: An Ambi-Valent Introduction," the introductory essay of the inaugural issue of the Art Studies Journal which aims to set the agenda of an alternative reading of the ethnic and its inscription within divergent discourses of identity. The other articles in the said journal are likewise committed to recast the definition of the discourse of the "Philippine" in terms of its intervention in the formation of "Filipino" identity in culture and the arts.
- 13 The term modern is problematized here for some of the politically disabling legacies it has spawned like false consciousness and avant-gardism. The thesis believes the term must be refunctioned so that it could impel what Raymond Williams has called a "modern future" and initiate a thoroughgoing dialectical critique of some of the equally politically disabling legacies of post-modern theory.
- 14 Nick Joaquín, *Culture and History: Occasional Notes on the Process of Philippine Becoming* (Manila: Solar Publishing Corporation, 1988), 81.
- 15 Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russel Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trin T. Minh-Ha, Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 72.
- 16 Bhabha, 75.