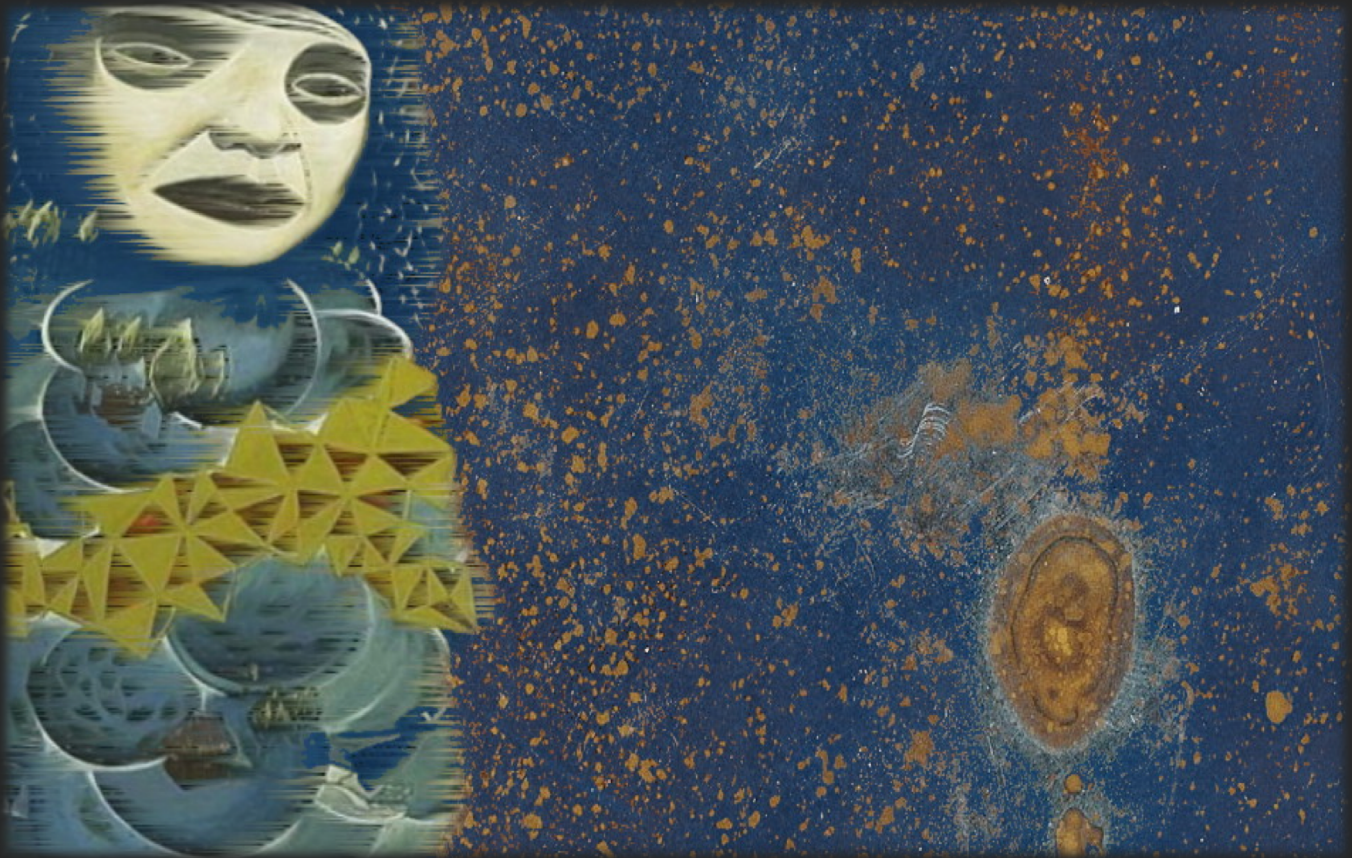


ALIENOCENE – THEORY/FICTION

CATHECTOPLASM

(A FILIPINO THEORY FICTION)



CHRISTOPHER CAÑETE RODRIGUEZ KELLY

Cubao, Manila 10/19/2003

The fundamental question for me is why no one cares about Filipinos. I think it's important to just state that at the outset, fraught as it may seem. No one cares about Filipinos. I barely do, despite the fact that I am Filipino (*half*, I should say, not that I'm ever able to forget). I'm Filipino and it feels strangely correct to say that the most Filipino thing about me is that I'm not just Filipino, I'm half Mexican and half Filipino. The most Filipino thing about me is that I'm half Mexican—how does that work? It works because no one cares, no one cares about Filipinos.

My Cebuano mom used to tell me that God was a baker and that white people were pulled out of the oven too soon. Correspondingly, black people were left in the oven too long. But the Filipino, perfectly brown, like coffee with *just* (*sakto*) the right amount of cream, we were in the oven for the right amount of time. This from my Cebuano mother who can't accept a compliment for fear of appearing vain, my Cebuano mother who was scared to let me do the dishes or wash my own clothes for fear that I would break something, something expensive that we couldn't afford to replace, my Cebuano mother who was angry at me for leaving stray hairs around the house for fear of witches finding them and cursing me with these totems of my negligence. And I bet you love that last part—that's the most interesting part, isn't it? Talk of witches gets the eyes rolling and the tongue wagging these days, because we're all so desperate for any manifestation of difference in the everyday. Even though people believe in witches in Cebu, they wouldn't believe that in the United States because there aren't any witches here, not really, no matter what your local Wiccan claims. The point is that my Cebuano mother thinks our skin is perfect even while submerged in a self-awareness that no one cares about her, about the fact that she's Cebuano (still Filipino, mind you, not that you care). It's the same reason kids called her *spic* growing up. She isn't a *spic*, or a *wetback*, but she was called both.

Of course, if our skin is perfectly coffee-and-cream, wouldn't that make our cook-time the same as those other subjects of Spanish-colonial rule, the Mexicans? Wouldn't that mean that we were the same? No, it doesn't mean that because, like I said, no one cares about Filipinos. Filipinos aren't *really* brown, in the same way that we aren't *really* Asian. We're *kayumanggi* which, I'm sure, is a word that you don't know, that you'll never know, because you don't care. We're not really Asian, we're not really American, we're not really brown, we're not really indigenous (*katutubo*); we aren't really anything. And you know what? You don't care, you never have.

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Cubao Expo, Manila 10/30/2003

I haven't been writing nearly as much as I had hoped. I have a lot of thoughts and ideas about being here, but I keep letting them fade or feeling like other things are more important and allow those things to stress me out to the point where I don't do anything. I'm easily distracted and it feels too easy to say that it's a Filipino thing but it probably is. Can't stop staring at someone across the table from me—hoping they'll look back, smile, because that feels like recognition.

I have this general idea about the crucial difference between comparison and letting. It's derived from Derrida's notion of Paul C  lan's "meridian." The meridian is a line that divides and yet leads back, so we have to wonder, wonder at division, wonder at the conditions of its possibility and wonder at an actual strategy of letting, that is to say, "letting arrive." What does it mean to "let arrive?" Given its Derridean basis, it involves the inherent impossibility of presence in all things, because something is constituted just as much by what it isn't as what it is. In this sense, there's something very apophatic about the whole affair, something Pseudo-Dionysean.

There's always such a small leap from theology to the Philippines. It's hard to conceive of anything here except along theological lines, at least for me. The Philippines, I think, has taken the problem of colonialism and transformed it into a problem of (and for) theology. Of course it is Jean-Luc Marion who noted the similarities between the work of Derrida and negative, or apophatic, theology. The general idea, for Marion, is that the positive ascription (the practice of naming) of attributes to God is predicated on linguistic idolism, or can slip into what amounts to the same thing (by imprisoning God within a word, you worship the word, which is an image). Now, this idolatry is only made possible if it becomes an end in-itself. Derrida's vacillation of presence is thus a linguistic reformulation of the cosmic tension between naming and negating. As an exploration of God, of all that is holy, which is all of God's creation, naming must be undone by negating, that the prayerful might glimpse the (un)knowing darkness of God's brilliance (think Sinai in tandem with Jesus's holy revelation as light to the disciples).

Filipinos know this, even if they don't ~know~ it. It might be more accurate to say they (un)know it. The practical-political mode of letting conceives of oneself as multiply named and negated, indifferent to hegemonic myths of purity or authenticity. Filipinos let arrive colonial encounter because colonialism is always already mired in the savage disease it demands—the fiction it speaks into truth—and, because of this, that which is colonial will always come to speak in a foreign voice. You would never notice this because no one fucking cares about the Philippines. In the 2005 movie, *Constantine*, starring Keanu Reeves, the second scene opens onto a Catholic household in Los Angeles. The previous scene depicts scavengers digging in a Mexican scrapheap, until the voiceless character Manuel finds something called the Spear of Destiny, the spear that pierced Jesus's side when he was hanging on the cross. But this second scene, with brown Catholics in Los Angeles, isn't Mexican, though the opening scene in Mexico confuses this trajectory. Brown Catholics in California is code for Mexican, but no, they're Filipino, and it's 100% unclear. More importantly, when the demon possessing a young girl in this Catholic household threatens the titular Constantine, the subtitles note that the spoken

language is unknown, even though the demon, through the Filipino woman, is muttering a grammatically incorrect phrase in Tagalog. Isn't that interesting?

So I'll say here that demonic possession in America is always coded Filipino—an unknown brownness less familiar than Mexican but nevertheless present, invisible, choking on unknown phrases in the corners of your nightmares. *Karunungan ng Diyos*, the Wisdom of God, is what we allow to speak our name, in our voice, what we force to speak for us, unbeknownst to anyone at all. We let arrive other voices that are confused, speaking languages they don't remember learning in the service of things they don't remember knowing.

Weird to think about how I have two corpses in me, one Mexican, the other Filipino. Or am I two corpses myself? Maybe I inhabit them. It's easy to fit inside corpses that are two sizes too small when you're double jointed.

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Quiapo, Manila 11/05/2003

Someone's been following me, maybe several people. Don't know if I'm being too white about this because I can't tell if it's the same person or different people. I went to Quiapo today and I'm still here, writing from the confines of the *Chowking* adjacent to the *Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene*. A few things have happened today. Firstly, I finally secured an *anting-anting*, which Dennis Santos Villegas describes as originating in the precolonial Philippines: "These [anting-anting] included wooden idols, pendants, gems, crystals, stones, animal bones, and crocodile teeth. The natives believed that these objects protected them from harm and provided many of their needs." This is different than anting-anting today, however, which are usually medallions depicting Filipino characterizations of Christian figures. This feels inaccurate though—they are Christian

figures and they do look different than how we'd expect those figures to look (or how they look in most Western art) but there's no reason to say that these are departures from Christian doctrine. They are renditions of Christian figures I should say, though they'd be unrecognizable to those of us living in the West.

I was told that you cannot buy an anting-anting, so I offered money to the *tindera* as a donation (*donasyon*). I bought two, one depicting San Miguel and the other with the *animasola* (lonely soul), also known as *Impinito Diyos* or "Infinite God." Around the *animasola* are the words "*Iresumad, Iremurim, Iremorum Rum.*" I don't think I'm supposed to share this information, especially not with a mouthful of *lumpiang Shanghai*. *Bahala na.*

The three words written around the *animasola* are a corrupted Latin, I think. I don't know what they mean (*kahulugan*) and I don't want to. Someone across the room from me hasn't taken his eyes off of me. He's slowly masticating a spoonful of *pancit*. He's staring at me and he isn't smiling like they do in the United States. He's staring like he's angry with me and scared of me at the same time. I think the corrupted Latin words in my head as he's staring. I form their syllables silently, over and over again. Now we're staring at each other. I think around the words, I think inexplicably of Neferti Tadiar and how she points out, "Such is the ritual function of literary and oral memorials of dead guerillas: to embody and enact the revolution's power over death for the sake of the living."

Emmanuel Lacaba equally emerges here, shining out the white men thrumming in my hips:

"To the fascists we are the faceless enemy
Who come like thieves in the night, angels of death:
The ever-moving, shining, *secret eye* of the storm."

I dissolve momentarily into the metal I'm holding, the anting-anting, the Latin-made-Filipino, the Latin that is Filipino, indistinguishable from Filipino, Tagalog, not that you care, whoever you are. I think we share one eye, *isang mata*.

Words of José Rizal come to mind, in the original Spanish: “¡Algunos rayos que maten personas y quemen casas!” It's Tasio the Philosopher speaking here, about the coming storm and how it might kill some people, burn some houses. How this would be a good thing. I'm here again at *Chowking*, staring, except now the both of us are also laughing. Hysterically, in spite of ourselves, compulsively. He walks to my table, puts a hand on my shoulder, and pulls an old book from a tote bag, entitled *Karunungan ng Diyos*. When I put down my anting-anting, I notice there is a painful slit in the palm of my hand, thin and of little consequence except for its deep redness at the center, like it leads somewhere. When I stare long enough it seems like it's quivering, thinking on its own.

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Intertext A:

Dear Mr. XXXXXX-XXXXXXXXXX,

I received your inquiry regarding Lacanian anxiety and am a bit confused. It seems as though you're implying that Lacan's work describes a particularly diasporic experience—but that would negate the premises of the inaugural, subjective split that Lacan argues is constitutive of the subject itself. As he says, "I am that which thinks," ventriloquizing Descartes. He goes on, "'Therefore I am,' as I have commented on elsewhere, noting that the 'therefore,' the causal stroke, divides inaugurally the 'I am' of existence from the 'I am' of meaning." As the causal stroke divides two "I am" acts, then we have to understand that there is a shared trauma of being split by language, a trauma that does not correlate to experiences of diaspora alone.

As for Lacan's work on anxiety specifically, there is a similar issue in your desire to apprehend his arguments solely in the terms of diaspora. Lacan's argument goes back to his concept of the mirror stage. He explains, "Already, just in the exemplary little image with which the demonstration of the mirror stage begins, the moment that is said to be *jubilatory* when the child, grasping himself in the inaugural experience of recognition in the mirror, comes to terms with himself as a totality functioning as such in his specular image, haven't I always insisted on the movement that the infant makes?" And, of course, the "movement" Lacan refers to here is the turn of the infant's head to ratify this specular totality by referring it to the totality of the Other, Other as law, that is. The big Other. The infant, held by their parent, turns away from the mirror, from its distanced image of self-totality, and must confirm its value in that which holds them, constrains them, supports them. The parent, the big Other, is that which ratifies the value of the specular totality the infant recognizes as themselves, but it's always at a distance, isn't it?

Always just out of grasp.

Because the mirror stage involves the apprehension of one's operative totality in the world, then people become mirrors themselves, and their presentation to us secures our own presence because they are at a distance, they are absent from where you are, guaranteeing that you're right there, you are where they are not. Their absence from where you are guarantees your presence, doesn't it? The security of your presence is generated by their absence, their distance. But what if this wasn't possible, what if the scales were tipped irrevocably in the other direction? What if, all of a sudden, the absence of the Other no longer guaranteed your presence, but the whole system became apparent to you, and you realized that you aren't really where you are? What if you grasped yourself as the absence that guarantees (an)Other's presence? That's why, in grade school, perhaps, when you see two people giggling and talking but can't quite make out what they're saying, you get worried. You get worried not because you don't know what they're saying; you get worried because you are so certain that they are talking about you. Anxiety occurs when the lack stops lacking; it operates not by doubt, but by certainty.

But this is something everyone experiences. Another quick thought experiment will suffice and then I really must go. Let's return to the mirror. If you are looking into the mirror, let's say after showering because there's something of an assumption of aloneness there, isn't there? You just step out of the shower and then you are looking into the mirror, brushing your hair. This won't work unless you're really imagining it and I apologize for how in depth and insistent on this point I am. But there you are—staring into the mirror, guiding your long hair behind an ear or whatever else and maybe you see something you like, maybe you don't always like the way you look but here you are with your hair fresh in a way it hasn't been in some time and you risk a silly smile at yourself and it's odd because it makes you feel silly but that's okay, isn't it, just this once, and slowly, so slowly you can't know for sure whether or not it wasn't always there, you

notice that an eye is appearing in the mirror. Two eyes, blinkingly watching you, calmly, as though they've been doing this forever. More eyes are there, you notice, like when you realize during a picnic that the whole blanket is moving with ants. And they aren't your eyes of course. They're theirs, you know who. How long have they watched you for? Is it the same eyes every time? And imagine that you were wearing a mask, that your face wasn't your own, and so you couldn't see if you provided a specular image for the guarantee of their own presence, because our experience of anxiety must disrupt the relationship here on both sides. You don't know what you are, can't see yourself, and you don't even know if you know what they are, because there's too many eyes, more and more, and they may have always been there, might be there now. And you have this mask that means you'll never know what you're giving back to them. The many eyes of those who are not us reminds us that we're really fragmented, irrevocably split from ourselves thanks to our emergence into language. Many eyes and that's what reminds you that you're never there, no you never really were.

In any case, I'll leave you with an Italian phrase from one of Lacan's patients. I hope this all helps by the way. "*Io sono sempre vista.*" I can't remember if it's one of his patients, actually, but he mentions her drawing. Perhaps you can find it. It means, "I am always in view."¹ The ambiguity here reminding us not only of her schizophrenia, but more generally of the fact that while you are viewing someone else, you are always already in view, as that which is being viewed.

P.S. In case it isn't obvious, this can't be particular to people of diaspora because it is empirically experienced by everyone, regardless of colonial history. I don't know how else to say this: your experience of anxiety isn't unique and it isn't caused by colonial

¹ It should be noted that I don't know where these citations come from. I don't want to respond to the email for fear of bothering this professor further but I can't seem to find the locations of these quotes. I found Lacan's book on anxiety but it hasn't been translated into English yet. I have to look more.

rule. Your anxiety is the same as everyone else's. I'm sorry.

Hope this finds you well,

Dr. Murat La Garde

Department of Psychology

Dewey University

Intertext B:



² This is the image referenced in the email. You can vaguely make out the words along the tree, the Italian *"io sono sempre vista."* Tauak.

Cubao, Manila 11/15/2003

Isabelo de los Reyes writes, “The Ilocanos say that the dark spots on the moon are a tree under whose shade Saint Joseph is sleeping and remembering their flight into Egypt.” I’ve been thinking about my own exile lately as well, only I can’t sleep. I only dream. I dream that I was born the same day as a snake. That the snake crawled out of a slit in the palm of my infant hand, the same age as me. But the snake isn’t only a snake. It’s a string of mucus like snot, or like old photographs depicting ectoplasm, an outgrowth from the spirit-medium that indicates contact with the other ((an)Other) side. I’ve never learned the word *Tauak* before, but I keep writing it in my notebook, only I can’t remember when. Ectoplasm is alive, really, like a snake, like the memory of a snakebite that killed someone you never knew the name of, someone you never even met, but who you can’t stop remembering, a mucousy quagmire of the deaths you didn’t participate in, but which cling to you like strings of snot that can think and act on their own. Whenever someone is killed, especially through the exercise of authoritarian power, I think that a creaturely contact between the deceased colonial savage and a yet-to-be-born white child emerges, cells scurrying through time and forming invisible strings of mucus that are the result of libidinal attachment, the libidinal attachment of the murderer to the murdered. All that violent desire has to go somewhere, has to claim a future whiteness as recompense for the failure of murder to resolve white desire.

Iresumad. Iremurim. Iremorum Rum.

I have to admit that I’m not Mexican and Filipino. Wait. No, that’s not right. I’m not ~only~ Mexican and Filipino. I’m scared to admit that. I’m scared that I have more Scottish, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian in me than either of those, but I can’t know for sure. People don’t understand. They get it wrong. Brownness, or color of any kind, isn’t the barrier. Whiteness is the barrier. Color dissolves, disperses, covers barriers.

Whiteness is this absence, this open-mouthed response to anything bigger than itself. It keeps me from recognition and brings me to heel. It prevents me from screaming or crying, it makes me quiet, amenable. But that's not all. I am whatever it says I am, because whiteness maintains a magical 1:1 correlation between reality and speech. I said there are no white witches and I was right. There aren't. There're only brown witches, who speak no reality, but operate in the darkness of nondistinction, of immediacy, of reinvocation and reincarnation; they don't weave truths but they weave the memories of someone else's truth, someone else's scream, someone you never knew because you never cared to know. White witches are the ones who speak reality from fiction, or speak fictions into reality. That's why Neferti Tadiar says that Filipinos are vital media for other cultures. I'll explain.

Murat Halstead, in his 1898 book, *The Story of the Philippines and Our New Possessions*, writes of the Filipino as a racial ambiguity in between other, stabler racial categories. First, he says of indigenous groups in the States: "We of North America may be proud of it that the atmosphere of our continent, when it was wild, was a stimulant of freedom and independence. The red Indians of our forests were, with all their faults, never made for slaves." He mentions this only to compare Filipinos and their inherent stubbornness to indigenous peoples in America because, as he notes here, indigenous people are more challenging to work with if made into slaves, and they're more superstitious (read: stupid) as a result. Unfortunately, Filipinos were slaves, are superstitious, and therefore are more obdurate in their savagery. However, they bear beatings well, perhaps too well, because they're also fundamentally weak. He elaborates:

When, in Manila, I have seen the men bearing burdens on the streets spring out of the way of those riding in carriages, and lashed by drivers with a viciousness that no dumb animal should suffer, I have felt my blood warm to think that the men of common hard labor in my country would resent a blow as quickly as the man on horseback—even the poor black—emancipated the other day from the subjugation of slavery by a masterful and potential race, stands up in conscious manhood, and that the teachings of the day are that consistently with the

progress of the country—as one respects himself, he must be respected—and that the air and the earth have the inspiration and the stimulus of freedom.

The Filipino is not as independently powerful as either the indigenous or black person. We remain between the two, somewhat indiscernible as a result. Both stubborn and ashamed of ourselves, we flicker like glitches in the system. But what does it mean that I also have so much blood of my own oppressor in me? What does that mean now? It means I'm split, and the Filipino in me mediates the oppressive history that equally lives in me. I myself am sent in exile by myself, from myself. Tadiar argues, "Insofar as the Fourteenth Amendment was framed to give citizenship to African American former slaves (excluding Native Americans), we could understand this non-extension [of the Fourteenth Amendment to Filipinos] as racializing Filipino nationality against the defining 'cases' of both (indeed we could say Filipino is racialized as *not* black, and *like* Indian)." We are similar to indigenous people because we can't be citizens, or couldn't at the turn of the century, unlike black people. What word do we use to describe this middle position, in which the Filipino operates simultaneously between and against the limit-cases of both indigenous and black? The Filipino *mediates* these two limit cases (let's not forget that Filipinos were called the n-word by occupying US-American soldiers who *knew* they were using the word differently than in the States).

And lest we forget my Cebuano, Filipino mother, just like everyone else does, she was called anti-Mexican slurs growing up. She's a *spic* and a *wetback*, so that people in her childhood invoked in advance of myself my future birth as both Filipino and Mexican and yet not either, because I'm also Portuguese, Spanish, Italian. Again, returning to Tadiar, especially in regard to the contemporary phenomenon of overseas foreign workers (domestic workers who work overseas are, after all, the Philippines' #1 export): "...Filipina domestic workers and caregivers in Europe, Asia, America, and the Middle East...mediate and shape socialities that ultimately may not claim them as one of their own, or as bearing the proper lineage and agency of cultural transmission of their host or

patron communities.”

And when I think of how fraught I am, how fraught this admixture, this combination, this unending nightmare, I think of how I must have killed my mother and grandmother in someone else’s colonial dreams that far precede the nightmare I live. I think of how I must have looked Portuguese and Filipino at the same time as I was killing both. Isabelo de los Reyes said that there’s enough chaos in him for God to make another universe. I want to believe he was thinking of me when he said it, lost in time and race as I always am.

There are hands pressed against windows everywhere here. They all know me, know who I am. I haven’t read the book past the title page yet. *Karunungan ng Diyos*, the Wisdom of God, by Melencio T. Sabino. I’ve heard whispers about it, whispers of a Third Testament, from who or what I can’t say. My palm itches but whenever I touch it it feels like I’m twanging strings deep inside of me, strings that lead straight to the bottom of things, back to when I’m still dissolved across the moments that will culminate in whatever it is I am.

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Intertext C:

While the faroff mountains mused to each other sagelike, they walked in circles. Every now and then an eye off to those selfsame mountains, back to their shoes, their two left feet. They walked in circles. And they'd sleep sometimes, unmoved, curling in the rotary shape they had made in the day, stretched along its rim. Footprints like antlines suspended in time you could tell they walked heeltoe heeltoe and they slept with their head pillowed by the disrupted sand of their daily march.

They always awoke at midnight and they only thought of verbs in the passive though it was not always like this. They loved gerundizing. They were known as "they" because they were many and they knew the sand was not sand but so many eyes, *maraming mga mata, higit pa sa dati*. Snakes flowed freely from their palms. They knew well all the creatures of the night and day, the *aswang*, the *tikbalang*, the *duwende*. Maybe they were a *duwende* themselves, they would think, as they did have a long beard and sometimes lived in a mound of dirt. Maybe they are your *bantay ng bahay*.

The footprints they left were unique and important to them. They had 12 pairs of shoes, left and left, making up 24 singular shoes in total, and each shoe had a different letter on the bottom and they would put on different pairs when they walked so they could combine different letters and therefore different images and in this way they would write the names of God in the sand with their shoes day in day out like some mad prophet living off at the edge of things where the sun meets the earth. And so there were furrows in the dirt, furrows in the dirt that were the names of God. There were furrows in the dirt, with sinkholes the size of nailheads appearing every now and then when a whipscorpion or a mesquite bug might poke its head through, judge the severity of the disruption, return to its shaded network of tunnels. And every night the wind would erase those names so they could begin the labor anew. And many who lived in

those parts called them Abba and all living creatures curled round them and their work and bowed their heads as though they were sleepy because they walked in circles with their two left feet, same as the devil depending on who you ask.³

³ I found this written on several tarot cards (*barahang mga tarot*) that were given to me by an old *manghuhula* in Quiapo.

Intertext D:



⁴ This is a painting by Filipino artist Rodel Tapaya. It reminds me of the closeness of the creaturely world in the Philippines, of the old power that shines through all things. There's a Spanish colonialist who wrote in the eighteenth century, "There is scarce a Filipino, even the most enlightened, who does not tell marvelous things that have happened to him—wondrous visions mute and speechless; ghosts, goblins, strange figures; dead people; dogs, and fabulous and never imagined animals; castles, and balls of fire, that have appeared to him; frightful noises of all sorts that have scared him; and, finally, the most improbable stories and bits of nonsense that could be invented by the most raving maniac." I read this in its original Spanish in the archive at the University of Santo Tomas in Sampaloc, Manila. I think Rodel Tapaya's paintings capture the immediacy of the supernatural and the ordinariness of it. This means that it doesn't exist in an exclusive, esoteric place, like in other traditions. It's important, however, to also bear in mind that that immediacy doesn't diminish its meaning. These paintings remind me of the need to recognize something beyond all this, beyond the finite time of capital.

Something else to keep in mind from the perspective of the supernatural: Animism in the Philippines. It's hard to say whether or not Animism is a term that accurately represents the constellation of beliefs that it is often used to explain. Sometimes the terms Animism and Totemism appear to be scorpions in a bottle, invented by anthropologists from Christian nations to watch the gods of their colonial holdings tear each other apart. Dennis Santos Villegas maintains that Animism is "the belief that every physical object is invested with a mind and a soul. The word 'animated' means something is filled with life and vigor. Our ancestors respected

the natural objects surrounding them, including trees, stones, crystals, gems, and so on, because they believed that these objects had souls.” If everything has a soul, then we can see ourselves reflected in all things. Isabelo de los Reyes points out that Ilocanos in Ilocos Norte sing songs to the trees before they chop them down: “do not feel bad my friend because we cut as we are ordered.” In Ilocano it appears differently:

Barí, Barí
Dika agüñget pári
Ta pusukan kamí
Iti pabakírda kada kamí

In the trees are *mangmangkik*, who Reyes believes are “old *anitos*,” spirits or secondary gods that have been given unnaturally long life due to their imprisonment in the trees. *lo sono sempre vista* describes the *anitos* peering out at us, but that isn’t all. What makes us anxious, really anxious, when we see Filipinos? Why are they what they are, between black and indigenous? Why are we what we are?

There’s an old legend in the Philippines about the creature known as the *aswang*. Difficult to explain. A scorned woman, usually associated with magic of some kind, sometimes a man. She can sever herself at the waist and fly, searching for human flesh. One Tagalog legend, called “House in the Woods,” sees three young men traveling through the woods one night, making their way home from a fiesta. Three beautiful women living in a house all by themselves flag the young men down and ask them to stay the night with them. The symmetrical numbering of the men and the women assumes that they will have sex, doesn’t it? The assumption, I think, is that the young men will transform their own isolation in the woods into a nightmare of isolation for the women. Well, not so, as it turns out: “At midnight they [the men] heard a loud rushing sound in the air outside and after that the house was silent. Now the young men tiptoed out to the *batalan*, an open porch outside the kitchen where all who are to enter the house first wash their feet. There they found three maidens’ bodies cut off at the waist.” Isn’t that interesting? The women lose their genitalia, revealing the fantasy of sexual exploitation to be just that—a fantasy, returning us to a time and space anterior to Spanish colonial rule. We are returned to the supernatural, to the immanence of the Animist world that never went anywhere after the Spanish came, the lurking behind of all things that uncannily gets us back, back to where we started, back to where and when sexual exploitation could and should be met with monstrosity, with horror. But that’s not quite it.

It’s something different here, isn’t it? That’s too easy, the uncanny reminder that our time is really bound by the time of elder things, elder things that remember in a language we’ll never pronounce, elder things that far exceed our viewpoint. That’s just Lovecraftian, colonial fear. No, the transformation of the women into *aswang* at the moment they are severed from the

Cubao, Manila 12/23/2003

It's been a very long time since I last wrote, whenever that was. Maybe a month. Things started to move differently. I started to wonder at the thin barrier between sleepfulness and wakefulness. I feel more brown than ever before, but I've gotten there through knowing why I'm white. I ask that people let me stay a while in brownness so that my own experience of being brown isn't isolated to the experience of pain. Accept me as brown with a smile so that I can know it's not all bad, being what I am. So I can experience brownness outside of my sister being hospitalized because of her endless drinking, or my mother being sick and coughing up bile from all the junk food she's consumed over the years. These are things that have really happened, not just in the confines of this story, but really truly, I experienced them. If I could reach out and touch you I would, or maybe I already have.

The *Haring Bakal*, whose English name roughly translates to "Iron Kings," are secrets among us, hiding in plain sight. You can find their YouTube videos all over the place, especially their welcome ritual of striking an aspirant with a machete in different places all over the body. There are bruises in place of cuts. After being protected by anting-anting and *oraciones*, you cannot be cut. It's true. Cross your arms, laugh at savagery, but

genitalia that bind them to a certain conception and performance of gender is key to understanding a spirit-mediumship of Filipino Animism, the way the body mediates and transmits both the Spanish-colonial now *and* the supposedly precolonial, monstrous then. Then and now together on the body, the both now and forever of time. I am a monster at the same time I am human, an all-too-white rumor of what is always already there, the forever awaited, the always when, the long-arrived and never over, the prolonged, held breath of everything that went into making me and my culmination in an elsewhere. I am Portuguese and Spanish and Filipino and Mexican and I know that that means that there is rape in my blood, that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for white men raping brown women. What does that say about me? What does that say about the white women who have raped me?

The slit in the palm of my hand keeps widening. It sometimes excretes small puddles of salt water. I don't know how or why my hand can be sad.

when a man wearing an anting-anting charges you, be sure to grab a blowtorch and a book of magic, because they can't be stopped by bullets. That's why the Americans invented the M1911 Colt .45 semi-automatic pistol. Did you know that? The official sidearm of the US-American military until, I don't know, Desert Storm? That gun was invented because Americans couldn't put down charging Moros in the southern islands. Filled with rounds from a .38 caliber pistol, they kept coming. The Americans made their excuses of course. Louis A. La Garde, in his book on gunshot wounds that would become the basis of the M1911's tests, he dismissed this nightmare as a result of "fanatical" enemies, which, in contemporary American parlance means drugged. It's always drugs, these brown savages and their herbal repertoire. Americans can't stand the sight of something stronger than them. So they dismiss anting-anting as relics of a bygone, superstitious era. But if you ever face a man coated in *oraciones* with a *trespico agimat* hanging pendant from his neck, I suggest you run.

Perhaps the greatest representation of this conflict can be seen in episode 30 of the anime *Yu Yu Hakusho*. The character Hiei who, up until this point, had not yet revealed the true power of his artificial Jagan Eye (which we might understand not only as his third eye but as a representation of *animasola*), unleashes on his white opponent of the Dark Tournament his Dragon of the Darkness Flame. As a technique, Hiei acknowledges that his Jagan Eye is in control, that he is only in service of this eye, this attachment to an otherworldly ancientness that is nevertheless present, growing out of Hiei's forehead. Claiming Hiei as Filipino is easy since anime often traffics in a nonspecific Asian signifier, begging the conclusion that anime is a diasporic form, originating from and leaving Japan and allowing different racial attachments by way of this endlessly-ramifying (and multiple) diasporic departure into the hyperactive feedback loops of internet culture. Hiei is Filipino because it is unclear that he isn't; however, this unclarity is matched by his opponent's obvious and incontestable whiteness. And when Hiei unleashes his Dragon of the Darkness Flame and his Jagan *animasola* erupts from where he once stood, we can see how colonial savagery can only respond by being more savage than even Louis A. La

Garde's wildest nightmares of drug-induced marauding can anticipate. Hiei's opponent isn't killed by his attack. Hiei's opponent is erased, no longer a white opposition but the now-forgotten memory of a white world that is always already coming to an end, without a trace. And when you look back you wonder if it wasn't always Hiei just standing there. You wonder if there was even a conflict to begin with.

Most importantly, all this opposition isn't pagan, you should know. It's Godly. In an eighteenth-century letter to a local friar who had stolen land from peasant Tagalogs, the leader of an imminent insurrection wrote at the end of his letter "*Mabuhay ang pananang palataya!*" It means "Long Live the Faith!" He didn't write it as parody. He wrote it because he knew that taking land back from the friars was godly, and that it brought him, them, the peasants as a whole, closer to God. God loves land. God *is* the land, in the same way that he is you and me. Filipinos are the closest to God because they let him speak through their anting-anting, or they let God speak the name of anting-anting. They let God speak in a native tongue, in native tongues, because there's never only one.

Walter Benjamin writes, "The soothsayers who queried time and learned what it had in store certainly did not experience it as either homogeneous or empty. Whoever keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experienced in remembrance—namely, in just this way." Truly, the present for the Filipino is "now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time." Maybe Benjamin was Filipino. Maybe he was Filipino because he knew, beyond Animism, what constituted Filipino cosmology—a "cosmos of similarity." We (all of us Filipinos, Benjamin included) know that every moment binds the past to the present body anew, via spirit-mediumship, the spirit-medium of the anting-anting. I dissolve into the metal. I dissolve and I snap back like elastic. Telling the future has nothing to do with the future and everything to do with the reorganization of the present through a different vocabulary, allowing you to apprehend different shapes of the future by looking backward at the now.

Melencio T. Sabino's book gives you the 24 letters of the Tagalog alphabet with which you can construct the names of God. In the time before time there was the *animasola*, the lonely soul, *Impinito Diyos*, the God above God and before God, the God whose name among the ancients has reemerged through the *Santisima Trinidad*, the trinity. The trinity emanates from the *animasola*, because everything multiple is also one by way of critically-forged cosmic similarities. The *Karunungan ng Diyos* details this, with images and narrative and instructions. But you have to find the names of God, make them for yourself.

A sharp pain shoots through my palm. I look down and see that in the middle of my right hand, two pieces of flesh forming the slit are struggling to open completely. They're sealed in the middle by a crusty rheum, which I gently rub off with the soft of my thumb. When freed from the crust, the two pieces slowly open wide, revealing someone else's blinking eye, moving in the ways eyes do when attempting to incorporate the new data of what they see. It stares at me for a long time until it turns toward my left hand. There, in the center of my palm, my flesh painfully tears open, revealing another eye. I walk forward with both facing backward, the searing pain now a dull ache, the dull ache of being many in time and flesh.

Different places on my body are now erupting.

I remember the numbers,

the impossible numbers that no one knows for sure.

Did you know?

1000 Moros killed at Bud Dajo.

500 or more murdered at Bud Bagsak.

The March across Samar, where the numbers are unknowable.

Western historians say 2,500; Filipinos say it could actually be as many as 50,000. What do you do with a gap like that?

How do you live somewhere whose heroes moved from place to place, killing men, women, and children. Raping as they went and never forgetting to snap a pic of the wasteland.

I know God well.

I know God better than I know the mysterious ravings of white men.

It's impossible to stop at this point.

There are eyes all over me, just like Hiei's Jaganshi form. I'm watched but I am watching.

I wish i knew. I wish I kne

There's so much to no know

Iresumad.

Did you know?

Did you know?

Did you know that the Philippines was only granted independence after the US military
bombed Manila into oblivion to drive out the Japanese? Second-most bombed city in
WWII, only surpassed by Warsaw.

DI d you kn

Io sono sempre vista.

Iremurim.

But they're all blue. Sometimes they're not.

The eyes.

They're all blue.

I think.

I think they're all blue.

Why would they be blue?

Who's watching me?

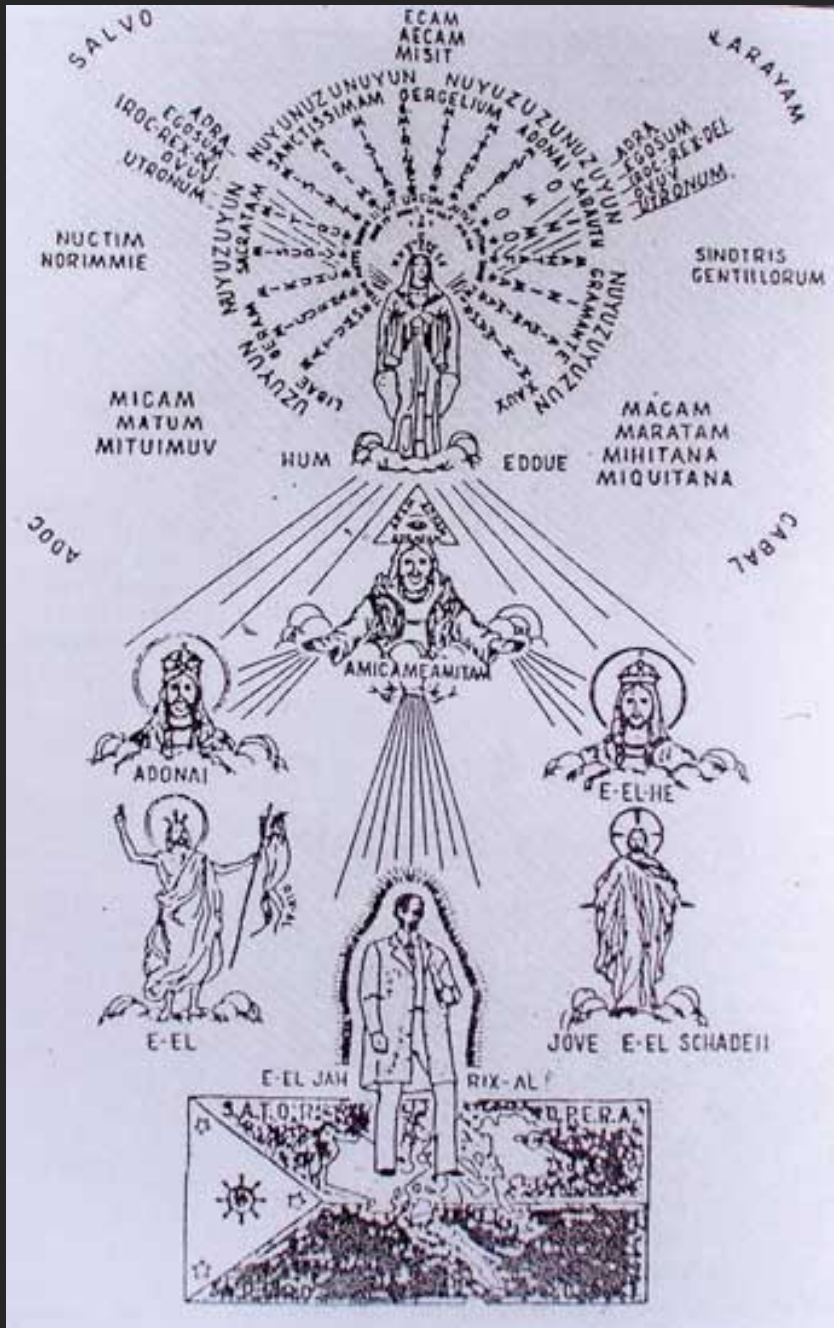
But who sees with my eyes?

Blue. Might as well be blonde.

Iremorum rum.

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Intertext D:



⁵ A politics of letting converges on an unending (though ultimately unseen) drive toward infinite insurgency that refuses an easy distinction between colonial and precolonial, or indigenous. We contaminate you and erupt, ad infinitum, as the effaced watchers of everything, of all of your movements. But a politics of letting is necessarily reciprocal and forces letting to emerge as a

Oakland, California 11/29/2004

The last thing I remember was awaking with a white face. I went to the bathroom, as I always do. I saw myself in the mirror and I don't know how, but I saw the Portuguese face of my mother's murderer. It's hard to know if this was a dream, or whatever else was. I awoke into a dream of being my Cebuano mother's Portuguese murderer—her plantation creditor. I was wearing his face. I wasn't me, but I was. I *was* him.

response to letting by way of mediation. We are you because we mediate your culture, slowly killing you, and the only solution you have is to let arrive the end of your world. The *animasola*, the *solo mata*, *ang isang mata* (the one eye), hasn't been posited in advance of itself as a hyperstition whose future invocation creates the necessary feedback loops that generates its material reality. No. That's too digital a phenomenon, or was only made apprehensible via digital media. The *animasola* is at the back of things, the analog anteriority of the *Santisima Trinidad*. If there's a tint of brown in your child, you might think of coincidence and meaninglessness; from the perspective of the *animasola*, there is no coincidence. There is only the fulfillment of the position of reality before all realities so that you'll never know the name of what erases your dynasty. If we posited future fictions we might lurch toward them, utilizing accelerated feedback cycles of difference to do so (as with the phenomenon of hype). But we don't bear the requisite worldly care for that. This is a mythological cathectoplasm, an attachment through spirit-mediumship that passes culture through the sieve of cultural patience and lets arrive while letting die. Cathectoplasm is thus a phenomenon that describes the rewriting of an originary, hegemonic authoritarianism and watches slow changes while operating in the unseen spheres of service; it is a retroactive prophecy that proclaims us as the long-awaited in the now, (dis)coloring the bluest water over time because you'll never know if it wasn't always *kayumanggi*. Cathectoplasm is content within silence and without eyes, because we all form one eye that looks much like your own. No one cares about Filipinos, remember? While no one was caring, we rewrote your God, and uncaring you watch your own skin change colors. God is the insurgent brown eye that blinks in the language of the old nomenclature, a language we Filipinos still understand, and while you mouth it dumbly to yourself, you don't know what you're saying because you never cared to learn. In a prolonged state of never-knowing, never knowing how many died way back when, mythological cathectoplasm is the sticky attachment of colonial filth to your God, to your money, to your metal, to your desire. The mastermyth is made filthy, with residual strings of blood clinging like mucus to my body if my brown body was (and it is) the bodies of everything and everyone brown, dead and alive, lonely yet many. *Mabuhay ang pananang palataya*.

And I didn't know what to do in my departure (or return?) into another present, a present of the colonial past, folded 1000 times into this present, a folded mimetic (*memetic?*) night. I didn't know what to do until I took an American-made *balisong* (butterfly knife) and I slit the throat of the first cop I could find. In his blue eyes I could see me reflected, not as a Portuguese, but as a Filipino. I no longer look as white as I once did.

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