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The Art Studies Journal is the official journal of the Department of Art Studies, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines Diliman. It is envisioned to foster discursive and scholarly engagements on Philippine art, in conversation with the regional and the global, through deploying the lenses of art history, art theory and aesthetics, art criticism, curatorship, and arts management. Taking the Philippines as a geographical, historical, and theoretical starting point, it aligns with the department's commitment to a humanistic and interdisciplinary approach and to the decolonization of art, which have been its response to dominant Euro-American epistemologies and practices in the discipline.

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ON MODERNITIES

MARK LOUIE L. LUGUE
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Editors, Art Studies Journal

Much has been written about modernity as a conceptual category that encompasses various disciplines. In sociology, modernity was studied to understand changes in social formations following the democratic and industrial revolutions in Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, while modernization was the subject of anthropological and comparative studies that looked into processes of industrial and cultural development between Western and non-Western societies (Shilliam). In these disciplines, modernity has earlier and largely been conceived to mark a utopic break from a previous social fabric, a rupture between traditional community and what came after. These demonstrate that while various ways of understanding modernity inform

the development of knowledge about humanity and society through the lens of their respective disciplines, deploying concepts from these disciplines also lends more complexity to our grasp of what modernity is.

In this new issue of the *Art Studies Journal*, we are interested in the relationship between art, broadly conceived, and modernity, specifically in the context of the Philippines, and how it can further the discussions on modernity that are still taking place. Inspired by the acceleration and scale of industrialization, the early and dominant understanding of Euroamerican modernity gave primacy to certain conceptions of human freedom. On this understanding, Euroamerican modernity cannot be separated from capitalist expansion, urbanization, specialization, functional differentiation, rationalization, and the domination of nature (Smyth 367).. Various streams of modern artistic expressions responded to these conditions differently; they reflected, critiqued, resisted, or attempted to escape these conditions (Perry 3; Hunter 46; Adorno 321). Although diverse, these streams fortified modernity's emphasis on individual liberty, which also made prominent other constructs that have their own sets of problems, such as the myth of the artist as a lone genius, originality, style, and so on. For a time, the Euroamerican experience has been the basis in defining modernity—the standard against which geographies outside of their boundaries are measured, rendering these inferior and backward, and their modernisms derivative and inauthentic (Kapur 19). This has been contested by the assertion that modernity should be more

broadly understood as “societal self-understanding” and that, since interpretations of this are open and varied, modernity has multiple manifestations and is contingent on the specificities of local history, culture, and social conditions (Wagner 150; Fourie 10-12).

The trajectory of these developments in deconstructing modernity aligns with the decades-long commitment of the Department of Art Studies to trouble the canonical understanding of art and the other conceptual categories that relate with it, through foregrounding local knowledge and experience. Recognizing this ambit, this issue of the *Art Studies Journal* includes research articles, a paper proceeding, and a research note that all delve into the various ways in which art and modernity intertwine. Specifically, these writings evaluate tendencies in doing art studies locally (historiography of modern art in the country) while also proffering critical and alternative means of doing it (renewed understanding of various objects in the context of the art museum). These also analyze forms of creative expressions beyond what are categorically considered as “fine arts” (performance in a video game platform, visual illustrations of an unbuilt monorail in Manila, and an everyday house implement).

Since their beginnings in the 1950s and their first commercial release in the 1970s, video games have become more complex. With the continuous development of technology and the emergence of Internet connectivity, game developers created massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs)—a video game genre known for

their compelling narratives, virtual interactions among their communities, and their own immersive worlds. The research note by Kevin Michael De Guzman attends to this development and forwards the phenomenological experience of playing a game—specifically, his performance ethnography in the game *Final Fantasy XIV* entitled *E/c/h/o* (2022-2023)—as a research and performative endeavor. Framed as a deployment of arts-based methodology, the performance-cum-research departs from traditional research methodologies through the primacy of the researcher’s grounded experience of the topic-at-hand while a performance is being produced. Given that it is hosted in a virtual world, the performance is positioned to be an exploration of posthuman subjectivity. By performing using a virtual body that is still categorically apart from the author, the research note offers a troubling of preset definitions of what humanity is, in light of the complex ecology of human and more-than-human agents powered by various technologies. The research note also recognizes that the performance, set in a virtual world called Eorzea, can likewise delve into the social interactions among the avatars played by human players, elaborating on the idea of an alternative world, with conventions that are informed by the culture of the communities of the players.

In 1969, images of a monorail were splashed across the pages of national broadsheets and magazines, gripping the imagination of not a few inhabitants of Manila who suffer daily its increasingly onerous traffic jams. Judith Camille Rosette unpacks the iconography behind these monorail illustrations

produced by the architect Otilio Arellano’s firm for a planned—but unrealized—monorail project to flesh out the modernist aspirations of a good life in the city. As a technological innovation that consolidates the “modernist...vision for the future,” Rosette draws comparisons between Space Age-inspired structures of the period and the monorail imagined as lines and abstracted forms in dynamic composition. The monorail is depicted speeding above a Filipino metropolis, the “image-dream” of ease and comfort which nevertheless also bears the marks of colonial history, with buildings built during the American colonial period, damaged by the Japanese occupation, and rebuilt after the war. Decades after Arellano’s modernist fancies, the monorail figures in the mirage of a history that could have been, weaponized as part of the Marcos propaganda machine that derives its power from our current problems with the mass transit system in Metro Manila. Rosette highlights the enduring appeal of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.’s modernist nation-building project, an indictment of the failed promise of the dictatorship’s end. A dream is as potent as reality; if anything, modernist narratives endure as long as their end—progress—remains elusive.

Narratives are one of the key ways that art takes part in the nation’s becoming. Art histories contribute to the project of creating a national identity. In “Myths and Imaginaries: Interrogating Modern Art Narratives (1950-1960s),” Gianpaolo Arago examines early Philippine art histories (*Art of the Philippines 1521-1957*, *Art in the Philippines*, and *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the*

Philippines from 1928 to 1962) to flesh out the roots of grand narratives in Philippine art. Totalizing and comprehensive, these narratives positioned modern art relative to Philippine identity-formation and nation-building. The art historical texts in question are marked by experiences of American colonialism and the Second World War and are consequently burdened by these contexts. Arago problematizes an assumed “universal and totalizing progression” in the history of Philippine art in these texts, and their positioning of modern art as testament to Philippine art’s unceasing development. An ideal Filipino identity, one that is defined by rationality and its capacity to be “improved” and “developed” according to the modern logic of progress, is made universal. The institutional roots of these narratives—in this article, the Art Association of the Philippines, the Philippine Art Gallery, and the National Museum—open future opportunities for analyzing the role of institutions in processes of myth-making in art histories and elsewhere.

Taking off from the intrinsic power of institutions in disseminating master narratives and propagating worldviews that connive with these narratives, the panel presentation of Flaudette May Datuin included in this issue proposes a different way of approaching objects in the context of art museums. Instead of seeing them as material evidence to give substance to neat periodizations and categories in which modernity is implicated, she encourages the idea that they “resist their expected roles,” which she performed by zeroing in and constellating several objects previously discussed by her colleagues. Here,

she surfaces a household implement that was selected for an exhibition through a process that engaged a local community, criticizing the elitist understanding of what a museum object should be, and the singular yet powerful hand of a curator or agents of the artworld in the innately political gesture of selecting. She also delves into a *Virgen* from Japan that may have been washed ashore into the northern part of the Philippines by chance, troubling the conventional view of intercultural and inter-island transfers as something intentional and deliberate. In addition, she probes at clothing and asserts how it can be seen to resist its tendency to inhibit women, said to be a machination of patriarchal nationalism. These objects may not categorically fall under what can be considered modernist, yet they embody the value of modernity as a potentially transformative force.

What appears common among the materials gathered for this issue of the journal is the experience of encountering the fragility of manifestations of modernity, which in turn comes with its characteristic promise of transformation. Technological breakthroughs kindle the desire to explore and form new artistic expressions, but likewise give birth to new lines of questioning about what makes us human and how we interact with others—humans and more-than-humans alike. The gesture of dreaming of and imagining a better world—whether it be in the form of advancements such as an unbuilt monorail, or in the myth of a Philippine nation constructed by critics, historians, and annotators of modern art during the post-war years—edges toward the brink of diving into falsehoods and

unattainable fantasies. Amidst the restraints that modern genealogies and categorizations posit with regard to how we appreciate and understand objects, we are encouraged to rethink them and what they are trying to say (or to scream at us, per Datuin) by the very virtue of challenging the conventions petrified by modernity. It is through these examples where we delve into our material of study, art in the context of the Philippines, that we further find richness in the concept of modernity. At the same time, such ironies and dynamisms in modernity perhaps offer glimpses to how we can possibly make sense of Elizabeth Mansfield's proposition that modernism—modernity's artistic and philosophical armature—is “a condition of tension, instability and ultimately, irresolution” (13), which in turn compels us, scholars and practitioners of art history, to constantly reflect upon how we do art studies.

Lastly, in the face of claims about the end of modernity, the desire to transform communities and societies insists on its presence and asserts that modernity is an ongoing process, our “enduring social state” (Kumar 72; Smythe 366). This same desire mobilizes the texts within the third volume of the *Art Studies Journal* of which this collection is the first issue, and it is in the spirit of the (modernist) aspiration for transformation that this collection argues for the need to persist in studying modernity and its diverse incarnations.

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