

CRITICAL THEORY AT THE MARGINS



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Gerard Matthew R. Arcamo, *Dissent*, 2017. Photograph.

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- **Oriental Thought and East-West Comparative Philosophy**
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The word "kritike" is Greek from the verb "krinein," which means to discern. Hence, kritike means the art of discerning or the art of critical analysis. Any form of philosophizing is, in one way or another, a "critique" of something. Being critical, therefore, is an attitude common to all philosophical traditions. Indeed, the meaning of philosophy is critique and to be philosophical is to be critical.

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Introduction to the *Kritike* Special Issue: Critical Theory at the Margins

Paolo A. Bolaños

Founded in 2007, a group of alumni from the philosophy program of the University of Santo Tomas decided to name what would then become the official open-access journal of the Department of Philosophy as *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*. The word 'kritike' comes from the Greek verb κρίνειν ('krinein'), which means 'to discern.' Hence, *kritike* means 'the art of discerning' or 'the art of critical analysis.' Any form of philosophizing is, in one way or another, a 'critique' of something. Being critical, therefore, is an attitude common to all philosophical traditions. Indeed, the meaning of philosophy is critique and to be philosophical is to be critical.

The journal, since its inception, has been a staunch advocate of critique. Owing perhaps to the spirit of no less than Theodor Adorno himself who proclaimed that "[c]ritique alone, as the unity of the problem and its arguments, not the adoption of received thesis has laid the foundation for what may be considered the productive unity of the history of philosophy,"¹ we may surmise that now more than ever, and especially in today's fast-paced world, perhaps a reversal of Marx's proposition is needed: that the task of the philosopher is not only to actively change the world, but to critically interpret it.

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of the journal, the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas hosted the first *Kritike* Conference on 1-2 December 2017, with the theme "Critical Theory at the Margins." Max Horkheimer understands critical theory as propounding a strong social and political claim: emancipation from slavery and the abolition of social injustice.² Critical theorists have always been staunch defenders of social justice and egalitarianism through their vocal criticisms of the

¹ Theodor Adorno, "Why Still Philosophy," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 8.

² See Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1989).

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ideological nature of capitalist culture and the oppressive tendencies of Western empires. While the birthplace of critical theory is Europe, its normative claims are, nonetheless, universal, inasmuch as it lends an intellectual voice to the voiceless and articulate a notion of hope for the hopeless.³ To quote a line from Walter Benjamin's "Goethe's Elective Affinities": "Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope."⁴

In the context of the Philippine society, critical theory may play an instrumental role in analyzing social and political pathologies. Moreover, the complex history of the Philippines, as a postcolonial nation with a neocolonial culture, has resulted in "marginal spaces" that profoundly inform Filipino identity and culture. As such, the Philippines is a peculiar locus for the possibility of a critical theory of society that is characterized by marginal spaces. While we may understand the word "marginal" in its negative form, usually referring to the disadvantaged members of society, it is also possible to construe "marginal" precisely as the obverse of the disadvantaged, as there are subterranean cultures that are thriving, yet largely unrecognized or misrecognized. These subterranean cultures or "alternative rationalities," when given voice, may inspire new forms of normative modalities that could respond to various forms of social and political crises, thus instigating the possibility of hope and the activation of utopian visions. This special issue of *Kritike* brings together a collection of selected papers from the conference, exemplifying critical theory, as described above, at work in the Philippine context.

In the first paper, "Problematizing Critical Theory: Arriving at a More Critical Critical Theory," Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez admonishes Filipino scholars who use critical theory as if it provides a set of scientific criteria to test or show the failures of elections, poverty alleviation, or peace processes. Moreover, Rodriguez maintains that, while critical theory has been a helpful tool for critique, it is still nonetheless framed within Western lenses and, as such, in the context of Philippine realities, critical theory lacks "the deep critique of society that unearths the ground which supports the naiveté of Western man's global world building." For instance, Habermasian discourse theory "already legitimizes Western, male rationality and delegitimizes the other rationalities especially those who are known as traditional, tribal, or metaphysical." As such, when applied to local problems

³ For an elaboration of these normative claims, see Paolo Bolaños, "What is Critical Theory? Max Horkheimer and the Makings of the Frankfurt School Tradition," *Mabini Review*, 2:1 (2013), 1-19.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," trans. by Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004), 356.

in the Philippines, Habermasian discourse takes the form of a prescription for political or social reform which favors “Western educated rationalities.” In contrast to Habermasian discourse theory, Rodriguez explores an alternative critical theory of society grounded in “indigenous forms of inquiry.” For Rodriguez, the legitimacy of critical indigenous discourse is not simply the justification of indigenous terms, but, rather, the intellectual articulation of “the value of their forms of knowing on their own terms.” A *more critical* critical theory then demonstrates the epistemic value of “alternative rationalities,” that is to say, their own peculiar ways of meaning-giving. To quote Rodriguez: “These alternative meaning giving systems could allow for the most authentic critique of the dominant rationality which critical theory fundamentally seeks to realize.” The works of Salazar, Iletto, Almario, and Nono, Rodriguez argues, are notable examples of indigenous critical theory.

Meanwhile, Ranilo B. Hermida’s “Towards a Critical Theory of Philippine Society” may be read as a direct contrast to the position of Rodriguez. While, on the one hand, Rodriguez criticizes Habermas for his Western-centric discourse, Hermida, on the other hand, rehearses in detail the basic presuppositions of Habermas’ theory of communicative action: from the critique of positivism, to the emphasis of the normative import of human interests, down to the procedural workings of communicative rationality. Hermida, then, uses this Habermasian framework to articulate a vision of a “critical theory of Philippine society.” This localized critical theory, according to Hermida, necessitates a reevaluation of the significance of philosophy — more specifically, “we must reflect on the study and teaching of philosophy in our country.” This reevaluation entails factoring in the historical upheavals that shaped Philippine society in the past three decades (the three people power revolts) for they, as Hermida intimates, reflect the nuances of our societal problems and how we have collectively responded to these problems. This reevaluation of philosophy, moreover, entails a rethinking of the role of philosophy courses in the various curricula offered in schools and universities. Is philosophy taught as *primum inter pares* or *unum inter pares*? Are we teaching philosophy in the spirit of communicative interdisciplinarity? Do our philosophy courses address issues regarding the oppressive tendencies of our educational and economic systems? In other words, we must be able to teach philosophy in such a way that theory and practice are combined. Hermida notes that Habermas is a philosopher that exemplifies that union of theory and practice, inasmuch as the latter wrote against the backdrop of historical events in Europe. In this context, philosophy can only become relevant if its center is the present historical situation, that is to say, when it engages with the public sphere of reason.

Jeffrey V. Ocaj offers the third paper of this special issue, “The Peasant Movement and Great Refusal in the Philippines: Situating Critical Theory at

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the Margins,” where he explores an underdeveloped dimension of Herbert Marcuse’s work: the nature of social struggles at the margins. Ocaj uses Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal as an interpretative tool for critically understanding the plight of peasant movements in the Philippines. More specifically, Ocaj underscores “the possibility of redemptive alternatives to the struggle for emancipation.” I take as the most novel contribution of this piece, which is actually the centerpiece of the theme of the conference, the idea that “the most oppressed of the oppressed” offers the hope for emancipation. Ocaj shows that “Filipino peasants in their plight, but also in their organization and indeed in their struggles, point to a way of life that escapes the apparently inescapable logic of technological domination.” Peasant movements, according to Ocaj, while they are dominated by the neoliberal system, actually exist “outside the established” system, thereby highlighting the violence inflicted upon their societies inasmuch as these movements of “ways of life” are not completely contained by the dominant system. Moreover, as peculiar ways of life, they provide utopian visions for alternative ways of organizing society. Ocaj, however, is very specific, as not all peasant groups in the Philippines, such as the lowlanders, qualify to be agents of emancipation. The agents of social transformation are from the periphery, the margins, “upland agricultural areas where they produce agricultural products for the local economy and for family consumption.” Ocaj, moreover, argues that, while some radical peasant movements have resorted to militant struggle, what the paper intends to do is to present alternative practices of resistance that do not resort to violence. One example of nonviolent resistance is the practice of communitarian cooperation which is a more viable system of shared labor and economic organization. Ocaj’s piece forces us to ask question whether the margins need critical theory or, rather, critical theory actually needs the normative resources of the margins in order for critical theory to make sense.

In the fourth paper, “Becoming-Democratic as Becoming-Revolutionary,” Raniel SM. Reyes explains how Gilles Deleuze- and Felix Guattari’s notion of “becoming-minoritarian” becomes a normative basis for “becoming-revolutionary.” One aspect of becoming-minoritarian, according to Reyes, is “becoming-democratic.” Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming-democratic is, however, in opposition to conventional democratic practices, as it “exemplifies the principle of becoming-revolutionary via its critical diagnosis of different capitalist and democratic codifications in the society.” Reyes defends Deleuze and Guattari from accusations of being apolitical and maintains that what they offer is a minoritarian notion of democracy that emphasizes its critical potential, as opposed to it being a majoritarian (or grand) political theory. As such, for Reyes, Deleuze and Guattari present democracy as a kind of minoritarian praxis, that is to say, a

kind of praxis that happens in specific, and often personal or subjective, moments that are dialectically conditioned by majoritarian narratives. To be more exact, “Minoritarian politics aspires to critically examine how laws are created and interpreted, and how minoritarians can challenge majoritarian principles in society so as to produce novel laws and relations.” In this context, therefore, minoritarian politics is close to jurisprudence inasmuch as jurisprudence is the “creative modification of existing laws and rights to address varying and present circumstances.” This critical-creative character of becoming-democratic is the revolutionary potential of minoritarian politics—it is a becoming that perpetually opens up the invention of new types of resistance. There is an attempt by Reyes, albeit almost implicitly, to recommend this Deleuze-Guattarian minoritarian critique of majoritarian politics in the Philippines, more specifically the strands of anti-intellectualism and populism in the realms of education and politics.

“Toward an Aesthetic Community: A Manifesto for a Revolution to Come” is the fifth piece, where its author Jesus Emmanuel S. Villafuerte, by borrowing some insights from Adorno, presents a critical assessment of the “artist’s perception of his superiority and offer ways on how he could reformat his modes of thinking and making.” Villafuerte’s premise is that the privilege accorded to the artist in society today renders a kind of forgetfulness the materiality of art. In effect, the artistic creation, as well as the artist himself or herself, becomes immune to the “exigencies of class conflict” and the “politics and ideology” that come with its production. Along with this forgetfulness of materiality of the artwork, Villafuerte adds the artwork’s “original ethico-representative logic” is also veered away from. By discussing the historical circumstances that led to the veneration of the artist and the birth of the curator, “the prophet of the museums and galleries,” Villafuerte tells a story about the fetishizing logic of capitalism that developed in the world of art, that is, the world of artists and curators. Villafuerte, however, salvages the image of the curator: “a curator ... is self-reflexive ... someone who is aware of the inherent contradictions in his role and power ... by virtue of his awareness ... able to subvert the logic imposed on him” In addition to salvaging the curator, Villafuerte, recasts the role of the artist. He argues that the artist (as well as the curator) will only be able to become significant again if he/she subverts the fetishizing logic of capitalism that haunted the artworld. Inspired by Rancière, the artist, Villafuerte intimates, “must leave the museums and galleries and forge connections with the common people” leading to the “creation of an aesthetic community.”

The final paper for this special issue is Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez’s “Ang SMisasyon ng Lipunang Pinoy.” Cortez introduces the neologism, “SMisasyon” or “SMization,” which he argues as the Philippine version of phenomena, such as, McDonaldization, Disneyfication, and Wal-Martization.

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He defines SMisasyon as “the effective perpetuation and fortification of the neoliberal process in the Philippines and the broadening of its effect in all aspects of the lives of Filipinos” For Cortez, SM (Shoe Mart) is a conglomerate that symbolizes the dominance of the neoliberal ideology in the Philippines, inasmuch as the SM symbol and values penetrate various aspects of Philippine society: economic, social, religious, political, cultural, psychological, moral, ecological, inter alia. In the paper, Cortez explores three features of SMisasyon: hyper-consumerism, survival-of-the-fittest culture, and myth of upward mobility. According to Cortez, the shopping mall is the physical manifestation of hyper-consumerism and SM malls exemplify exactly this. The mall projects the illusion of affluence and paints a misleading image of Philippine society. The display of infinite consumer goods, available to people from all walks of life, masks the reality of poverty and projects a pretentious appearance of a well-ordered society. Moreover, SMisasyon, according to Cortez, had changed the behavior of way of life of Filipinos who have assumed the philosophy of “survival of the fittest” through consumption or, at least, the appearance of consumption. Cortez intimates that, while the consumer culture presents a scenario where people can participate in a leveled playing field; in reality, this culture is governed by the dialectics between the powerful and the weak. At the end, the invisible hand behind the pretense of affluence and fairness is still monopoly capitalism. The last point of Cortez is that SMisasyon breeds the culture of “upward mobility,” that perseverance and patience lead to gain. Cortez complains that in SMisasyon, the ideologues of neoliberalism determine the purpose of perseverance and patience. Indeed, neoliberalism is the new religion and the shopping malls are the new religion’s cathedrals.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the institutions and people who made the conference and the publication of this special issue possible. The Commission on Higher Education granted us the necessary financial assistance to organize the conference and to fund the publication through the CHED Journal Challenge Program. Additional institutional support was provided by the University of Santo Tomas, through the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Letters, as well as the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy. I also wish to take advantage of the opportunity to thank the Editorial Team for this special issue: RT Pada, Jovi Cariño, Raniel Reyes, Ranier Abengaña, Gian Agbisit, Julia de Castro, and Venus Basa.

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Problematizing Critical Theory: Arriving at a More *Critical* Critical Theory

Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez

Abstract: This paper reflects on how critical theory is deeply rooted in Western, European philosophical traditions. It argues that a more radical critical philosophizing could be realized if the rationality of the othered traditions of thinking are brought to bear in critical theorizing.

Keywords: Habermas, critical theory, Filipino thought, discourse theory

There is a style of philosophizing in the Philippines that is rooted in the Critical Theory school of thought. This tradition focuses its research on the critique of Philippine socio-economic realities using the methods of ideology critique applied to mass society, Westernization, neo-Liberalism, and the market economy. This philosophical tradition has been very useful in recognizing the complexities of consumerism, multiculturalism, globalization, and postcolonial struggles for self-determination. In most of our philosophical conferences, critical theorists are very present as guides for interpreting our societies and the problematic lives we build in these postmodern, postcolonial, and postmetaphysical epoch. Because of this tradition, Filipino scholars have been given a tool with which they can expose the underlying ideological and structural substructures that frame the suffering of the people and, with it, imagine possible paths of development and liberation.

If one reviews the research of Filipino scholars, one will see many works that critique Philippine social systems exposing the ideological frames that determine the dynamics of governance, policy making, sexual politics, multicultural co-existence, and economic development. They pose questions regarding the rationality behind development, the definition of good governance by Western values, and the roots of poverty in power relationships. But mostly, the works are applications of ideology critiques on Philippine social realities. For instance, they will show how elections do not

fulfill the fundamental criteria for genuine discourse. They will discuss how poverty is a failure of solidarity or the blind adherence of government institutions to the illusion of free markets as free. They show how the insurgencies we face can be responded to more effectively with a clearer critique of the interests that define that discourse of peace. Many of these papers would take the form of a Habermasian critique of the peace process or an ideological critique of the ASEAN consolidation process. Thus, critical theory has been a useful tool for the critique and reform of the Philippine nation-state which aims to realize genuine democratization and development. Critical theory has an effective way of giving a thinker a tool for digging more deeply into the rationalities that shape society and bind people to exploitative structures. However, given that the tools used to critique the ideologies that frame us are themselves framed by the Western (perhaps even modernist) minds that framed these very same ideologies, our critical theories may lack what they profess to offer us, i.e., the deep critique of society that unearths the ground supporting the naiveté of Western man's global world-building. What do I mean by this? Let us look at one of the most important and most useful scholars of critical theory, Jürgen Habermas.

A Brief Discourse on Discourse Theory

Habermas is arguably one of the most influential critical theorists. He studied some of the most problematic realities of postmodernity and offered a way—founded on justice and solidarity—to confront them. One of his main questions was the possibility of building a shared conception of the good in post-traditional societies.¹ In the postmodern situation, when the West woke up to the reality that theirs was not the only (albeit still the superior) rationality, they began to question the possibility of having a shared conception of the good in a multiplicity of rationalities. In the late 20th century, as the world turned more radically global, the Western world realized that there were other possibly legitimate rationalities than the dominant male, abstract, systematic system of meaning-giving. This was the time of the assertion of the woman's way of knowing and the postcolonial discourses of the colonized others. This was the time of the other when Western civilizations were being questioned for their totalizing orientations by their own thinkers. It was the time when the West began to question its naïve belief that their rationality bore a universal ground for the good, the authentically rational. How can humanity come to a shared conception of the good when the legitimacy of White, male rationality was so clearly losing its legitimacy?

¹ Jürgen Habermas, "The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship," in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. by Ciaran P. Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001).

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This was, after all, the era of the great wars, and a time when the abuses of the great systems of Western totality—capitalism and colonialism—were causing destruction and misery on a global scale.

This is the background for the need for the development of a critical theory that addresses the radical roots of the oppressive dominant system. Habermas addressed the problem by proposing a discourse theory that allows a multi-rational society to come to a shared conception of the good.² In a particularly profound analysis of communicative practice in terms of lifeworld and systems, he explained how, in praxis, dominant systems that shape our ways of seeing and being in the world are formed.³ He also showed how, through discourse, societies can collectively critique their defining ideologies and justly come to a shared will- and opinion-building societal process that will ensure solidarity among citizens.⁴ Habermas's theory is important because it shows both how to critique the dominant system of which we may not even be aware, and how ways of collectively and critically building an ideology can bind autonomous, rational, and free individuals.

The discourse ethics procedure that Habermas formulated is precisely founded on the understanding that human beings are autonomous rational beings who are capable of legislating a shared conception of the good for themselves.⁵ Given this fundamental capability, procedures for discourse need to be formulated to give these autonomous lawgivers a structure for fair processes of legislation.⁶ These procedures allow for the creation and maintenance of an arena for encounter of rational minds in order to share their deepest convictions and mutually critique each other's understanding. These procedures ensure that all persons are allowed to fairly express their conceptions of the good to each other in such a way that all the participants in fair discourse are able to examine the limitations of their own and each one's particular conceptions. However, one wonders if Habermas's assumptions about fair discourse are themselves critical enough. The basic assumption of Habermas is that the person most capable of building a multi-rational society is autonomous and rational in the Western mode. What does this Western mode of autonomous personhood mean?

² Ibid.

³ The analysis is particularly thorough in his masterwork. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. by William Rehg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Christian Lenhardt (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990).

⁶ Ibid. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Remarks on Discourse Ethics," *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. by Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993).

The rational, Western man is a person who exists primarily as an individual capable of coming to knowledge using his own, personal reason—which he can check against the understanding of others. This person is confident that his use of reason will give him a workable understanding of the world because reason has processes of self-verification. Reason has a way of validating its understanding of the world by ensuring that all insights into the real are acceptable to its established systems of meaning-giving based on its categories of understanding. This is useful because although others may have a different understanding of the world, these various conceptions of reality are reconcilable because fundamentally they are founded on the same systems of meaning formation. I suspect that each person is thought to be capable of coming to a shared conception of the good because they share the same categories of understanding and that the use of these categories can be disciplined and universalized, as we have in science, to allow for a shared opinion and will formation. This is why Habermas's main concern for fair, solidarity-building discourse is procedural. The autonomous lawmaker worthy of Habermasian discourse is the bearer of Kantian rationality—the person who knows that the key to understanding the world is the proper or disciplined use of self-verifying reason.

The value of Kant as an epistemologist is that he was able to explain that the knowledge of pure reason was founded on the application of the categories of reason to the data of the sensibilities which use their own forms. He showed that all human beings know the world based on universal, *a priori* structures and that all human knowing is universalizable once we agree on how the categories are validly applied to data. The same is true for the use of practical reason. Although there are no indubitable grounds for determining the good, it is possible to determine conceptions of the good that are acceptable to reasonable persons as rational. This is why the formulation of the Kantian conception of the good is to formulate a maxim that one can legislate for all rational people. For Kant, it is possible to come to a universal conception of the good that is valid if people use their reason in a way that is in accord with reason's capacity to articulate and understand the good. With the maxims of practical reason, one does not necessarily come to an understanding of the good in an ontological sense. Rather, one comes to a conception of the good that reason can accept as reasonable. The autonomous lawmaker can legislate for himself the good because he bears reason and reason determines what is acceptable as good.

The autonomous lawmaker is a person who can rely on his rationality to formulate a conception of the good that does not need an ontological grounding, but only a form that reason itself can validate. Thus, the focus on a valid understanding of the good and a valid knowledge of the world is rooted in the proper use of reason such that it can validate itself. It is not

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necessary for the autonomous lawmaker to be able to know the good or the true. It is unnecessary for this person to be rooted in the presencing of beings as they are given to presence. This autonomous lawgiver is not intuitively connected to the world as a unified cosmos because autonomous reason means an independence from any transcendent order. The possibility of having an autonomous lawgiver spells the freedom from the idea that the world has a transcendent order and that genuine human knowing is the opening to the transcendent order. The autonomous person is the bearer of the structure of knowing using his reason alone. Meaning is constructed by that reason and its systems independently of a belief that the world is a bearer of its own meaning.

Discourse theory proceeds from the understanding that rational persons construct the good as a maxim that all persons of good reason can abide by. The good is agreed upon not because it reflects the world as it presences but because it is acceptable to all persons capable of rational discourse. In this way, the fair system of discourse becomes oriented toward a building of society based on the rationality of autonomous, rational (a.k.a. Western) men. Habermas, without stating it, already legitimizes Western, male rationality and delegitimizes the other rationalities especially those who are known as traditional, tribal, or metaphysical. This is because he places as the higher rationality that of the autonomous, male thinking rooted in the abstract thinking of pure and practical reason that tend to accept as legitimate scientific forms of reasoning abstracted from a meaningful cosmos. Immediately, and unconsciously, this places the Westernized rationality on a level superior to what Habermas regards to be the metaphysical or traditional rationality.

This is the reason why, whenever Filipino scholars apply discourse theory perspectives to political reform in the Philippines, their prescriptions are always oriented toward the implementation of systems of discourse that favor Western-educated rationalities. This can be seen in their critical view of “the masses,” “the uneducated,” and “traditional peoples” who are unable to participate in rational discourse, as well as the uncritical critiques of patronage politics and traditional forms of community formation. Rational discourse here means discourse that favors data-based, argumentative, agonistic thinking where claims to truth are only accepted when substantiated by grounds acceptable to systematic, abstract, and scientifically framed justification. In other words, the only acceptable claims to legitimacy are claims that are supported by the ways of thinking of Kantian rationality. Thus, most philosophical reflections on political, electoral, and economic reform in the Philippines tend to believe that empowerment of the margins will only genuinely be realized when the disempowered are educated in the

ways of Western democratic deliberation. Thus, our focus as reformers is always on our people's education in citizenship.

Take the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan–Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (Kalahi-CIDSS) program of the Philippine government as an example.⁷ This massive anti-poverty program meant to fund effective development projects in the poorest Filipino communities is designed to introduce grassroots leaders to effective participatory project identification, proposal, and implementation. Toward this end, teams from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) are sent to the poorest barangays to coach them in participatory poverty mapping and project identification and implementation programs. The brilliance of the Kalahi-CIDSS design is that it is meant to bring development to the poorest barangays through participatory, empowerment techniques. Through the coaching of the DSWD, the grassroots leaders and other members of marginalized communities—whose rationalities are unable to navigate the dominant rationality—are allowed to understand their development issues from their perspectives, then, are taught how to translate their concerns to the development goals of the national government, that is, from issues regarding income generation, basic services, and security, into terms that funding agencies can accept as worthy of support.

From one perspective, this is a development program worthy of Habermasian discourse theory. Firstly, it allows people from marginalized rationalities to effectively and creatively engage the dominant rationality by creating structures and systems for discourse. Secondly, it teaches them to think about their problems within the framework of the dominant conception of development. The Kalahi-CIDSS program is designed to allow for discourse toward liberation. It allows for a people who are caught in oppressive systems to critically engage the marginalizing system in order to make it more responsive to their needs. However, the discourse system still insists that the liberating discourse occur within the framework of the dominant rationality. Fundamentally, the program aims to teach the marginalized rationality to discourse with the dominant rationality on the dominant rationality's own terms. Thus, its conception of the good, its understanding of development, and its definition of human flourishing will all occur within the dominant system. This framework for liberation, without realizing it, effectively entrenches the marginalized rationality firmly in the dominant. The Kalahi situation does not stand as a metaphor for the limits of the liberation work of discourse theory. Rather, it is the concrete

⁷ Asian Development Bank, *The KALAH-CIDSS Project in the Philippines: Sharing Knowledge on Community-Driven Development* (Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank, 2012), <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29878/kalahi-cidss-project-philippines.pdf>>.

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demonstration of how the naiveté of critical theory can deepen marginalization.

Kalahi-CIDSS is an anti-poverty program designed around discourse. People are supposed to be liberated from their marginalization through processes which allow them to creatively and effectively engage the dominant rationality and its governance systems for their development. Communities are taught to think within and discourse with the dominant system. Eventually, their own rationalities will be aligned to the dominant system because they will realize that as long as they can frame their problems within the dominant discourse, then they can effectively access resources for their development—development which is itself framed by the rationality of the dominant system. Because of this, the marginalized are assimilated into the hegemonic discourse of Western development. In effect, the multiplicity of rationalities would be reduced to the powerful totality of the dominant development thinking. And so, the system that was meant to liberate people through discourse facilitated their absorption into the dominant system, in a sense, facilitating their exploitation as low-cost producers and laborers as well as consumers. Thus, because of its failure to question the dominance of the dominant rationality, this seemingly innovative practice based on the principles of empowerment and liberation can achieve a purpose that counters its avowed objective.

I believe that it is possible that in the philosophical and the broader academic arena, our critical theory lenses uncritically contribute to the Westernization of the world. This is because critical theory, being a child of the Western *fin de siècle* crisis, is really oriented toward the critique of the shortfalls of Western rationality in order to reform it and make the Western world more critically rational. However, the fundamental faith in Western rationality was never abandoned. In order to genuinely critique the unchallenged, dominant Western rationality, we must begin to explore the legitimacy of other rationalities that themselves make alternate truth claims founded on other forms of reason for the very reason that we need to explore the possible fruitfulness of other forms of rationality.

Our tasks as adherents of critical theory is to embrace its mission of ideology critique and push it further by even more radically grounding our critique of society on other grounds. Of course, the only truly radical ground of ideology critique is the transcendent rationality that is not influenced by any ideology. However, there is no such human perspective. The best we can do is to explore the grounds of legitimacy of other claims to truth and place them in just and equal discourse with the dominant rationalities. In our case, this concretely means exploring indigenous, non-Western rationalities which could enrich the discourse on the good. The only way to genuinely critique one's rationality is if there is another perspective that challenges the very

ground of our assumptions. So far, the West has only dialogued with itself and with its junior partners who could only join the discourse if they fit their own rationalities to the forms acceptable to the dominant culture.

Researching Otherwise

In the Philippine context, it has always been easier for local thinkers to engage the mainstream discourse of our discipline if we tailor our social analysis to dominant paradigms of thinking: Marxist, ideological critique, feminist theory, postcolonial criticism, and deconstruction. The reason is because we have not been able to demonstrate the ground of legitimacy of our own indigenous forms of inquiry. There are too few studies that explore how indigenous rationalities present a rigorous frame for reading social phenomenon. In order to explore the legitimacy of indigenous discourse, we must promote studies that do not merely translate or justify the native in terms of the dominant rationality. Rather, we must articulate these rationalities in a way that demonstrates the value of their forms of knowing on their own terms. These studies must have rigor in the sense that they can legitimately articulate the play that brings these systems of understanding their structure and dynamism. We must have studies that are not just an interpretation of other rationalities in the mode defined as legitimate by the dominant academic rationalities. Rather, we must engage these rationalities in a way that allows the rationality to demonstrate its own ways of meaning-giving in order for others and even the adherents of that rationality to recognize how it gives meaning to the world that presences. These alternative meaning-giving systems could allow for the most authentic critique of the dominant rationality which critical theory fundamentally seeks to realize. This is because the only way any society can come to a critical understanding of its dominant systems is if it is able to dialogue with a rationality that can genuinely question its most basic premises. Thus, if our philosophy practitioners are to genuinely contribute to critical theory, such contribution will be realized in our ability to bring our native rationalities into critical dialogue with the dominant systems.

There have been some notable attempts at this kind of work. I would like to cite here the works of Zeus Salazar and Reynaldo Ileto in history, Virgilio Almarino in literature, and Grace Nono in ethno-musicology. Let us begin with Salazar. Among Salazar's notable works is his *Ang Kartilya ni Emilio Jacinto*.⁸ Here he argues against the thesis that the ideology of the Katipunan is a mere indigenization of the liberal ideals of the French

⁸ Zeus Salazar, *Ang Kartilya ni Emilio Jacinto at Ang Diwang Pilipino sa Agos ng Kasaysayan* (Quezon City: Palimbag ng Lahi, 1999).

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Revolution and the European Enlightenment. He shows how the fundamental ideals of *kalayaan*, *katwiran*, and *kapatiran* are indigenous ideas that do not merely translate European ideals but rather articulate a fundamental conception of reality. Salazar, through a genealogy of words and their evolution shows how the Filipino conceptions of a good society worth fighting and dying for have a nuance that puts into question the kind of societies toward which we believed the Katipunan should have been building. Ileto's classic, *Pasyon and Revolution*, is a work that shows how the revolutionary aspirations of the people are rooted in the *Pasyon* rationality.⁹ It explores how the indigenous interpretations of *Langit* was the foundational idea of a *kaharian* or *bayan* that inspires many of our grassroots revolutionary movements. He showed how the Filipinos appropriated the colonizing, Catholic narrative as a discourse of liberation for the marginalized natives.¹⁰ These historical studies, mostly accomplished in the Western mode of postmodern scholarship of suspicion, reveal a hidden rationality written over by the dominant, official history. They expose the palimpsests in the imposition of Western rationalities. In so doing, they give us a glimpse of the alternate rationality that defined the indigenous people's conception of the good, and showed how a recognition of this rationality thus imposed can become a ground for a radical critique of the dominant world order.

Almario is pursuing a seemingly similar project in his multi-study opus of literary criticism. In his reading of the classics of Philippine literature, including the novels and poems of Rizal, *Florante at Laura*, the foundational Tagalog novels, and the literary production of the revolutionaries of 1896, particularly the work of Andres Bonifacio, he shows how these works of literature were misjudged by previous scholars because they insisted on reading the works from an American or European aesthetic and academic framework. He labors to show the dynamism of intersecting traditions and historical circumstances that bring about these works. Concretely, he illustrates how these works were demeaned by scholars trained in Western traditions and how the works demand their own categories of appreciation than those established for Western works.¹¹ In this way, Almario argues for a native literary practice that is rooted in the lived experience of the people. He shows that the works of the literary tradition generate their own aesthetic categories rooted in the dynamic play that produces these works. He shows us that if people desire to genuinely understand the contribution of Filipino

⁹ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Virgilio Almario, "Mga Bukal at Batis ng Nobelang Tagalog: Panimulang Suri," *Unang Siglo ng Nobela sa Pilipinas* (Manila: Anvil, 2009). Similar insights can be found in Virgilio Almario, *Ang Pag-ibig sa Bayan ni Andres Bonifacio* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2012).

literature to world literature, they must enter the dynamic rationality that produced it and its understanding of the world and the good.

These scholars have shown us how to critically think about the dominant systems of reading history and works of literature. They help us understand that other methods are needed to understand the artifacts and traces of our other rationalities, and how the dominance of Western rationalities, as reductive frames for interpreting our acts and artifacts, need to be challenged. They challenged these enframing frames of interpretation by producing critical works that made their native readers aware that they saw the world from other rationalities that needed to be articulated in order to appreciate their understanding of the good despite their being imposed upon by the dominant Western conceptions. These studies are useful in understanding how to critique dominant systems of rationality and how these dominant systems are still applied to demean our otherness. However, these local scholars' own methods are still accomplished within the frame of the dominant rationality. Fundamentally, the otherness of the Philippine novel and the ideology of the revolution were articulated in Western forms of abstraction and systematization. The other was fundamentally translated for the analytic gaze of the dominant mind.

Grace Nono's work shows us a step further in the exploration of the native conception of the world. In her work of ethno-musicology, *Song of the Babaylan*,¹² she shows us how research on the *babaylan* culture demands a different form of research, a different methodology. For her, it is important to engage the *babaylan* cosmology with a different method of research because we wish to faithfully speak of another way of knowing another world. It is an other of the systematic rationality of the West, and we do not merely want to translate this other rationality for consumption by Western systems of comprehension. Thus, other categories of understanding and articulating are needed.

How does one do research in a setting where the people about whom one is learning are dwellers in a completely different rationality and in effect belong to another world? It seems that the only way of genuinely engaging this world and its presencing is through an immersion that fully opens to its rationality and its modes of presencing. It is not an immersion that prioritizes the desire of reducing this world's presencing to abstract, conceptual systems and the reduction of its lifeworld to the abstract systems of modern rationality. Rather, the aim would be to focus on *pakikipagkapwa* as a mode of research. This aims less at abstract systematization and more at a deeper understanding that reaches the levels of sympathetic understanding. It is a kind of understanding where we understand the other reality but with the

¹² Grace Nono, *Song of the Babaylan* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2013).

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insight of one who is able to enter the world of the other even if one is other than them. Thus, techniques of *pakikipagkapwa* or entering the world of the *kapwa* as a sympathetic other need to be applied.¹³

According to Nono, these are the possible research tools to use. *Pakig-ambit* or the reciprocity of sharing one's self by spending time with the other is a sharing in the life of the other in an opening to presence and being present. This sharing of self does not allow for the best form of systematic abstraction that would lead to useful knowledge. However, it allows for the thinker to be immersed in the rationality and the world of the other. More than comprehending the lifeworld and rethinking it in system form, the researcher dwells with the other and understanding emerges from that lived immersion. The other means of engaging are *pagkaanaa* or sensing the presence, *panuluktuk* or gaining insight through intuition, *pamalandong* or engaging in forms of contemplation to arrive at a deeper truth, *pagtugyan* or surrender to the experience and the spirits making themselves manifest, *pagdarwat* or acceptance of the experience that is being given, and *pag-agas* or opening to the cosmos in a spirit-like flow are part of a larger process of sharing. *Panag-abyan* is the process by which a person can meet the *babaylan's abyan* or spirit guide which will lead to an even deeper immersion into the *diwata*-filled world. This is accomplished, of course, by learning the songs and participating in rituals taught by the *abyan*, but also, being alert to and discerning of *damgu* (dreams), *timala* (signs), *buna-buna* (thoughts), and *pagbati* (feelings and sensations).¹⁴ These are spiritual, emotive, and relational ways of knowing that allow spirits to presence to us. In this way, the researcher is gifted by the *babaylan*, the community, and the spirits with a kind of knowing that is communal and participatory. The researcher enters into altered states and other rationalities that allow her to commune with nature, elders, spirits, and ancestors. In this methodology, the spirits and guides become co-researchers who are open to collaboration, if treated with respect. And if the researcher succeeds in entering the world of the *babaylan* and their *abyan* through these alternate methodologies, she will be able to explore a moral cosmos that is spirit-filled. She will get a glimpse of a world where our actions and our way of being conform to the cosmic order in which we are all responsible for each other. Because through discourse with spirits, we realize that individual good fortune and well-being is tied to the well-being and good fortune of others. It is a universe where knowledge and power are acquired through negotiation and communion. The arrival at the truth and understanding of the world is rooted in a kind of thinking that allows the human knower a communion with other knowers.

¹³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

At their core, these alternative research methods are means of preparing the researcher for an openness that does not aim at Western enframing. Rather, the researcher is made to open to the other in a kind of letting be: the letting be spoken to and taught to listen to other kinds of voices—including those of spirits; the letting be touched by reality in ways that defy one's conception of the logical and common sense. In other words, it is a research method that allows the researcher to open to the presencing of reality beyond what has been defined as legitimate knowledge. It is a method to access another world that presences to another rationality—a rationality which may potentially offer a way of seeing that enriches the dominant system. Researchers immersed in other common senses may be the only genuinely critical discourse partner of dominant rationalities.

Towards a More *Critical Critical* Theory

At this point, one may wonder why I am talking about such ideas for alternate research methods. Let us return to our concept of critical theory. Critical theory is a philosophical way of proceeding that allows people to unearth the ideologies that frame our social realities. It is a fruitful way of critiquing the growing influence of capitalism, the formation of global society, the new forms of enslavement of the economic actors, and the growing commodification of our relationships with the world and each other. With the various forms of ideology critique that unearthed the blinders that shaped the enframed self-realization of a supposedly enlightened and emancipated Western humanity, humanity was drawn to other forms of realizing Western rationalities without a radical critique of it. The process of ideology critique and emancipation from enslaving systems will always require the engagement of discourse partners who are genuinely other from the dominant system.

The Filipino scholar was never able to effectively develop a critical perspective from which to critique the dominant Western one. This is because, being trained in Western philosophizing, the Filipino scholar begins with the assumption that our traditional rationalities are, like capitalist and commodifying rationalities, unexamined frames for enslavement. Thus, immediately, the traditional, other rationality and its frame for being in the world are seen with suspicion because it also forms an ideology that can program people into destructive ways of being in the world. Thus, in academic circles, traditional worldviews are discredited as uncritical, unsystematic, and unable to liberate the colonized people from their oppression and the poor from their poverty. This, because of its alleged lack of sophistication and rigor. Every academic discipline needed to be accomplished in a systematic, Western frame of understanding, even the

most radical critiques of Western rationality, were not acceptable unless they took on the modes of thinking of Western systematic thinking.

This actually makes sense because the point of critical thinking is emancipation. As we stated, this emancipated person is a person who is an individual who can will the good by legislating for himself the ought. We can see how an uncritical use of critical theory, or any Western form of emancipatory thinking, can prejudice the discovery of the emancipatory discourse of other rationalities. This is because the means to understand the rationality of non-Western or traditional rationalities runs counter to the methods of an autonomous, critical, emancipated rationality. This is especially true because the traditional rationalities themselves are immediately understood to be counter-emancipatory. Fundamentally, the articulation of some alternative rationalities calls for the work of communal research grounded on the sympathetic opening to the world that is other than the dominant system. Thus, it is essential that we somehow achieve a kind of research methodology that does not completely serve the unconscious agenda of Westernization. Again, for a deep and radical critique of the dominant Western paradigm, we need categories of critique that do not serve to strengthen the imposition of dominant rationalities. This means we should cultivate a means to genuinely articulate our traditional rationalities.

This is what I mean by a more *critical* critical theory. We need to explore these “queer” ways of knowing other worlds because that is the only way we can challenge the dominant rationality to an extent that it can see its limits and possibilities from a perspective that is critical enough. But this demands that we build a new scholarship that allows marginalized rationalities to fairly discourse with the dominant one on their own terms.

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Towards a Critical Theory of Philippine Society¹

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Abstract: The *end of philosophy* does not really mean its complete dissolution; instead, it means putting an end to the old ways of doing philosophy. Philosophy should not remain the same given the pluralism and diversity of modern society; it cannot hope to explain complex social issues by relying solely on its own methods and resources. Habermas declares that philosophy must be *critical theory*—its main task the forging of a theory of society aimed at emancipation. This paper elaborates his proposal on how philosophy can serve the goal of critical theory through his analysis of the potency and function of language as communicative action. Using his proposal as framework this paper then reflects on the study and teaching of philosophy in the Philippines and how these may be aligned with the new way of doing philosophy as critical theory.

Keywords: Habermas, critical theory, Philippine society, emancipatory philosophy

Introduction

The philosopher is often taken to task about his role in society, and the inclusion of philosophy in our courses is challenged in terms of its relevance to the present. This was never the case in the earlier times when the philosopher was revered as the man of wisdom and he enjoyed his place in society as an esteemed teacher and even royal adviser. However, the current state of misgiving towards philosophy—which extends to the whole of the humanities—is not an entirely new development. The *end of philosophy*

¹ This paper was originally delivered as a keynote lecture during the first *Kritike* conference with the theme, “Critical Theory at the Margins,” held at the Martyrs’ Hall of the Ecclesiastical Faculties of the University of Santo Tomas last 1-2 December 2017. The event was organized by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas.

had been proclaimed matter-of-factly by some of the most significant thinkers at different periods in history.

In his book, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, Jürgen Habermas inquires whether philosophy is still possible and necessary:

... [T]he unsettling question remains whether, after the downfall of systematic philosophy and now even the retreat of philosophy itself, it is still possible to do philosophy, and, if it is, for what purpose philosophy is needed. Why should not philosophy, like art and religion, fall victim to the world-historical process of rationalization described in historical terms by Max Weber and expressed conceptually by Horkheimer and Adorno in their dialectic? Why should not even philosophy itself fade away in the graveyard of a spirit that can no longer affirm and realize itself as absolute? Does philosophy still have a purpose today, and will it tomorrow?²

There are twofold factors that may be cited as the bases for the contention that philosophy has come to an end or has lost its aim. The first is the predominance of capitalism and the materialism engendered in its wake. In this state of affairs, the value of everything is measured in terms of the economic gains it can generate; in light of this evaluation, philosophy is thereby deemed wanting insofar as it is reckoned to serve no utilitarian purpose. The second is the more insidious challenge because it goes to the heart of philosophy as an enterprise of rationality. Habermas calls it “scientism” which he defines as the tendency of positivism to regard the methods of the natural sciences as the *only* legitimate form of meaningful inquiry.³

The emphasis on materialist over other values is corollary to orthodox Marxist theory of the evolution of society and proceeds from its fundamental tenet that law, religion, morality, and the whole sociocultural suprastructure are merely derivatives of the economic mode of production.⁴ Habermas rejected this view as a misreading of history and asserted “the opposite view that the ‘normative structures’ of culture, morality, and

² Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 9.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 4.

⁴ Andrew Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas* (Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2005), 56.

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collective identity do not simply follow economic or system imperatives and that *they evolve according to their own logic.*"⁵

Habermas elaborates his rejoinder to scientism in his first major work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, which he developed into a "systematic history of ideas with a practical intention."⁶ And the intention is, precisely, "to show how positivism has mutilated our reason and swallowed it whole into a limited theory and practice of science."⁷ It is imperative for Habermas, therefore, that we recuperate a more comprehensive concept of reason and disavow the limited understanding to which it had been consigned "as if only empirical or scientific validity claims about factual states of affairs can be rationally contested and redeemed."⁸

At the same time, however, Habermas declares that as philosophy "confronts a modern social reality that has itself undergone dramatic and irreversible developments toward complexity, pluralism and diversity," it cannot remain the same inasmuch as "these developments place strong limits on what philosophy can legitimately aspire to explain."⁹ Philosophy as theorized and practiced previously has to be recast. This is the real meaning of the *end of philosophy*: the clearing of a new path towards a way of thinking that is more competent and appropriate to modern social existence. The *end of philosophy* is, therefore, not a cause for disquiet and alarm, but a source of excitement and interest.

Habermas refashions philosophy after the conception of knowledge inspired by German idealism according to which knowledge is to be at the service of human autonomy. Philosophy, as an enterprise of reason, is rational to the degree that it liberates humanity from the tutelage it has imposed upon itself. Philosophy is to be "knowledge grounded in the emancipatory interest";¹⁰ its project is the forging of "a theory of society ... with a practical intention."¹¹ This new face and task of philosophy is *critical theory*.

⁵ Michael Pusey, *Jürgen Habermas* (London: Routledge, 1993), 40.

⁶ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 4.

⁷ Pusey, *Jürgen Habermas*, 20.

⁸ Franklin Gamwell, "Metaphysics and the Rationalization of Society," *Process Studies*, 23:3-4 (Fall/Winter 1994), 220.

⁹ Max Pensky, "Historical and Intellectual Contexts," in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, ed. by Barbara Fultner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 30.

¹⁰ Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas*, 88.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. by John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 1.

Critical Theory: Origins and Directions

The term “critical theory” was first used in reference to the social scientific research program conducted at the Institute for Social Research by thinkers from widely divergent fields of thought to present a new interpretation of Marxist theory, focusing their speculation on issues and problems that were rarely tackled by more orthodox approaches to Marxism. The orientation of the Institute was initially provided by Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) who was the director in its incipient years. It came to be known later as simply and famously the *Frankfurt School*, because it was at Frankfurt University in Germany where the Institute was established in 1923 with funds provided by a wealthy industrialist named Felix Weil (1898–1975). Some of the researchers initially associated with critical theory included Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Erich Fromm (1900–1980), Leo Lowenthal (1900–1993), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), and Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), plus a few others.¹²

The general objective of the School was to revitalize Marxist analysis and to engage in research that is socially scientific and simultaneously oriented towards human emancipation. The approach was to be interdisciplinary: “philosophers, sociologists, economists, legal scholars and even students of psychiatry and literature” collaborated “on large-scale studies of the sources and structure of contemporary social pathologies.”¹³ Philosophical analysis was coupled with empirical social research “with the goal of critically identifying and indicting sources of injustice, domination and oppression.”¹⁴ The social research program of Jürgen Habermas and also the moral philosophical work of Axel Honneth are further developments of critical theory.

What further distinguished the school were the essential features it assigned to critical theory. Critical theory is *reflective* as differentiated from the natural science theory which it reckoned as objectifying. Critical theory is *cognitive* in character as it aims towards enlightening individuals so as to clearly determine what their true interests are. Critical theory is *emancipatory* because it suggests a process through which human agents can liberate themselves from a form of coercion that is self-imposed, being the result of their self-frustration over conscious human action. Raymond Geuss recapitulates these features of the Frankfurt School in the following:

All the members ... are agreed that ... critical theory
must be knowledge and must show ideological beliefs

¹² Pusey, *Jürgen Habermas*, 32.

¹³ Pensky, “Historical and Intellectual Contexts,” 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

and attitude to be false. Otherwise ... critical theory could not have its proper emancipatory effect, which depends on its ability to make those who adopt it able to withstand the pressure of the legitimacy apparatus of society. Critical theories must be 'true' because the legitimizing ideologies of the society claim to be 'true.'¹⁵

Moreover, there is one essential element of critical theory that is a common orientation among all its adherents and practitioners: critical theory necessarily entails the critique of ideology—understood in the negative sense and used as label for worldviews that exclusively reflect the particularistic interests of dominant social groups and yet are presented as universally valid or true. Habermas is emphatic of ideology critique; for him, philosophy, particularly as critical theory, is a normative undertaking—“the ideal of critical theory, after all, is to provide a *critical* diagnosis of the times, which is to say, a diagnosis from a normative standpoint from which how things could be better becomes visible.”¹⁶ Critical theorists together maintain that the unveiling of the exclusivist interests behind ideologies “serves to empower social agents to enact social change.”¹⁷

From Cognitive Interests to Communicative Action

Habermas has always assigned to the philosopher the role of being the guardian of reason. He claims that the problem of rationality is ever *the* central question in every philosophical discussion. Although he is critical of the modernist appropriation of rationality in a restrictedly positivist and instrumentalist manner, Habermas is secure in “the capacity of reason to establish valid standards and to tackle the challenging dilemmas of human life.”¹⁸ He concurs with the postulate that rationality is the fundamental principle behind social change. It is, therefore, the abiding task of the philosopher to identify the evolving patterns by which rationality is appropriated in the course of history and to analyze how such appropriation has either advanced or hindered the progress of society. Habermas is confident that this quest will indicate rational grounds for social hope.

¹⁵ Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 94.

¹⁶ Barbara Fultner, “Introduction,” in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts* ed. by Barbara Fultner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 8.

¹⁷ Darrell Arnold, “Critical Theory,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by James D. Wright, 2nd ed., Vol. 5 (Waltham, MA: Elsevier, 2015), 293.

¹⁸ Ranilo B. Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 18.

The rejection of positivism is centered on its claim of an objective knowledge that is devoid of human interests. Habermas rejects that claim based on the finding by American pragmatism that all forms of knowledge are laden with interest. He exposes the “presence of an unacknowledged connection between knowledge and interest” in the sciences; he suspects that the objectivist claim is an offshoot of “the *ontological illusion of pure theory*” which the sciences still cling to.¹⁹ There is no pure theory, however, since there are no theoretical propositions which are unrelated to empirical variables. Habermas declares that once the connection is grasped “the objectivist illusion dissolves and makes visible a knowledge-constitutive interest.”²⁰ He identifies three distinct interests: the interest in instrumental control, in understanding, and in emancipation.

There are three categories of processes of inquiry for which a specific connection between the logical-methodological rules and the knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated. This demonstration is the task of a critical philosophy of science that escapes the snares of positivism. The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* interest²¹

The cognitive interest that constitutes a realm of knowledge also serves as the underlying factor in the development of the various sciences: the interest in *technical* or *instrumental* control in relation to the *natural sciences*; the interest in *understanding* to the *human sciences*; and the interest in *emancipation* to *moral-practical knowledge*.²² Habermas admits that both the empirical-analytic and the historical-hermeneutic sciences contribute to some form of emancipation from the oppressive conditions of nature and culture, respectively; however, in the process, they perpetuate new oppressive conditions and other pathologies.

Habermas employed his theory of knowledge and human interests in overturning the illusion of pure theory. He then shifted into a theory of language in his critical theory. This shift is what is known as the *linguistic turn* in his thinking. His theory of language was first formulated as a doctrine of

¹⁹ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 307.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Arnold, “Critical Theory,” 296 ff.

dialogue without coercion and later on, presented as *universal pragmatics*—the name Habermas proposed for his “research program aimed at reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech.”²³

The linguistic turn by way of universal pragmatics may seem to be a puzzling and unwarranted detour in the critical theory of Habermas. The connection between the formal conditions of rational discourse and the emancipatory orientation of critical theory is not easily grasped. It becomes clear, however, when we realize that for Habermas “all forms of prejudice, self-deception, and error” that “significantly thwart the emancipatory potential of the persons or groups so affected” are “appropriated in the self-formative process of an individual or group” which is facilitated by language.²⁴ The goal of insuring the autonomy of human agents is blocked by constraints that are rooted in language. Universal pragmatics provides the methodological framework whereby the said constraints are revealed and can thus be contested.

Universal pragmatics focuses on the pragmatic context of language. Communication is not a purely linguistic exercise. Speech is also an action. This concept of speech-acts was adopted by Habermas from the work of Austin and Searle.²⁵ A linguistic utterance has a performative component— which is to say that when a speaker *says* something, he is simultaneously *doing* something, namely, entering into a certain relation with his hearer: “The essential notion operative in universal pragmatics ... is that there are no speech acts without dialogical participants; that is, speech is not possible without, at the very least, a speaker and a hearer engaged in the process of communication.”²⁶ Communication is coming to an understanding through the medium of language and it involves at once two levels: one, “the *level of propositional content* which is communicated”; two, “the *level of intersubjectivity* on which speaker and hearer, through illocutionary acts, establish the relations that permit them to come to an understanding with one another.”²⁷

Habermas rejected the modernist prejudice of equating and limiting the function of reason in social life to instrumental or strategic rationality. Not all social actions can be typified as oriented towards success—“defined as the appearance in the world of a desired state, which can, in a given situation, be

²³ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1979), 5.

²⁴ Robert P. Badillo, *The Emancipative Theory of Jürgen Habermas and Metaphysics* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991), 55.

²⁵ Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 275.

²⁶ Badillo, *The Emancipative Theory of Jürgen Habermas and Metaphysics*, 57.

²⁷ Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 42.

causally produced through goal-oriented action or omission”²⁸—otherwise, we will have to accuse all actors engaging in social action of being calculative and manipulative, treating one another as mere conditions or means to their respective ends, either through enticement or intimidation. Habermas finds “such an underhanded mode of interaction” incapable “to account for how the social fabric is able to hold society together steadfastly.”²⁹

There is another category of rational-purposive action. Habermas designates it as communicative action. The identification of this category is part of his project to rehabilitate the idea of rationality in what he considers the unfinished project of modernity. Communicative action is the orientation towards coming to an understanding between speaker and hearer. Communicative actors act differently from calculative actors in so far as they subordinate their individual goals to their desire to reach a common understanding with other social actors. Habermas writes:

Reaching understanding is ... a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects ... an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance ... has a rational basis Agreement can indeed be objectively obtained by force; but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement. Agreement rests on *convictions*.³⁰

The agreement is based on a claim that a speaker proposes to the hearer who may either accept or reject the claim. The basis for the reaction to the claim of the speaker is the evaluation by the hearer based on the presence or absence within the claim of rational grounds. There is, at all times, a sense of rationality embedded in every communicative action. Habermas posits, moreover, an interconnection between knowledge and rationality: the rationality of an utterance is a function of the reliability of the knowledge it contains; hence, every validity claim set forth in communicative action is always criticizable, liable to error, open to objective judgment, and is dependent on a discursive ground to validate it. Utterances are not immediately rational.³¹ Habermas explains why this is so:

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 285.

²⁹ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 20.

³⁰ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, 286-87.

³¹ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 21-22.

In contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in light of legitimate expectations. We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.³²

There are three validity claims that a speaker may possibly raise when he attempts to reach understanding with his hearer. The first is *truth (Warheit)*: he claims that the propositional content or existential presupposition of his speech act is true. The second is normative legitimacy or *rightness (Richtigkeit)*: he claims that his statement is correct within the given context. The third is authenticity or *truthfulness (Wahrhaftigkeit)*: he claims that his pronouncement is a sincere expression of his interiority.

When a speaker is able to persuade his hearer that the claim he makes is rational and deserves to be recognized, there can arise a rationally motivated consensus that may serve to coordinate future action. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that the process of coming to an understanding that both speaker and hearer mutually engage in cannot be attained in a situation where they regard each other as strategic adversaries bent on pushing a private agenda to achieve personal objectives. Habermas stresses that precisely “the goal of coming to an understanding is to bring about an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another.”³³ This means that both speaker and hearer must consider each other as partners equally intent on the accomplishment of a common goal.

Communicative action seeks the cooperation of dialogical participants through a consensus regarding the rational validity of the norms whereby they understand the situation. The consensus is important because it serves to regulate the otherwise conflicting

³² Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, 15.

³³ Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 3.

individual interests and to coordinate social action. It also makes possible the rationalization of social action according to the agreed norms in such wise that when the action fails to conform to these norms, an outright criticism can be mounted against it.³⁴

In ordinary conversations, these claims may be taken for granted, and yet they are assumed all the time so that the speaker could vindicate his claim if the hearer so demands. It is a presupposition that is shared by communicatively interacting subjects. Universal pragmatics further examines the relation to reality that the speaker establishes in his every utterance. There are three realms of reality to which an utterance may refer: the first is external reality or *the world of external nature*, of perceived and potentially manipulable objects; the second is normative reality or *our world of society* or of socially recognized expectations, values, rules; and, the third is inner reality or *my world of internal nature*, the arena of intentions. Habermas speaks of the reference to the various realms of reality as a process of demarcation:

The universality of the validity claims inherent in the structure of speech can perhaps be elucidated with reference to the systematic place of language. Language is the medium through which speakers and hearers realize fundamental demarcations. The subject demarcates himself: (1) from an environment that he objectifies in the third-person attitude of an observer; (2) from an environment that he conforms to or deviates from in the ego-alter attitude of a participant; (3) from his own subjectivity that he expresses or conceals in a first-person attitude³⁵

These demarcations are accompanied by a basic attitude on the part of the speaker: an *objectivating* attitude with respect to external nature; a *conformative* attitude vis-à-vis society; and, an *expressive* attitude with regard to internal nature. Three parallel modes of communication correspond, respectively, to these attitudes: the *cognitive*, the *interactive*, and the *expressive*. And in each of these modes, there is a specific function that speech performs, namely: the *representation of facts* for the cognitive; the *establishment of legitimate*

³⁴ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 23.

³⁵ Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 66.

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interpersonal or social relations for the interactive; and, the *disclosure of the speaker's subjectivity*.

Unlike an ordinary sentence of which intelligibility depends on its being grammatical, that is to say, its conformity to an established system of recognized rules for the use of language, the three validity claims mentioned above require something more beyond language in order to be intelligible:

... [T]he validity of the propositional content of an utterance depends ... on whether the proposition stated represents a fact (or whether the existential presuppositions of a mentioned propositional content hold); the validity of an intention *expressed* depends on whether it corresponds to what is actually intended by the speaker; and the validity of utterance performed depends on whether his action *conforms* to a recognized normative background. Whereas a grammatical sentence fulfills the claim to comprehensibility, a successful utterance must satisfy three additional validity claims: it must count as true for the participants insofar as it represents something in the world, it must count as truthful insofar as it expresses something intended by the speaker; it must count as right insofar as it conforms to socially recognized expectations.³⁶

A fundamental question that needs to be answered is about the source of the illocutionary force of an utterance; in other words, how coming to understanding is attained or how the speaker is able to persuade the hearer to enter into an intersubjective relationship through communication. Habermas answers this question by asserting that the hearer can be *rationally motivated* to accept the content proposed by the speaker. Every communicative action contains the immanent obligation to redeem the validity claim it makes.

The correlation between communicative action and linguistic validity claims denotes the singular capacity of communication to serve as a medium to bind actors in dialogical interaction and to coordinate their action. The binding character of communicative action is embodied in the obligation of the speaker to produce rationally convincing justifications of his or her claims for the sake

³⁶ Ibid., 28.

of his or her hearers, who are bidden to evaluate the claims presented. The raising of a validity claim affirms, moreover, the mutual commitment of participants in discourse to criteria of validity that make communication possible.³⁷

The satisfaction of the obligation to redeem a validity claim is according to the mode of communicative action embedded in each claim. In the *cognitive* mode, the speaker has to supply a *ground* for the propositional content; in the *interactive* mode, he has to provide a *justification* for the normative background; and in the *expressive* mode, he has to offer a confirmation of his intention. The obligation can be satisfied immediately or mediately. It is satisfied *immediately* through recourse to experiential certainty with respect to the *truth* claim; through indicating a corresponding normative background with respect to the *rightness* claim; through affirmation of what is evident to oneself with respect to the *truthfulness* claim. The mediate satisfaction of the immanent obligation requires a different process but still according the mode of communication engaged in. David Held explicates the process involved in each of the three modes:

In the cognitive use of language, if an initial statement is found unconvincing, the truth claim can be tested in a theoretical discourse. In the interactive use of language, if the rightness of an utterance is doubted, it can become the subject of a practical discourse. In the expressive use of language, if the truthfulness or sincerity of an utterance is questioned, it can be checked against future action.³⁸

Universal pragmatics demonstrates the comprehensive possibility to examine an utterance. This possibility is an essential component of the rational motivation behind the illocutionary force of a speech action. Habermas exclaims:

We can examine every utterance to see whether it is true or untrue, justified or unjustified, truthful or untruthful, because in a speech, no matter what the emphasis, grammatical sentences are embedded in relations to reality in such a way that in an acceptable speech action

³⁷ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 25.

³⁸ David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 338.

segments of external nature, society, and internal nature
always come into appearance together.³⁹

When a validity claim is proffered and it is accepted, a consensus may be reached. The consensus, however, may not be genuine and the discourse itself may be systematically distorted. Habermas admits that problematic situations may arise but he maintains that these can be overcome by ensuring that the discourse rests on the *suspension of the constraints of action*. No form of compulsion is tolerated other than *the force of the better argument*, and only one motive is allowed to dominate and that is *the cooperative search for truth*. The absence of constraints facilitates the formation of a social relationship among communicative actors insofar as their mutual commitment enables each to see his or her own perspective side by side that of another in relation to the world that they intersubjectively share. Habermas refers to this condition as the *ideal speech situation* that serves to engender genuine consensus: “a situation in which there is mutual understanding between participants, equal chances to select and employ speech acts, recognition of the legitimacy of each to participate in the dialogue as ‘an autonomous and equal partner’ where the resulting consensus is due simply ‘to the force of the better argument.’”⁴⁰

The standards for redeeming a validity claim to which the communicative actors commit themselves form the basis of the social bond. The degree of rationalization that informs society and its processes is, according to Habermas, directly proportional to the development of communicative practices in that society. Where these practices are hampered by purposive rationality, “the consequence is that relations which should be based on personal commitment, common understanding and involvement, are instead regulated on an impersonal basis, with alienation, disintegration of social responsibility and decline of legitimacy as results.”⁴¹

Universal pragmatics is more than just about the fundamental norms of rational speech. It is an emancipatory science as it points to a larger vision of society—a society where the reign of truth, freedom, and justice can flourish through the inherent structure of social action and language. Habermas argues that truth and virtue, facts and values, theory and practice are inseparable because “the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life.”⁴² The overarching point of his critical theory is that our interest in emancipation impels us to initiate or promote efforts towards building more humane societies by advocating a

³⁹ Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 68.

⁴⁰ Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, 343.

⁴¹ Jarle Weigard and Erik Eriksen, *Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy* (London: Continuum, 2003), 6.

⁴² Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 317.

rigorous analysis of the complex relationships between espoused ideals and social structures.

It is imperative that we imagine visions which take us beyond our present condition, otherwise, we will simply accede to our present condition and accept it as inevitable. "Without utopian thinking, the given social order may be unduly elevated to the status of the natural order, and so be regarded as unalterable."⁴³ Towards the avoidance of this eventuality, Habermas trains his critical theory and expects the philosopher to address his project of thinking and action towards the same end.

Preamble to a Critical Theory of Philippine Society

One implication of critical theory is the revision of the way philosophy is to be conceived and practiced. Habermas suggests some kind of demotion for philosophy. "Philosophy must be gently but firmly knocked off its pedestal as a discipline with a special claim to transcendent, foundational truth, and assigned a more humble but more socially significant role, one that was tailored specifically to the values and challenges of a secular, 'postmetaphysical,' democratic society."⁴⁴ Modern society has developed immensely to an extent that overtaxes the capacity of philosophy to explain using only its distinct concepts and characteristic frameworks. Philosophy has to abandon its entitlement to clarify exclusively the foundation of all knowledge. Instead, it has to cooperate with the empirical sciences in explicating structures of worldviews and forms of life. This is what critical theory demands in our doing philosophy in the context of the social realities obtaining in our country.

Habermas narrates that he was just a teenager during the Nuremberg Tribunal, and was shocked that some of his fellow Germans "instead of being struck by the ghastliness, began to dispute the justice of the trial, procedural questions, and questions of jurisdiction."⁴⁵ Max Pensky writes how Habermas was dismayed "that philosophy in post-war Germany could carry on business as usual, as though the period between 1933 and 1945 could simply be bracketed out of consideration."⁴⁶ He was scandalized "that the

⁴³ James Rurak, "The Imaginative Power of Utopias: A Hermeneutic for Its Recovery," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 8:2 (Summer 1981), 186.

⁴⁴ Pensky, "Historical and Intellectual Contexts," 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16. "During his university studies at Bonn and Göttingen from 1949 to 1954, Habermas had two major experiences of disillusionment. The first was a crushing realization concerning Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). It was a great shock for him to discover that the philosopher he so admired had written in 1935 of the '... inner truth and greatness of the Nazi movement.' The discovery came when Heidegger republished his 1935 lectures on metaphysics in 1953 without retraction of the astonishing passage. Instead, he appended an explanatory note

very idea that philosophy must transform itself in response to the German disaster met with deep resistance.”⁴⁷

On our part, we must seriously reflect on the study and teaching of philosophy in our country. Our interrogation should factor in the historical upheavals that our country has undergone in the last three decades: the two successful People Power Revolutions of 1986 and 2001 that ousted from the presidency a dictator and a scoundrel, respectively, as well as the third *poor people power* revolution that began as a protest against the arrest of the scoundrel but later on surfaced the neglect of the social question in the first two manifestly political revolutions. We have to rethink the new curriculum for the undergraduate philosophy program mandated by the Commission on Higher Education beyond the addition of more courses.

Critical theory is a movement of collaboration with the other disciplines—in a “substantive and productive reciprocal dialogue with the newer, adjacent disciplines that it had traditionally held at arm’s length.”⁴⁸ While thinkers who were trained primarily as philosophers initiated this movement, critical theory is not an attempt to sustain the position of philosophy as *primum inter pares* (first among equals) with the other sciences serving ancillary functions; instead, critical theory situates philosophy as *unum inter pares* (one among equals). The hierarchical arrangement of the sciences is foresworn and the objective is for the various disciplines to fit with one another in “relations of supplementing and reciprocally presupposing.”⁴⁹

In still a good number of universities in our country, philosophy is a separate and independent department. It is a service department catering to all the other schools or colleges. In some institutions there is a philosophy department in every college. It is apropos to inquire how much interdisciplinary collaboration does philosophy endeavor to establish with the other disciplines. It would not be a surprise if the philosophy department is hardly in dialogue with the particular school or college it is lodged in. It may just be structurally situated in, but not communicatively engaged with, the school or college it belongs to. Is the philosophy department in the College of Education, for instance, more oriented towards a critical theory of the educational system? Or is the philosophy department of the School of

that the ‘greatness’ denoted ‘the encounter between global technology and modern man.’ As he recalled much later, ‘Then I saw that Heidegger, in whose philosophy I had been living, had given this lecture in 1935 and published it without a word of explanation—that’s what really disturbed me.’ His second great shock was the discovery of the Nazi past of both of his dissertation supervisors in philosophy at the University of Bonn, Erich Rothacker (1888–1965) and Oskar Becker (1889–1964).” Matthew G. Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

⁴⁷ Pensky, “Historical and Intellectual Contexts,” 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, 339-340.

Economics involved in research and analysis of how the steering media of money and the profit motive of business foist oppression and inequity in society?

Critical theorists link theory and practice “both noting the effects of social practices on theory formation and formulating theory with a view to emancipating the marginalized.”⁵⁰ Theories are developed neither in a vacuum or from the lofty heights of an ivory tower nor from the comfort of an office armchair. They are woven from the experience of actively engaging with society, wrestling with social issues, being immersed in the crucible of events and even conflicts as the occasion demands. This is how Habermas developed his theories. In one of his interviews, he stated, “... [T]he rhythm of my personal development intersected with the great historical events of the time.”⁵¹ His major works were responses to historical incidents and current social debates:

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962) ... evolved from a question of praxis ... how to respond to the multifaceted crisis of the Social Democratic Party after its electoral defeat in 1957 *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) ... responded to a pervasive discourse on “technocracy,” or rule by experts, in which all political tendencies in West German society from the far left to the conservative right participated *Between Facts and Norms* (1992) ... shows how the work subtly reflects the hopes raised by German reunification and the disillusionment experienced in its wake.⁵²

The importance of linking theory to practice can be further appreciated by examining the mutual functionality they serve each other. Theory formation provides a reference, a prototype, or a criterion for the scrutiny of existing conditions. The testing of the theory validates or falsifies it. The value of a theory is proportional to its relevance to the reality it seeks to reflect on and ameliorate.⁵³

The unmasking of cognitive interests points not only to the possibility but indeed to the necessity of emancipation “for the history of science, technology and communication is also the history of political

⁵⁰ Arnold, “Critical Theory,” 294.

⁵¹ Peter Dews, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas* (London: Verso, 1987), 73.

⁵² Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, 23–25.

⁵³ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 7.

domination and ideological distortion.”⁵⁴ Our interest in emancipation, and more so, our striving towards that goal, is an obligation borne of our being philosophers. We are philosophers; we are guardians of rationality. Habermas challenges us to review and update our “vision of the proper tasks and scope of philosophizing” which should proceed from an overarching or *metaphilosophical* view of our “own times, intellectual landscape, historical situation and social demands ... making [our] relationship with [our] own times the center, rather than the by-product, of the activity of philosophy itself.”⁵⁵

Critical theorists are public intellectuals. Habermas is “a public intellectual *par excellence*, contributing on a regular basis to the editorial pages of major newspapers and engaging in public dialogue with other major figures ranging from Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty to then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope [Emeritus] Benedict XVI.”⁵⁶ Of his involvements in numerous current discussions, Stephen Bronner writes:

Habermas has become an exemplary *public* intellectual. He has taken a position on the major issues of the time: calling for more democracy in the educational system, dealing with student protests, confronting those conservatives who considered it time to wash their hands of the Nazi past in the *Historikerstreit*, challenging the postmodernist advocates of relativism and experientialism, championing the contributions of the welfare state, opposing the deployment of nuclear missiles in Germany.⁵⁷

Critical theory must specify where and how it may be actualized in practice. We are not the *only* saviors of our society, but we are *also* its saviors. We have to delineate clearly and strictly our role considering our status and limits as academics. The primary locus of our intervention is the classroom. Outside the confines of the classroom, the public sphere awaits us, the arena opened up in modern society distinct from the state and the economy — “a site for the production and circulation of discourse that can in principle be critical of the state ... a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and

⁵⁴ Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas*, 89.

⁵⁵ Pensky, “Historical and Intellectual Contexts,” 15.

⁵⁶ Fultner, “Introduction,” in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, 1.

⁵⁷ Stephen E. Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 283.

selling.”⁵⁸ In the public sphere, the ordinary citizens can “exercise their rational agency by participating in informal discourses on matters of shared interest.”⁵⁹ From the public sphere, therefore, a movement can emerge that can “give voice to social problems, make broad demands, articulate public interests or needs, and thus attempt to influence the political process more from normative points of view than from the standpoint of particular interests.”⁶⁰

The prospect of the public sphere is often frustrated, unfortunately, by the dominance of “state bureaucracies and market economies” which results in “squeezing shut the narrow public space between state and market economy, transforming active citizens into passive clients and economic consumers.”⁶¹ What we can do in this regard is to support “specific, and focused, analyses of the concrete ‘sites’ of irrationality”⁶² or we can conduct the research and analysis ourselves. For this enterprise, we need to expand our knowledge and supplement our skills with applied research tools and techniques.

We can also join social movements which can “serve as potential carriers of emancipatory social and political change.”⁶³ Habermas cautions us, however, to be discriminating in our choice of social movements: there are “movements with emancipatory potentials and those that remain limited by their orientation towards resistance and withdrawal as such.”⁶⁴ The old ways of “exposing and opposing” the state that had proved successful in the past are no longer relevant and effective within a political system, where the processes and institutions available for direct participation require of civil society groups the skills of “composing and proposing” policy and governance alternatives.⁶⁵

That seems to be the case with many civil society groups and nongovernment organizations in our country up until now. Marlon Wui and Glenda Lopez explain why this is so:

⁵⁸ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 110.

⁵⁹ Pinsky, “Historical and Intellectual Contexts,” 23.

⁶⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. by William Rehg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 355.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Pusey, *Jürgen Habermas*, 35.

⁶³ Keith Haysom, “Civil Society and Social Movements,” in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, ed. by Barbara Fultner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 177.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁵ Hermida, *Imagining Modern Democracy*, 166.

[S]ocial and political movements, which, in the moment of revolution or transformation, were able to act as powerful catalysts or change-agents, often found themselves lost in the process of the ensuing transition. Armed with skills designed more to oppose or confront—than create or negotiate—policy and governance, these change-advocates, who were also potential participants in the new status quo, discovered themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis comebacking technocrats and politicians more adept in the so-called rules of the game.⁶⁶

This is one window of opportunity open to us where we can make a meaningful contribution. We can help enhance the political efficacy of the leaders and members of social movements in the country, we can assist them in acquiring “the necessary understanding of state dynamics and processes and the tools for carrying out its multiple functions as critique, conscience, partner, or opponent, as the case may be, of the state”⁶⁷ We can also lend our competence “in adjudicating the depth of insights and in analyzing the validity of arguments”⁶⁸ that are proposed by the state and other interest groups for the understanding of ordinary people in our society. In this way, we can hasten and heighten the process of rationalization for them to be able to engage in meaningful communicative interaction on issues that affect them.

Conclusion

The above proposal is inchoate, and it is offered as a preamble to future efforts towards the forging of a critical theory of Philippine society—an endeavor worth pursuing both as a matter of research interest and a demand of our current social conditions. Critical theory calls for a new understanding of the role of philosophy and the task of philosophers: “for Habermas the intellectual life is not a game, or a career, or a cultivation of wit and taste, or even ‘learning for learning’s sake.’ It is above all a vocation ... to

⁶⁶ Marlon A. Wui and Ma. Glenda S. Lopez, “State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making,” in *Philippine Democracy Agenda 2: State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making*, ed. by Marlon A. Wui and Ma. Glenda S. Lopez (Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1997), 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Rainier Ibane, “The Democratic Aspirations of Civil Society and Habermas’ Discourse Theory of Morality,” in *Philosophy, Culture, and Education*, ed. by Philip Cam et al. (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1999), 47.

anticipate and to justify a *better* world society—one that affords greater opportunities for happiness, peace, and community.”⁶⁹

Critical theory reinvents philosophy as a socially committed and interdisciplinary enterprise of rationality—feasible only through “a specific ongoing relationship with parallel disciplines in the natural and above all in the social sciences.”⁷⁰ It signals the end of philosophy as many of us perhaps have known it. This conference charts, therefore, a new direction for doing philosophy in our country: it is an act of subversion, a breaching of old traditions. It is a call to transcend the present, to a renewal that is as necessary as it is possible.

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⁶⁹ Pusey, Jürgen Habermas, 14.

⁷⁰ Pensky, “Historical and Intellectual Contexts,” 19.

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The Peasant Movement and Great Refusal in the Philippines: Situating Critical Theory at the Margins

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Abstract: This paper picks up on a dimension of Herbert Marcuse's model of critical theory that is greatly underdeveloped, and so much so that—particularly in the light of postcolonial theory—it is almost an embarrassment that what I refer to as “the margin,” that is, a semi-colonial periphery that is economically exploited, politically dominated and culturally hegemonized by imperialist powers, did not have a more important place in Marcuse's own work, and has not been far more the focus of Douglas Kellner and others who had fastened onto the Marxist Marcuse. In fact, Marcuse made only scattered statements about the nature of struggles in the society at the margins of the global system, and, when he did reference their plight and potential, he did not develop clearly how his theory could help in analyzing this context. This paper will look into the possibility of making Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal relevant in the Philippines today, in an attempt to signal the possibility of redemptive alternatives to the struggle for emancipation. My main aim in this paper, therefore, is to show that the Filipino peasants in their plight, but also in their organization and indeed in their struggles, point to a way of life that escapes the apparently inescapable logic of technological domination. To that extent at least, they thus point to the possibilities of emancipation.

Keywords: Marcuse, peasant movement, Great Refusal, critical theory

Introduction

The Philippines, as we know, have been facing enormous social problems and forms of injustice, like abject poverty, massive unemployment, military oppression, extra-judicial killings, and all kinds of human rights violations. These problems have been compounded

and entrenched by the invasion of the country by capitalistic forces relayed and aided by local elites and local institutions. Hence, in a country “at the margins” like the Philippines, the domination that accompanies a capitalist order has actually been two-sided, by contrast with the domination Marcuse analyzed in his famous postwar writings: the modern, “technological” form of domination has indeed applied to the Filipino populations, leading to a form of “one-dimensionality” peculiar to Philippine society. But it has also been accompanied by more direct, brutal, primitive forms of oppression in the imposition of the foreign rule and its spirit onto the native population.

In the face of such enormous power of domination, combining the cultural, psychological and intellectual sophistication of “technological domination” with the naked brutality of so-called “primitive accumulation,” what changes are there that a society like the Philippines could harbor anything like a sign or avenue towards the possibility of Marcuse’s grand dream of a “Great Refusal”? In fact, I will try to show that it is the most oppressed of the oppressed that offers precisely a hope of this kind. However, contrary to Marcuse’s contention that in late capitalist societies every form of opposition has been dissolved and has become part of the status quo, I will argue that the peasant movement in the Philippines provides substantive evidence to show that class antagonism and the consciousness of it are still a reality in the Philippines, and that Filipino critical consciousness, which climaxed in the 1896 Revolution, has survived and is on the rise again despite experiencing important setbacks during the Spanish, American, and Japanese period.

The fundamental question of this paper is how Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal, which is understood both as a “rupture” with capitalist society and as a form of “critical thought” that can reject the prevailing repressive rationality, can be concretely articulated in the Philippines. I argue that the Great Refusal at the margins cannot depend on an established democracy, but must contend with political violence. I argue further that the New Left model advocated by Marcuse in the 1970s is however potentially viable because the cultural focus of the New Left-style politics confronts an alien hegemonic culture at the margins, rather than an autochthonous culture of capitalist consumption. In doing so, I will present a compelling case of Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal based on my reinterpretation of Critical Theory in the neocolonial context.

The Great Refusal in a Nutshell

Let me begin with a brief presentation of Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal before I fully articulate the specificity of this concept as it is

applied in the Philippine context, especially the way in which it is embodied by the Filipino peasants.

Marcuse understands the Great Refusal as a kind of “negativity” both in thought and action, which enables the individuals to transform their present needs, sensibility, consciousness, values, and behaviour into a new radical sensibility, a sensibility that does not tolerate injustice and which resists and opposes all forms of control and domination. Douglas Kellner shows that for Marcuse, the Great Refusal is also a political refusal and revolt against the system of domination and oppression exacted by the capitalistic system.¹ The Great Refusal for Marcuse is both individual and collective refusal, aimed at transforming the system of domination and oppression and the realization of a radical social change, the realization of a non-repressive, free, and happy society. It is collective inasmuch as it can only be realized if it takes the shape of a social movement. But it is also individual inasmuch as it requires the transformation of the individual’s patterns of thought and of affectivity. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse maintains that it is only the Great Refusal that expresses a “truly revolutionary mode of opposition.”²

It is important to note that the Great Refusal is not simply an act of refusal for refusal’s sake. As is clear, the Great Refusal is above all a struggle for and towards emancipation. It is a struggle towards the realization of a non-repressive society where people are freed from all forms of social control and domination.

It is important to note as well that the exact form of politics involved in Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal is multi-dimensional. This can be observed in the switching of tone in Marcuse’s works from *One-Dimensional Man* down to his last work, *The Aesthetic Dimension*. In *One-Dimensional Man*, “Repressive Tolerance,” and *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse advocates confrontation politics, while in his *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, he advocates a United Front among the New Left. And, finally, in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse emphasizes “art” as the ultimate form of the Great Refusal. While some scholars, like Douglas Kellner, argue that Marcuse’s *The Aesthetic Dimension* abandons the idea of confrontation politics and a United Front,³ I would argue the opposite. One might well see the shift from confrontation politics to aesthetics as called by a change in social conditions. The change of tactic, therefore, is not necessarily to be viewed as an abandonment of

¹ Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London and Berkeley: MacMillan Press and University of California Press, 1984), 279. See also Jeffrey Ocay, “Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse’s Critique of the Advanced Industrial Society,” *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 4:1 (June 2010), 54-78.

² Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of the Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), 255.

³ See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 291.

previous strategies. It is basically a renewal of this tactic to suit the demand of the time.

The Great Refusal is thus a call for “social transformation” which is necessary in the sense that liberation requires a rupture in history and this rupture can only be performed through radical action.⁴ In some passages of “Repressive Tolerance,” Marcuse fully endorses the possibility that this radical action will be violent. He writes:

If they [the oppressed and overpowered minorities] use violence, they do not start a new chain of violence but try to break an established one. Since they will be punished, they know the risk, and when they are willing to take it, no third person, and at least of all the educators and intellectuals, has the right to preach them abstention.⁵

Furthermore,

With all the qualification of the hypothesis based on an ‘open’ historical record, it seems that the violence emanating from the rebellion of the oppressed classes broke the historical continuum of injustice, cruelty, and silence for a brief moment, brief but explosive enough to achieve an increase in the scope of freedom and justice, and a better and more equitable distribution of misery and oppression in a new social system—in one word: progress in civilization.⁶

In these passages, historical violence at the hands of the oppressed is justified in terms of the Kantian paradigm to which the Marxist element of class struggle has been added.⁷

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 19. See also Jeffrey O'Casey, “Hegel Reframed: Marcuse on the Dialectic of Social Transformation,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 16:1 (January 2015), 102-109. See also Jeffrey O'Casey, “Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the Theory of Historicity,” *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 2:2 (December 2008), 46-64. For more discussion on Heidegger, see “Heidegger's Existential Philosophy,” in *Philo-notes* (25 November 2017), <<https://philonotes.com/index.php/2017/11/25/heidegger/>>.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1965), 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” in *Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 41-53.

The kind of revolution Marcuse envisions there is in fact different from what we have witnessed in history, for example, the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Long March in China, because these violent upheavals were still premised on social conditions in which scarcity continued to prevail. They fought for essential rights and signalled the lack of fulfilment for the majority within the capitalist order, but they could not yet point to the full and proper transformation of the system. A more appropriate image of social transformation than the one to be gained from these previous struggles is the image of social transformation entailed in the concept of the “new sensibility.” According to Marcuse, this new kind of revolution is

... driven by the vital need to be free from the administered comforts and the destructive productivity of the exploitative society, freed from smooth heteronomy, a revolution which, by virtue of this “biological” foundation, would have the chance of turning quantitative technical progress into qualitatively different ways of life—precisely because it would be a revolution occurring at a high level of material and intellectual development, one which would enable man to conquer scarcity and poverty.⁸

In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Marcuse argues that this revolution involves the “new sensibility,” i.e., the transformation of the cultural and material basis of the society, the “needs and aspirations of the individuals,” and their “consciousness and sensibility.”⁹ This “new sensibility” is revolutionary because it militates against technological domination. It militates against the numbing effect of the functional language of the consumerist society and at the same time shatters the kind of “false consciousness” that this language engenders.

With this novel form of revolution, the Marxist notion of “proletariat” as the sole agent of radical change has been significantly revised. Despite the fact that Marcuse saw that violence is sometimes ineluctable, he made it very clear that in a highly advanced society this tactic should not be employed. A struggle which attempts to seize power directly from the centers of political control, Marcuse says, should not be resorted to because in the advanced industrial society, the military and police power have been so

⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 19. See also Jeffrey Ocay, “The Freudian Marxist: Herbert Marcuse on the Psychology of Domination, Resistance, and Emancipation,” *Silliman Journal*, 53:1 (January-June 2012), 156-179.

⁹ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 16-17.

organized in the hands of an effectively functioning government. More importantly, such tactic surely would not draw support from the working class due primarily to the prevalence of reformist consciousness among them.¹⁰

Marcuse assumes he is talking about societies at the center of the system. But what about the societies “at the margins,” like the Philippines? Here, his famous concept of “the New Left” and his notion of “radical sensibility” take on new meanings. As I will show later, at the margins, the system uses a combination of technological domination and direct violence. The imposition of an alien way of life made to suit colonial powers and direct imposition of unfair economic treaties and political and military agreements. In this case, the Great Refusal takes on different shape. First of all, the question of violence is different from what it is in countries at the center. In countries at the margins, there was the problem of armed power, of army and police, and transnational corporations. Thus, the struggle against colonialism at the margins was a violent struggle. Second, the model of “the New Left,” an old model, now defunct in the West, also takes on different form at the margins. For Marcuse, the New Left is not a single organization with the same ethos as the Communist Party of the Philippines or the National Liberation Fronts in general. Rather, it refers to the different minority groups like the student’s movement, women’s movement, labor unions, peasant movement, and other politically inclined groups that struggle for liberation. For Marcuse, these forces are concrete expressions of the Great Refusal because they define the limits of the established societies and signal the impending rupture of history.¹¹

The New Left, which for Marcuse is the only possible counterforce in the advanced industrial society, must “... assume the vast task of political education, dispelling the false and mutilated consciousness of the people so that they themselves experience their condition, and their ambitions, as vital needs and apprehend the ways and means of their liberation.”¹² Thus, as Marcuse argues, the revolution driven by the new sensibility must be brought

¹⁰ Ibid., 43. Although Marcuse is convinced that the working class is no longer the sole agent of the revolution, he continues to believe that they remain the most decisive revolutionary force. The acquiescence or complicity of the working class to the system of control and domination does not mean complete dissolution of opposites in the advanced industrial society. This dissolution is only a momentary one. Marcuse continues to believe that the working class remains a revolutionary class. The power to subvert the oppressive society lies dormant in their very consciousness but so ripe for explosion once ignited. See also Ismael Magadan, Jr., “Democracy as Critique: Re-actualizing Jürgen Habermas’ Theory of the Public Sphere,” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 3:1 (October 2017), 15-32.

¹¹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 6. See also Jeffrey O’Cay, “Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse’s Psychoanalytic Turn,” *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 3:1 (June 2009), 10-23.

¹² Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 28.

to the political arena. This is now what Marcuse suggests in order to materialize emancipation: refuse, resist, and repel all forms of social control and domination. This programme will mean something different and perhaps easier to implement in countries “at the margins” because it is easier to reject alien way of life and return to original culture and question of language. A return to the indigenous mode of work, consumption habit, and distribution, which primarily hinges on the notion of “cooperation” exemplified by the *baranganic* system of the pre-Hispanic Philippine society, can also be viewed as the best alternative because it would mean a redirection of the capitalist mode of production towards the satisfaction of the senses and imagination of the individuals. According to Marcuse, this would weaken the Establishment and eventually leads to the demise of the capitalistic system.¹³

The Peasant Movement and the Great Refusal in the Philippines

But why the peasant movement despite the fact that there are a great number of active social and political movements in the Philippines today, such as the student movements, the women’s movements, and the labor unions, that also struggled and continue to struggle against American-led capitalism? The privilege of any such movements located “at the margins” of the system, is that as soon as their particular struggle links the specific demands that they make and the specific forms of injustice that they denounce, to neocolonial policies and imperialist domination premised on a capitalistic logic, they immediately point to a possible “outside” of the system: first, they highlight “from the outside” the real violence and destructive potential of the system, a violence and destructive potential that has become invisible “at the center”; and second, they also embody other ways of living and organizing society. But this view “from the outside” is precisely what Marcuse envisioned the Great Refusal should achieve, both in critical and pragmatic terms. “At the center,” only Art for him was able to maintain this possibility. In countries at the margins like the Philippines by contrast, many radical movements embody this possibility much more explicitly and concretely. If we recall, an important implication of Marcuse’s model was that “the truth and the freedom of ‘negative thinking’, of the *Great Refusal*, have their ground and reason”¹⁴ in those movements that stay outside the established capitalist system. This means that exception from and resistance to capitalist domination comes from those who are not completely contained within the system per se yet receive the harshest exploitation.

¹³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 222. Emphasis mine.

The student movements, for example, the National Union of Students in the Philippines, the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines, the League of Filipino Students, *Kabataang Makabayan* (Nationalist Youths), and *ANAKBAYAN Philippines* (Sons and Daughters of the People), have joined for a long time force in resisting the onslaught of imperialism against Philippine education. The women's movements like GABRIELA (General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action), *Kababaihan* (Women), the historic *MAKIBAKA* (*Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan* or Nationalist Movement of New Women), and many others, struggled not only against domestic violence and other forms of injustice committed against women, but also against capitalist exploitation in the country. Much as the labor unions, such as, the *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (May First Labor Movement), an umbrella organization of many progressive labor associations in the Philippines, fight for the rights of the workers such as better working conditions and just pay, it is also one of the staunchest critics of US imperialism. Indeed, as these movements clearly fight not only for the classical goal of justice and equality, but also for national liberation, there is no doubt that these movements are also expressions of what Marcuse calls the Great Refusal.

Amongst all the movements listed, however, one in particular appears to me to be the most eminent (if unlikely) embodiment of the Great Refusal, at least in its spirit: namely, the peasant movement. My emphasis on the peasant movement is founded first of all on the fact that they are probably the most brutalized of Filipino populations to have suffered from direct or indirect capitalist exploitation (whether imposed through the colonial powers or not). The full impacts of trade liberalization that started with the Payne-Aldrich Act in 1909 hit the peasants the deepest and marginalized them severely. For sure, although it is true that elements of the discourse and actions of the student movements, the women's movements, and the labor unions can be considered as expressions of the Great Refusal, in a country like the Philippines, it is in fact the peasant movement that embodies the most potent critique of and resistance to capitalist domination.

But that dimension is of course by far not sufficient to support my claim that the peasant organizations and struggles incarnate the basic principles of what is required that would lead to something like a "Great Refusal." The force of the peasant movement also lies in their numbers and, most importantly, in their alliance with peasant movements in other countries "at the margins." As Walden Bello argues, the international movement of small farmers and peasants has been one of the most dynamic sources of resistance against capitalistic domination in recent years.¹⁵ Against the false

¹⁵ Walden Bello, *The Food Wars* (Manila: Advil, 2009), 148.

hope of neoliberal propaganda, if a country like the Philippines is to experience real emancipation, it will have to touch real masses in ways that are real for them. Rather than the false hopes attached to the inclusion into an industrial, consumer society, an alternative, that is, a more just and flourishing society, would have to be found in the very structures of peasant life. And thirdly, as a matter of fact, in the past history of the Philippines, it is the peasant masses that have been the most potent agents of resistance to domination. Here, the masses of peasant population become another argument: they represent a serious political force.

History shows that the Filipino peasants have always played a crucial role in the fight against colonialism. During the Spanish period, as we already know it, most, if not all, of the more than 200 revolts against the Spanish regime were waged by the peasants themselves. The one led by Diego Silang, and later by his wife Gabriela, is a classic example. Even the 1896 Revolution was primarily composed of peasants, despite the fact that it was founded by the proletarian Andres Bonifacio. During the American period still, the forces that struggled for national liberation were predominantly peasants. The Macario Sakay revolt, the last group to fight the Americans during the Filipino-American War, was very much dependent upon the peasantry. The *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (People's Army Against Japan), or simply the *Huk*, that valiantly fought the Japanese during the Second World War and then against the Americans during the postwar period were mostly peasants from central Luzon. And today, the New People's Army (NPA), the fiercest group that fights against imperialism, bureaucrat capitalism and feudalism is basically peasant by composition.

Although the peasant movement in the Philippines began as a struggle for just landlord-tenant relations, reasonable land rent, and land ownership, in the wake of capitalism vis-à-vis the establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines, it has explicitly become an anti-capitalist movement. In the course of history, the Filipino peasants were able to relate the struggle against land to the struggle against colonialism, and now to the struggle against American-led capitalism. For example, today, issues of sovereignty, such as unjust trade relations and foreign military base agreements, have been articulated mostly by the peasants themselves or by movements that draw strength from the peasants.

To show how the peasants' struggle for land became an anti-capitalist movement as well as how the peasants were excluded in the capitalist system, thus excluding them from what Marcuse calls "one-dimensional society," I will discuss briefly the way in which American-led capitalism in the Philippines have impoverished the peasants and made them more and more landless, thereby causing the crystallization of the latter's resentment—to a point where they could begin to embody the principles of the Great Refusal.

52 SITUATING CRITICAL THEORY AT THE MARGINS

It must be remembered that when the United States decided to annex the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century, there was already a group of landed Filipino elites that dominated Philippine politics. These landed elites had already benefited from the export of agricultural products during the second half of the 19th century. Because the Americans were fully aware that the Filipino revolutionaries, especially the peasants, continued to resist American colonial government, and because they knew that the peasants posed as a threat to the local elite, the Americans had to form an alliance with these local elite. To do this, the Americans continued the Spanish policy on the export of agricultural products, thus reinforcing the position of the landed elite. For the rest of the 20th century, the strong alliance between the Americans and the Filipino landed elite, which later helped form what is now known as “patron-client” relationship, have left a deep imprint on the economic and political landscape of the Philippines. James Putzel, a renowned scholar on agrarian reform in the Philippines, writes: “The US built upon the economic and political legacy of Spanish rule, shaping both the economic and state structures that would characterize the Philippines for the rest of the 20th century.”¹⁶

To reinforce their policy toward the Philippine economy, the American colonial government enacted the Philippine Organic Act in 1902, the Torrens Titling Systems also in 1902, and the Public Land Act in 1903. The Philippine Organic Act, which served as the constitution of the American colonial government until 1916, had “limited the size of public lands that could be acquired by individuals to 16 hectares (later amended to 100 hectares) and by *foreign* corporations to 1, 024 hectares.”¹⁷ The Torrens Titling System, on the other hand, beefed up the Philippine Organic Act by allowing foreign corporations to have absolute ownership over these lands. According to Putzel, the Torrens Titling System further deprived the peasants of their right to own the land they deserved because they were mostly ill-informed about the system, not to mention the fact that most of them did not have the necessary means to apply for land title.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the American colonial

¹⁶ James Putzel, *A Captive Land: The Politics of Agrarian Reform in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992), 51. Amado Guerrero also writes: “When the United States in its imperialist greed seized the Philippines for itself, it was very conscious of the necessity of retaining feudalism so as to provide itself continuously with such raw materials as sugar, hemp, coconut and other agricultural products.” See Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Oakland, California: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979), 93.

¹⁷ Putzel, *Captive Land*, 52. Emphasis added. See also Jeffrey Ocay, “The History of Domination and Resistance in the Philippines: From the pre-Hispanic through the Spanish and American Period,” *Lumina: Interdisciplinary Research Journal of Holy Name University*, 21:1 (March 2010), 35-61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

government offered the Public Land Act in 1903 to enable the landless peasants to acquire their own lands. This law gave all Filipinos the right to acquire 16 hectares of public lands but with the condition that they establish homesteads and cultivate it for five consecutive years for a nominal fee. However, like the Philippine Organic Act and the Torrens Titling System, the Public Land Act was also unsuccessful in its attempt to solve the problem of landlessness in the Philippines because, as they “had no tradition of living on isolated farms, but rather live in barrios, or village neighborhoods,”¹⁹ the Filipino peasants were unresponsive to this Act. Consequently, many peasants became more and more landless while several big corporations, local and foreign, fared well under US rule, such as, the Tabacalera and Hacienda Luisita. The Tabacalera alone had acquired about 15, 452 hectares in Cagayan Valley by 1913.

The American colonial government later maneuvered the public land acquisition in order to expand US agribusiness and mining industries in the Philippines. Thus, by the 1920s, several big American corporations had penetrated the Philippine market. Notable among them was the Philippine Packing Corporations, (now named Del Monte Philippines), Dole, Stanfilco, Firestone Rubber, Benguet Consolidated, Lepanto, and Atlas Consolidated. Established by the American agribusiness giant, then known as the California Packing Company, Del Monte Philippines alone acquired vast tracts of lands in Bukidnon for pineapple plantations. The American colonial government then facilitated Del Monte’s expansion by establishing an agricultural colony in Bukidnon. The 14, 000 hectares of agricultural land in Libona and Santa Fe which were converted into a US Naval base were leased to Del Monte and became Bukidnon Pineapple Reservation. Del Monte was also allowed to acquire an area within the agricultural colony and to finance homesteads that would raise pineapples.

As more and more Filipino peasants became dispossessed due to the establishment of these big plantations and mining industries, it seemed that the colonial government had never been sincere in introducing land reforms to the Filipino population. According to Amado Guerrero, these were sham land reforms because they only facilitated the acquisition of large public lands by US agricultural corporations, Filipino landlords and bureaucrats.²⁰ As a direct response to these sham land reforms along with other land-related inequalities, agrarian unrest exploded in the 1940s and 1950s. The *Huk* rebellion in Central Luzon was the most notable among them. In response to this crisis, land reforms continued to be undertaken by the government during the postwar period, particularly from the Roxas administration down

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 96.

to Quirino, Magsaysay, Garcia, and Macapagal. However, most Filipino scholars believe that just as the previous ones, these land reforms were highly ineffective, that they remained under the influence of the American capitalists and their allies, the local elites. During the Ramon Magsaysay administration, for example, land reform was done in the form of resettlement²¹ wherein peasants were forced to move to the uninhabited hilly and mountainous regions of the country with less, if not without, financial support from the government.

In 1972, shortly after he assumed absolute power by declaring martial law, Ferdinand Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 2, declaring the whole country as a land reform area “in order to accelerate the implementation of reform both to stimulate agricultural development and to remove the source of rural unrest.”²² In particular, Marcos’s land reform program aimed to abolish sharecropping, transform tenants to owner-cultivators, and create a market for industry.²³ Yet, the decree proved once again to be highly ineffective despite its commendable intents. Throughout his 21-year long rule which ended in 1986, Marcos had redistributed very little land to the peasants while huge amount of lands was still concentrated in the hands of the landed elite and foreign agribusiness corporations. Moreover, surveys taken during the 1970s and early 1980s showed that sharecropping was still extensive. For example, a 1978 study showed that 44 per cent of rice and corn farmers were share tenants and that it was the dominant form of tenancy in 7 out of 11 regions surveyed.²⁴

When Marcos was unseated in 1986, his successor, Cory Aquino, introduced the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in an attempt to implement a genuine and comprehensive land reform program that would redress the decades-long grievances of the peasants. But like the rest of the previous land reform programs, Aquino’s CARP was far from being successful. “Having passed the burden of defining the program to Congress, the landlord-dominated legislature produced a law that reflected the interests of the propertied rather than the program’s intended beneficiaries.”²⁵ In addition, Aquino seemed to have been inconsistent with her promise of genuine and comprehensive land reform as outlined in the platform during her bid for the presidency. It became evident in her address to the press in June 1986 regarding her first 100 days in office. Aquino stated

²¹ Resettlement, however, started with the Quezon administration and was organized under the National Land Resettlement Administration in 1939. See Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 96.

²² Putzel, *Captive Land*, 124.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁵ Cecilia S. Ochoa, *Siglo-Saka: A Century of Peasant Struggle and Contributions to Philippine Nationhood* (Quezon City: Philippine Peasant Institute, 1998), 23.

that only idle public lands would be covered by CARP.²⁶ Surprisingly, what Aquino's "genuine and comprehensive land reform" program aimed at was not to redistribute large agricultural lands but to provide services to small farmers in the form of credit, marketing, and technological support. As one could see, this obviously safeguarded the interests of the big agribusiness corporations and the landed elite, including her family which owned the Hacienda Luisita. Thus, time and again, the peasants were deprived of their right to own the land they tilled while the landed elites who dominated Philippine politics and backed up by the United States continued to own huge tracts of agricultural lands and control agribusiness in the country.

The Ramos administration witnessed the continued implementation of CARP, yet no new genuine approach was introduced to correct its loopholes. Although it is reported that more lands were redistributed during the Ramos administration than Marcos's and Aquino's combined, this did not change the fact that the large private haciendas which are the root cause of inequality and injustice in the countryside remained in the hands of the landed elite while a majority of the peasants remained landless.²⁷

Now, as we can see, the introduction of American-oriented capitalism in the Philippines contributed not only to the deepening of land problems and the increasing number of tenants, but also to the consolidation of landlord political and economic power. Up until now, the Philippine political landscape is dominated by the Filipino landed elites or by politicians who have benefited from agriculture-related industry. As a result, and as Cecilia Ochoa observes, the government has done little to address the century-old problem of landlessness in the Philippines.²⁸ On the contrary, what we witness today is the intensification of capitalist domination in the form of land grabbing, manipulation of agribusiness, militarization, and political killings, targeting especially the leaders of peasant organizations.

The displacement and dispossession of the peasants, that is, their exclusion from the affairs of the State did not ensue solely from the series of land acts instituted by the American colonial government during the first half of the 20th century and by the local political leaders after independence. The establishment of unequal trade agreements between the United States and the Philippines as well as the intrusion of transnational corporations into the Philippine market also played a big part. As is well known, the establishment of free trade in the Philippines via the Payne-Aldrich Act in 1909 and the Bell Trade Act in 1945 further impoverished the great majority of the population. And because no less than 75 per cent of the Filipino masses are peasants, there is no doubt that it is the peasants themselves who suffered directly from the

²⁶ Putzel, *Captive Land*, 199

²⁷ Ochoa, *Siglo-Saka*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

brunt of neoliberal policies. Let us take the issue on rice production, for example, in order to show how the peasants and majority of toiling Filipino masses were victimized by such neoliberal policies.²⁹

Much as rice has been a staple food for the Filipinos for many years—it has become, in fact, an integral part of their culture over the years—the majority of the Filipino peasants have been dependent upon rice production for survival. Due in part to the backwardness in technology and the chronic problem of landlessness that has characterized the agricultural economy of the Philippines for many years, most peasants produce rice only enough for their family's subsistence. For sure, long before neoliberal policies were introduced in the Philippines, there was already rice shortage in the country. The introduction of neoliberal policies in the country has, to some extent, contributed to the development of rice production technology as key rice research institutes, such as, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) have been established in the country in the wake of neoliberalism. With this innovative technique in rice production, of course, along with much-needed government's financial support to rice farmers, it would seem that the chronic food crisis in the country should have been well addressed, thereby contributing, however little, to the amelioration of the plight of the peasants in the countryside. Yet, as it turned out, the peasants have remained hard-pressed and far from reaping the benefits of such breakthroughs in rice production because, in addition to the lack of government financial support for the peasants and chronic landlessness, the powerful landed elites have cornered the profitable rice business. Most of the huge tracts of rice farms in the Philippines today are owned by the corporate agribusiness, if not by the rural elites. Even if some peasants own small parcels of lands, they could not fully take advantage of the advancement in rice production technology due to lack of capital. The government has failed to provide the peasants, especially the rice farmers, with the financial support necessary to attain maximum production output. Consequently, the peasants have been forced to take on loans from banks and, frequently, from usurious lending institutions which have mushroomed not only in the highly urbanized areas but also in the remote rural localities in recent years. Needless to say, this has further impoverished the peasants because a big portion of their profit goes to the interest of their loans. Moreover, because these loans usually require land title as collateral, many peasants have lost their lands after they became unable to pay.

²⁹ For a powerful indictment of the neoliberal economic policies pursued in the Philippines since the overthrow of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, see Walden Bello, Marissa de Guzman, Mary Lou Malig, and Herbert Docena, *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2005).

In addition, the problem of rice shortage in the Philippines has a lot to do with the capitalist-oriented export/import policy introduced by the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Again, when the Payne-Aldrich Act was introduced in 1909, which made “free trade” a national economic policy, the Philippines began to export raw materials, such as, copra, sugar, tobacco, and other agricultural products mainly to the United States. Because the production of these so-called cash crops offered better returns than rice, more and more rice planters turned to the production of these cash crops. As a result, huge tracts of agricultural lands were converted into sugar plantations, such as the ones in Negros Occidental, dubbed the sugar capital of the Philippines; hundreds of thousands of agricultural lands in Central Luzon and Mindanao were also converted into coconut plantations; and, huge tracts of lands were also cultivated for tobacco production in Northern Luzon, most notably the Ilocos region. Since then and throughout the 20th century, the production of export crops has been further encouraged, and, in the event of rice shortage, the government had to import rice from neighboring rice-producing countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and China. Until today, despite the fact that the Philippines is primarily a rice-producing country, it continues to import rice to feed its growing population. As a matter of fact, in *The Food Wars*, Walden Bello, reminds us that the Philippines is now the world’s biggest importer of rice.³⁰ It is reported that the Philippines imported 900,000 metric tons of rice in 2004 and 1.827 million metric tons in 2007.³¹

What this discussion shows is that the peasant populations have been the direct victims of capitalist domination as it has developed in the Philippines. They are the largest and most exploited of all social classes in their country. And to begin with, it is precisely in that respect that they can represent a force that corresponds to Marcuse’s vision of a “Great Refusal.” As the direct victims of the neocolonial exploitation that accompanies real-existing capitalism “at the margins,” they are in no way included in the logic of the system as other populations are. But the great force of the peasant movement is also its sheer number and indeed, as I will try to show, the alternative, non-consumerist ways of life it can propose.³²

³⁰ Bello, *Food Wars*, 54-67.

³¹ See “NFA urged to sue Arroyo, Yap over rice imports,” in *ABS-CBN News* (30 July 2010), <<https://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/07/30/10/nfa-urged-sue-arroyo-yap-over-rice-imports>>.

³² It is worth noting that when Marx was forced to move to London in 1849 after experiencing the defeat of the European Revolutions of 1848, he began to write on societies that were peripheral to the capitalist system and examined their prospects for revolution and as sites for resistance to capital. Here, Marx showed how a revolution could be successful if the peasant movement could be linked up with the working-class movements. This shows that Marx saw the peasant movement as a potential source of hope for social transformation. See Kevin B. Andersen, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The

To recall, Marcuse's concept of the Great Refusal puts great emphasis on those groups or forces, such as, "the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable,"³³ that are located outside the prevailing system. Although he never completely jettisoned Marx's "proletariat" as a revolutionary force, Marcuse believes that in a highly technological society, a rupture in history or simply any serious form of "liberation," which the Great Refusal aims to achieve, can no longer be carried out by the proletarians themselves or by armed men but by such groups and forces that are not completely contained within the capitalist system. They are, for Marcuse, the only possible agents of social transformation because all other groups have somehow been included in the mechanisms that allow the system to perpetuate itself, notably by making them accept a language and a way of feeling and looking at social life that serve the system's self-reproduction. In the Philippines, the peasant movement and other marginalized groups best exemplify the qualities of such agents of social transformation.

It is important to note at this point that when I speak of the peasants as pointing to the most serious possibilities of social transformation in the Philippines, I am not referring to the entirety of the Filipino peasants. Not all peasants in the Philippines today are in the position to embody resistance to capitalist domination because many of them are thoroughly subjected to state capitalism and militarization, especially those who are located in the lowland regions. The peasants in these regions have already been included into the national and international markets and are under direct government control so that the idea of resistance to domination makes little sense for them. According to Gary Hawes, the massive intrusion of state capitalism and a growing militarization (against which the peasant cannot resist), coupled with better transportation and communication in the lowland regions of the Philippines has made resistance less likely.³⁴ It is therefore not surprising that it was in these regions in which the Communist Party of the Philippines found it difficult to establish a mass base,³⁵ that the *Huk* rebellion failed in the 1940s and 1950s, that the green revolution strategy of the late dictator

University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2-3. For related study on the struggle of the indigenous peoples, see Jeffrey O'Casey, "Ethics of Refusal: Globalization and the Penan People's Struggle for Recognition," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, 19:2-3 (2015), 169-195.

³³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256.

³⁴ Gary Hawes, "Theories of Peasant Revolution: A Critique and Contribution from the Philippines," *World Politics*, 2:2 (January 1990), 269.

³⁵ However, recent history shows that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA) have gained considerable support from the peasants of these regions. Take for example the case of the Negros and Bohol. Many red fighters have already penetrated the lowland areas of these provinces.

Ferdinand Marcos which aimed to quell agrarian revolts gained considerable acceptance, and that major US and Philippine military bases are located. If we relate this to Marcuse, the philosopher would have argued that these peasants, because they are incorporated into the larger national and international markets, are already contained within the confines of the capitalist system, that technological rationality has already invaded their consciousness; thus, resistance cannot be expected from them. However, this does not discount the fact that a greater portion of the peasant population continues to practice values that are antithetical to capitalism, values in particular that continue to be informed by the basic features of the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist *baranganic* society. Thus, the best agents of social transformation that I am referring to in this paper are the peasants who are located in the periphery, in the more marginal, upland agricultural areas where they produce agricultural products for the local economy and for family consumption.

Thus, the peasants that I am referring to in this paper as the best agents of social transformation are those who are located in the periphery, in the more marginal, upland agricultural areas where they produce agricultural products for the local economy and for family consumption.

I want to add that this paper does not intend to undermine the more radical peasants, such as, the members of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its revolutionary wing, the New People's Army, and the *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas* (Peasant Movement of the Philippines), who resorted to militant struggle against land grabbing, militarization, and other forms of injustice brought about by capitalism. In fact, Marcuse believed that this kind of struggle is inevitable given the circumstances, that if the most oppressed of all the social classes decide to march for freedom in a violent manner, no one has the right to teach them abstention.³⁶ What this paper wants to do instead is look for alternative ways of resisting capitalist domination that are peculiar to the Filipino peasants, ways that are both in line with the Marcusean notion of "resistance from the outside" and different from the orthodox mode of resistance where seizure of power at the "center" is aimed at. Thus, the peasant opposition that I want to study here has nothing to do with the classical revolutionary forces that dominate in history. It is this point that I now want to develop briefly.

³⁶ Yet, in a society where the police and the military have been so well organized to defend the status quo, Marcuse also agrees that a kind of struggle that attempts to seize power from the "center" should be avoided. For Marcuse, this is not only an ideologically misguided struggle but political suicide. See Herbert Marcuse, "On The New Left," in *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, Vol. 3, ed. by Douglas Kellner (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 124.

I believe that the peasant movement in the Philippines is potentially a good expression of the Great Refusal as it situates itself explicitly and substantially outside the main ideological discourses of the day, between neoliberal justifications and the classical Marxist-Leninist-Maoist discourse that continues to prevail in the Philippines today, and because it challenges inequalities in terms that are different from the main ideological game. This uniquely Marcusean way of resisting capitalist domination takes many forms. I will only concentrate on the most salient points.

First, the Filipino peasants I am referring to oppose the current capitalistic logic and its forms of domination by reference to an alternative tradition of working, using, and sharing the land collectively and cooperatively. In many parts of the Philippine archipelago, there exists a strong indigenous practice of collective work which is called *suyuan* in Mindoro, *jungos* in Bohol, and *junlos* in many parts of Mindanao. This is a local practice by which the peasants pool their labor together in order to get the job done efficiently without the use of money, that is, without paying the labor each member of the *suyuan* or *jungos* or *junlos* expends. Ligaya Lindio-McGovern explains this type of collective work in the following manner:

Peasants who have lands to till, usually as tenants, work together on one plot, which is under the care of one member of *suyuan*. Since many do the work, they finish whatever they need to do in a shorter time. Then they work on the plot of another member in the *suyuan*. They follow this pattern until every member has her or his work finished.³⁷

This cooperative form of work is an effective alternative to a capitalist-oriented type of work because it unties the peasants from surplus repression demanded of them by the capitalist society and frees them from the obligation of maximum individual performance. More importantly, such cooperative form of work enables the Filipino peasants to come up with a viable economic organization that allows them to control the marketing of their produce. They do this by establishing consumer and credit cooperatives at the village and

³⁷ Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, *Filipino Peasant Women: Exploitation and Resistance* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 95. See also Jeffry Ocay, "Shifting Pattern and Sophistication of the American Colonial Domination in the Philippines: From Colonialism to Technological Domination," *Silliman Journal*, 55:1 (January-June 2014), 117-152. For a relevant discussion on marginalization in relation to race and immigration, see Andres Salvador, "Racism and Immigration: Is it racist to limit immigration?" in *Philo-notes* (27 November 2017), <<https://philonotes.com/index.php/2017/11/27/racism-and-immigration/>>.

community levels.³⁸ In principle, an alternative strategy of producing and consuming basic commodities that is both antithetical to a capitalist-oriented type of production process and yet ensures satisfaction of their vital needs, should spare the peasants from being crushed by imported products, such as imported rice, and from being swallowed by large-scale agribusiness as happened elsewhere in the country. In other words, this indigenous alternative of producing and consuming protects these Filipino peasants from the aggressive and destructive tendencies of technological development, which, according to Marcuse, perpetuates servitude amidst growing possibilities of freedom and which deepens poverty amidst abundance. Furthermore, their distance from the city centers combines with their social organization, itself revolving around an alternative, cooperative model of work, keeps them from being transformed into insatiable consumers whose consciousness is reduced into mere biological impulses that merely adjust to the technical processes of production. Following Marcuse, I would claim that this attitude to work, which is antithetical to the capitalist work ethic, and the consumption habits that go with it, constitutes a sphere that is not completely integrated into the capitalist system. As a result, through its sheer existence and its relative success it demonstrates the possibility of escaping a repressive society that develops only on the condition of accelerating waste, planned obsolescence, destruction, and exploitation of large populations.³⁹

In the face of the tremendous power of modern industry, science and financial techniques, the appeal to indigenous modes of social organization and cooperative work might appear incredibly naïve. But this is only if one forgets the immensely destructive nature of contemporary technological rationality, a potential for destruction which drove Marcuse to seek for the possibilities for alternatives. To speak very simply, and if one lets oneself be guided by Marcuse's analysis: if the logic at work "at the center," which has been imported to the new emerging powers, and which has subjugated countries "at the margins" like the Philippines, is left to rule unchecked, only a catastrophe can emerge from it, either social (new wars) or environmental (climate change), or a combination of the two. Against this catastrophic

³⁸ The establishment of cooperatives as a way of countervailing capitalist domination, however, is not a monopoly of the Filipino peasants. Obviously, cooperatives are also present in other countries. What is unique to cooperatives established by the Filipino peasants is that it has retained the basic economic features of the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist *baranganic* society, that is, the peasants depend on each other for survival (cooperative labor) and exercise control over the means of production. For a recent study on the philosophy of work of the Filipinos in the periphery, see Jeffrey Ocay, "Philosophy at the Margins: Exploring the Philosophy of Work of the Elderly People in some Remote Areas of Negros Oriental," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1:1 (October 2015), 1-22.

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society," in *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, 77.

background, the alternative model of social life presented by the *barangay* system, and indeed the historical struggles that were waged in its name, suddenly appear anything but sentimental.

However, it is very important to say that this emphasis on a traditional Filipino way of living and working together does not amount to a form of regression, that is to say, a return to a traditional form of production process where labor was still considered long and hard due to the absence of a more sophisticated technology. As a matter of fact, Marcuse was not opposed to all forms of technology when he denounced technological domination. The point to make is that the development of technology should be guided by the traditional attitude of the peasants toward work and consumption so that it would serve to disburden their toil and satisfy their vital needs. In this new type of production relations where technology takes central role, the people produce enough for the local economy and the family. There might be surplus but only in the sense of excess goods normally used for consumption, one that is not solely intended for circulation as “exchange value,” or surplus intended for profit.⁴⁰ As Kathy Nadeau also argues, this new economic set up, which reflects the economic set up of the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist Philippine society, is a direct negation of capitalism.

The type of society that emerges from this kind of socio-economic relations shows the bases of what Marcuse envisions as the good society. For Marcuse, according to Peter Lind, the good society is a social order which is primarily based on a cooperative form of labor necessary for the realization of freedom.⁴¹ Lind notes that this society allows a new *homo faber* (or the new individual with the new sensibility according to Marcuse) “to devote himself fully to his share of the collective social labor, to take a full part in decisions to produce this or that object and participate on an equal basis in the allocation of communal task.”⁴² The peasant way of life provides a concrete example of such a communal form of social life, organized around cooperative work.

These Filipino peasants also point to the signs of a Great Refusal in the way in which they approach land distribution. As I showed above, the Philippine government failed to implement true and effective land reform. This prompted the Filipino peasants to promote a radical and indigenous alternative of implementing land distribution that goes beyond the confines of modern law. They do this in the form of “land occupation,” a process of collectively occupying idle lands and making them productive. According to

⁴⁰ See Kathy Nadeau, “Peasant Resistance and Religious Protests in Early Philippine Society: Turning Friars against the Grain,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 41 No. 1 (March 2002), 80.

⁴¹ Lind, *Marcuse and Freedom*, 127.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 123.

Lindio-McGovern, these idle lands are usually owned by absentee landlords and corporations.⁴³ In Mindoro, for example, the first land occupation took place in Sablayan in 1984. Here, the peasants occupied huge tracts of idle lands, about 150 hectares, which were owned by Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT). Lindio-McGovern notes that the peasants occupied the land collectively and simultaneously and began to make these idle lands productive.⁴⁴ After the first harvest, however, the peasants were forcibly dispersed.

Although the Filipino peasants were eventually unsuccessful in their struggle for land ownership by way of land occupation, what is important is that their actions break with the familiar, with the routine ways of seeing and understanding reality. Theirs is a kind of struggle that differs from the traditional political opposition borrowed from the West. These efforts have allowed the peasants to challenge the state and the local capitalists in a unique sense which in fact corresponds to the kind of politics Marcuse envisioned, as politics that would step outside the mechanisms of reproduction of the system. For Marcuse, it is only through a methodical disengagement from and refusal of the established order, through an opposition from the outside, that a rupture with history can be signaled.⁴⁵

Again, the appeal to this kind of social movement appears naïve only from a perspective that assumes that the standards of rationality are the ones implicit in the existing system. But if, following Marcuse, and indeed as concrete facts and history demonstrate, one doubts the actual “rationality” of that system, in terms of the real justice and real human flourishing, it systematically fails to deliver, then again the reference to the forms of struggle engaged in by the peasants becomes far from naïve. Indeed, it is worth noting that the reference to struggles by the poorest of the poorest, namely the native peasants, around the question of land distribution, has been tantamount in many other countries “at the margins,” notably in South America, in Bolivia (Movement for Socialism of President Morales) and Mexico (and the Zapatista movement).

One specific example is particularly telling, in my mind, to highlight the novelty and effectiveness of farmers’ struggle in resisting the established society and its concomitant system of domination. This is the example of the framers of the Higaonon from Sumilao, Bukidnon, and how they fought for land rights recognition. Their land of about 355.824 acres was grabbed by converting it into a hog farm by the San Miguel Foods Inc. The Higaonon tribe farmers petitioned the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to issue a cease-and-desist order (CDO), but the Supreme Court of the Philippines

⁴³ Lindio-McGovern, *Filipino Peasant Women*, 86.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-95.

⁴⁵ See Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 6.

dismissed their case because they lacked legal standing. Yet the Higaonon tribe farmers decided to continue fighting for their ancestral land through extralegal means. Thus, on 10 October 2007, the 55 Higaonon tribe farmers started to march the 1,055.7 miles long Sumilao, Bukidnon-Manila highway for 2 months, arriving in Manila on 03 December 2007. When they reached Manila, they staged a hunger strike for several days in front of Malacañang. On 17 December 2007, President Gloria Arroyo revoked the conversion order on the disputed 355.824 acres land in Sumilao, Bukidnon, resulting in the return of the land to the 55 members of the Higaonon tribe farmers.⁴⁶

The success of the Higaonon tribe farmers is indeed an exceptional case in the history of the struggle for land rights recognition in less developed countries, and, perhaps, in the First World countries. It is because this struggle defies the reign of law yet receives due recognition by the law itself. This is what Marcuse would want to see in those subjects who struggle for radical social change.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing is not certainly a full explication of the ways in which the Filipino peasants express the Great Refusal. Yet, the illustrations above, albeit brief, suggest that despite the overwhelming force of technological domination and other forms of social control, there remain in Philippine society forces that carry the hope of emancipation: the peasants themselves. Their attitude toward work and their consumption habit which continue to be informed by the cooperative values of the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist society, show that they are capable of demonstrating liberating tendencies within the established technological society. That is to say, if they were given the chance to own the land they till, to control the means of production, and to determine their own needs within the existing conditions of unbridled technological advancement, these people would be able to propound a valid alternative model of development opposed to what Marcuse calls repressive technological society. Of course, as Marcuse gestured toward the end of his seminal work *One-Dimensional Man*, the chance of this alternative is almost bereft of hope. The road to liberation, if it is attainable at all, is surely an arduous one. What this implies for the Filipino peasants is that no matter how hard they struggled for land rights recognition or for reasonable land rent or for liberation in general, success is far from guaranteed. Yet, they have to continue this struggle which appears to be the last remaining one in a society that becomes more and more one-dimensional. In the end, the Filipino

⁴⁶ Fundador S. Binahon, Jr., "The Higaonon," in *National Commission for Culture and the Arts* (30 April 2015), <<https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-higaonon/>>.

peasants are burdened with the task of waging a perpetual opposition to the repressive technological society. As Marcuse writes, "We must *always* resist if we still want to live as human beings, to work and be happy."⁴⁷

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Becoming-Democratic as Becoming-Revolutionary

Raniel SM. Reyes

Abstract: I explain in this paper how Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming-minoritarian functions as a principle of becoming-revolutionary. To achieve this goal, I elucidate one of the significant features of becoming-minoritarian-becoming-democratic. The said principle is one of the ways that shows how to become revolutionary against the capitalist-captured democracy. I elaborate this undertaking by explicating becoming-democracy's antithetical stance to conventional democratic practices and popular opinions, as well as its violence to the human condition. Ultimately, becoming-democracy exemplifies the principle of becoming-revolutionary via its critical diagnosis of different capitalist and democratic codifications in the society. Such mode of resistance fuels philosophy's political vocation—the creation of concepts capable of radicalizing the grain towards a people and world-to-come.

Keywords: becoming-minoritarian, becoming-democratic, becoming-revolutionary, capitalism

Prelude: Micropolitics and Becoming-Revolutionary

Aside from the celebrated May 1968 political struggle, Deleuze and Guattari's micropolitics is greatly informed by Classical Marxism, Leninism, and the Bolshevik Revolution, to name a few. Nevertheless, while the concept of the Communist revolution is perceived to inform their sociopolitical imagination, its proletarianization of the revolution and teleological trajectory are criticized from the point of view of a micropolitical configuration of a revolution-to-come or becoming-revolutionary.

Deleuze and Guattari repudiate the possibility of a global revolution against totalitarian and capitalist-manipulated States whose goal is to end all contradictions in society. Likewise, they negate any kind of macropolitical

struggles that would convert ethical or micro-fascism¹ into molecular investments of free-floating desire. For them, it is imperative to launch a micropolitical diagnosis of the molecular existence of fascism in contemporary institutions, as well as in the manifold networks of political and subcultural enunciations. Its creative mutations in these social spaces transform this brand of fascism into a transhistorical phenomenon. Its transhistoricality makes fascism a very hazardous phenomenon. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they explain that: “What makes this fascism dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism.”² In *Chaosophy*, Guattari adds:

The historical transversality of the machines of desire on which totalitarian systems depend is ... inseparable from their social transversality. Therefore, the analysis of fascism is not simply a historian’s specialty. I repeat: what set fascism in motion yesterday continues to proliferate in other forms, within the complex contemporary social space.³

The molecular nuances of fascism in contemporary social spaces incapacitate any macropolitical interventions or examinations. Unlike macropolitics, Deleuzo-Guattarian micropolitics is concerned with critical and active experimentation with the numerous angles and fissures existing between politico-economic institutions or investments and subinstitutional movements of desire.⁴ As such, they support the political function of the minoritarians by virtue of their ability to antagonize the molar social codes, subjecting majoritarian norms toward transfiguration. The minoritarians’ capacity for deterritorialization is the essence of revolutionary becoming. Moreover, included in the principle of becoming-minoritarian is the goal of inventing novel investments and subjectivities capable of destabilizing the status quo.

¹ In Foucault’s Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, he distinguishes two kinds of fascism: historical fascism and ethical or micro-fascism. He associates the former with the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini. On the other hand, he characterizes the latter as “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” Michel Foucault, Preface to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xii.

² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 236.

³ Felix Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer, trans. by David L. Sweet, Jarred Becker, and Taylor Adkins (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009), 236.

⁴ Cf. Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a 'concept' is an open-multiplicity. In *What Is Philosophy?*, they argue that it is a "specifically philosophical creation [which] is always a singularity."⁵ Speaking of multiplicities and singularities, then a concept is likewise an assemblage the components of which consist of concepts.⁶ Its relations with other concepts are very significant for its identity-formation and meaning. Moreover, they define philosophy as the active creation or invention of concepts that radically transfigure economic, political, and historical occurrences that thwart life's possibility of becoming-other.⁷ In this vein, through a concept (philosophical concept), we can vigorously overcome our experiences toward novel kinds of thinking and living. Philosophical concepts, for them, "are fragmentary wholes that are not aligned with one another so that they fit together, because their edges do not match up. They are ... the outcome of throws of the dice."⁸

Micropolitics is a philosophical concept whose workings can only be understood when problematized in relation to another philosophical concept, namely, becoming-revolutionary. Their dynamic hybridity (in conjunction with other concepts such as becoming, multiplicities, deterritorialization, among others) crafts new intensities, connections, and possibilities of life that escape capitalism's molar codification and the State's capture. Meanwhile, the concept, becoming-revolutionary is untimely. It does not only aid micropolitics in the molecular reinstatement of desire, for instance; rather, it also subverts all molar codes or majoritarian representations (under capitalist or state capture) that derail rhizomic movements of desire, as well as the endless creation of nomadic and productive forces in society. In *Deleuze and the Political*, Patton elucidates the principle of becoming-revolutionary: "Becoming-revolutionary is a process open to all at any time. Moreover, its value does not depend on the success or failure of the molar redistributions to which it gives rise."⁹ This explanation reinforces Deleuze and Guattari's argument: "The victory of a revolution is immanent and consist in the new

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 7.

⁶ The same description of a concept appears in Massumi's Translator's Foreword of *A Thousand Plateaus*: "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window ... Because the concept in its unrestrained usage is a of circumstances, at a volatile juncture ... The concept has no subject or object other than itself. It is an act." Brian Massumi, Translator's Foreword to Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xiii.

⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 108.

⁸ *Ibid.* 35.

⁹ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 83.

bonds it installs between people, even if the bonds last no longer than the revolution's fused material and quickly give way to division and betrayal."¹⁰

Micropolitics is a new philosophy of immanence based on a politicized philosophy of difference. It is concerned with the transversalities, tensions, and transformations that occur alongside, beneath, and outside the Capitalist/State apparatus. Such a Promethean task is the challenge of the subject groups or the nomads. Because micropolitics is concerned with problems involving performances and pragmatics, not with essences, the question that needs to be asked is: "How does micropolitics or becoming-revolutionary work?" instead of "What does micropolitics or becoming-revolutionary mean?"¹¹

Becoming-Democratic as Becoming-Minoritarian/Revolutionary

Minoritarian Politics and the Becoming-Other of Life

The complex relationship between Deleuze's philosophy of difference and his politics of difference can be clarified by explaining his theory of multiplicities.¹² Against the backdrop of the philosophy of representation (or all forms of universalization), Deleuze states that "there is always an unrepresented singularity who does not recognize precisely because it is not everyone or the universal."¹³ The voiceless or the subaltern is an essential ingredient of minoritarian politics. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari assert that every individual or Oedipal issue in a life-story, for example, must be viewed via the lens of the political, which is also in conjunction with other spectra of living (e.g., economic, aesthetic, cultural, and the like). This perspective is magnified in *A Thousand Plateaus* where they claim that "everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics."¹⁴

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 177. See also Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 83.

¹¹ As part of their critique in relation to the conventional appropriation of desire through the question "What is desire?" Deleuze and Guattari focus on the query "How does desire work?" Their change of focus, from the essentialist to the functionalist problematic, is a microcosm of their overall critique of all forms of representation.

¹² The distinction between majoritarian and minoritarian literature, for instance, must not be perceived in terms of difference in degree; rather, it should be viewed in terms of difference in kind or as two types of multiplicity: extensive or quantitative multiplicity (majoritarian) and intensive or qualitative (minoritarian) multiplicity. A holistic understanding of these two kinds is only possible in relation to the Deleuzian politics of difference in general.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 52.

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 213.

Minoritarian politics is a paramount feature of Deleuze and Guattari's "relational understanding of difference."¹⁵ The opposition between minority and majority is complex. Writ large, the majoritarian logic of production derives its regulative principle from a transcendental concept or arborescent principle, which is external to the particularities it produces, and which homogenizes and hegemonizes. The majoritarian resembles a hierarchical and nonreflexive structure because it assumes a leverage over other particularities. According to Deleuze and Guattari: "When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian."¹⁶ The 'white-heterosexual-European-male,' for example, is a majoritarian standard. Albeit they are fewer in numbers compared with blacks, Asians, transgenders, women, and the like, 'man' still is designated as the majoritarian model. Man "appears twice, once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. It assumes the standard measure,"¹⁷

The minoritarian or molecular promotes singular and local connections by virtue of its autopoietic and protean attributes. It also espouses an ethics of prudence, that is, its elucidation of the value of the minorities does not want to commit the similar blunder by the very principle it seeks to critically diagnose. Its specific goal, as Patton argues in *Deleuze and the Political*, is merely to defend the right of the minorities by expanding the majoritarian standard to include the excluded, and by practicing gender sensitivity and neutrality, as well as multiculturalism.¹⁸ Hence, joining man are also other concepts such as 'woman,' 'Asians,' 'Africans,' 'homosexuals,' and the like. However, their penchant to the minoritarian is merely a prologue to the third and most important term in micropolitics—becoming-minoritarian or molecular.

Before elucidating this concept's significant role in micropolitics or assemblage theory, I deem it necessary to first explicate the Deleuzian notion of becoming—an omnipresent concept in Deleuze's philosophy even before his collaboration with Guattari. Deleuze's philosophy of becoming is greatly Spinozian (affects) and Nietzschean (power). Affects and power are indispensably contributory to schizoanalysis and assemblage theory articulated in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, respectively. In Spinoza's philosophy, the affective dimension of a body (individual and collective agencies) implies both the capacity to affect another body and the power to

¹⁵ See Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 47.

¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291

¹⁷ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 105.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 47.

be affected. As such, the affective aspect of the body or power is parallel to the Nietzschean concept of the will to power. Nietzsche's understanding of power is not about craving for power and the eradication of the weak because these are only expressions of slave morality or the descending life-typology. Relation of bodies can either be active or reactive, or it may increase or diminish an agency's capability to act. Engagement with other bodies increases one's powers. Ideally, the processes involved in the said encounters result in the bodies' creative transformation and not appropriation.

Deleuze perceives the feeling of power as a kind of affect inextricably connected to a process of becoming or becoming-other.¹⁹ Apparently, implicit in becoming-other is the goal of 'joy' in Spinoza, the active expenditure of *power* in Nietzsche, and the enrichment of desire via perpetual and creative connections and production in Deleuze and Guattari. Additionally, becoming-other refers to transversalities with other bodies and proximities, or what Bergson calls the realm of the 'nonhuman.' It is the becoming-minoritarian of everything.

Becoming-minoritarian resembles Kafka's rhizomatic minoritarian literature. As opposed to being the standard (majoritarian) and being the marginalized (minoritarian), becoming-minoritarian advocates a principle of becoming that operates at the middle of the former and the latter. As Deleuze and Guattari explicate:

A line of becoming ... passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs ... transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end The middle is not an average ... it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between If becoming is a block ... it is because it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility ... a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other.²⁰

¹⁹ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain how affects are related to becomings: "To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual's own parts. Affects are becomings." Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 256.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 293

In *Dialogues*, the majoritarian, minoritarian, and becoming-minoritarian principles are discussed in terms of a triadic politics of immanence. Assemblages are comprehended through these lines that immanently constitute different things, individuals, and groups. For Deleuze and Parnet: “We think lines are the basic components of things and events. So everything has its geography, its cartography, its diagram. What’s interesting, even in a person, are the lines that make them up, or they make up, or take, or create.”²¹ The intricate nuances and tensions produced through the conjunction and disjunction of these lines are the very objects of study of schizoanalysis, micro-politics, rhizomatics, and cartography.²²

The first is the line of rigid segmentarity (molar line). Modern society or State society bombards us with enormous numbers of rigid lines or striated spaces by which individuals move from one place to another—the line that connects us from the Oedipalized relation in the family to the arboreal structures in the university, compartmentalized setting in the workplace, and the bureaucratic configurations in the government, among others. These lines are characterized by “clearly defined segments, in all directions, which cut us up in all senses, packets of segmentarized lines.”²³ Segments are interdependent to social binary opposites such as black and white (race), man and woman (sex), and rightist and leftist (political affiliation). Albeit they are characterized by rigid lines, they collide or cut across each other in various directions and operate diachronically.²⁴ Consequently, new lines or binaries are produced such as the transgender identity when man-and-woman binary collides or when you are neither a man nor a woman. Despite their dynamic production, rigid segments are likewise instruments of power. Social segments in the form of social codes are formulated as devices of control and surveillance. Using the prison model (as a microcosm of all other institutions such as the hospital and the factory), Foucault elucidates a macrolevel account of power and its aptitude of disciplinarity. A reconstructed version of Jeremy Bentham’s notion of panopticon is the central idea of Foucault’s political philosophy in *Discipline and Punish*.²⁵ Through the State’s centralized machinery, “each segment is underscored, rectified, and homogenized in its

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 33.

²² Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, rev. ed., trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 125.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 128.

²⁵ Bentham’s panopticon is very important to Foucault’s political philosophy in *Discipline and Punish*. After 1975, the former’s philosophy is no longer relevant to the latter’s political philosophy. See Paul Patton, “Foucault and Normative Political Philosophy,” in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. by Timothy O’Leary and Christopher Falzon (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), 212–214.

own right, but also in relation to the others. Not only does each have its own unit of measure, but there is an equivalence and translatability between units. The central eye has as its correlate a space through which it moves, but it itself remains invariant in relation to its movements.”²⁶

The molar lines that cut across each other also produce fissures. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari clarify that instead of establishing the distinction between the segmentary and the centralized, we should elucidate the existing difference between the two kinds of segmentarity, namely rigid (modern) and supple (primitive).²⁷ The molecular lines, the lines which operate in primitive societies, are suppler than the molar. Because they are characterized by fluxes and are elusive to all types of overcoding or the State’s panoptical control, they bring about molecular becomings. If molar lines operate diachronically between segments to produce more binarized segments, the molecular lines operate at each segment’s subterranean plane via disjunctions and conjunctions, or repulsion and attraction. The rhizomic fluxes are “imperceptible, marking a threshold of lowered resistance ... you can no longer stand what you put up with before ... the distribution of desires has changed in us, our relationships of speed and slowness have been modified.”²⁸ Nevertheless, unlike the rhizomic fluxes, traditional binaries retain their existence even though new ones are produced after a series of collisions. Although apparent dissimilarities separate the molar (modern or rigid) from the molecular (primitive or supple) lines, it is important to know why Deleuze and Guattari deem Kafka (the minoritarian writer) as the greatest theorist of bureaucracy. How can a writer espouse rhizomatic thinking and be a theorist of rigid segmentarity at the same time? The modern bureaucratic societies are not only governed by arborescent structures, segmented spaces, and a centralized mechanism, but they are also characterized by “a suppleness of and communication between offices, a bureaucratic perversion, a permanent inventiveness or creativity practiced even against administrative regulations.”²⁹

In the case of fascism, it can exist both in the rigid and the supple segments. Prior to its conversion into a grand, collective, and centralized black-hole of macro-fascism, micro-fascism may exhibit supple segmentarity. Moreover, the molecular is not downsized or individualistic although it operates in fissure and pockets. The distinction between the two therefore is analytic and qualitative, and the relationship between them is characterized by intricate interdependence. In other words, molar and molecular lines coexist. Kafka’s minoritarian philosophy, for example, illustrates how the

²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 211.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁸ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 126.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 214.

“barriers between offices cease to be ‘a definite dividing line’ and are immersed in a molecular medium (milieu) that dissolves them and simultaneously makes the office manager proliferate into microfigures impossible to recognize or identify, discernible only when they are centralizable: another regime, coexistent with the separation and totalization of the rigid segments.”³⁰

Lastly, a line enables us to navigate across our segments and thresholds toward something *terra incognita*—the ‘abstract line.’ It resembles the line of flight by which the other kinds of line owe their existence. In this vein, it entails a power to rupture all binaries—be it segmented or supple—toward a becoming-imperceptible. Although the fluidity of the molecular lines actualizes as a device of deterritorialization, the possibility of reterritorializing into molar lines is inevitable. Meanwhile, the abstract line can transfigure into a creative and radical assemblage, as well as the assemblage it affects. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari design and conceive *A Thousand Plateaus* not only as a rhizomic literature but also as a philosophical piece promoting lines of flight in thinking and living. It is a book that fosters novel and radical pathways of theory and praxis in a way that deterritorialization leads to further deterritorializations, and creation to perpetual creations.³¹ A line of flight is relative when it operates in between milieus that are usually pre-established attractors or flows. In this regard, it can reterritorialize into extremely rigid segments, and worse, it can metamorphose into a line of decadence or destruction. Moreover, a line of flight is absolute when it promotes absolute deterritorialization that fashions entirely new relations, ways of thinking, and thresholds.³² Mark Bonta and John Protevi, in *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, describe the absolute line of flight as a vector of freedom.³³ As a tool for freedom, Deleuze and Guattari underscore the call for the transfiguration of the lines of flight to become machinic assemblages of incessant enunciation, relation, and overcoming that would radicalize social life as a protean plane of existence, always haunted by the horrifying possibilities of lines of destruction.³⁴

As a vector of freedom, the absolute line that fuels the principle of becoming-minoritarian gains a political force because it emancipates the subaltern concepts and entities from the totalizing dominion of the molar line and the highly polymorphous current of the molecular. More importantly, becoming-minoritarian abrades the minoritarian to the majoritarian to

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 106.

³² See *ibid.*, 106.

³³ See *ibid.*

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 229.

extinguish the rigid ramparts of majoritarian, as well as the subaltern frontiers of the minoritarian principle, and differentialize them through incessant deterritorialization.

Becoming-other as becoming-minoritarian is immensely informed by its dynamic and reflexive relation with marginalized social collectivities outside the frontiers of traditional institutions such as the family and the State. They represent "minoritarian groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions."³⁵ As a creative process, becoming-minoritarian deterritorializes the minoritarian's determinate configurations in relation to the majoritarian. In the case of the majoritarian 'man' and the minoritarian 'woman,' becoming-minoritarian is tantamount to becoming-woman. All becomings, even the becoming-minoritarian of language in its activity of stuttering, should pass becoming-woman, which is another term Deleuze and Guattari utilize to represent becoming-other. In this manner, becoming-woman subjects 'man' and, in fact, even 'woman' into perpetual deterritorialization:

In a way, the subject in a becoming is always 'man,' but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity. ... Conversely, if ... women must become-woman, if children must become-child ... it is because only a minority is capable of serving as the active medium of becoming, but under such conditions that it ceases to be a definable aggregate in relation to the majority.³⁶

Becoming-minoritarian as becoming-woman dismantles conventional woman stereotypes imagined by the male phallic economy in the same manner that it deletes even the essentialist underpinnings and values traditionally associated with women. The audacious efforts of the first wave of feminists, for example, who struggled for equal rights to education and suffrage are indeed praiseworthy. Deleuze and Guattari, however, argue that a molar politics of this kind should be coupled by molecular politics of becoming-woman.³⁷ Thus, failure to pass the process would imply their conversion into another kind of majoritarian politics wherein its process of incessant minoritarian variation comes to a halt. Doubtless, their theorization

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 291.

³⁷ Even the second wave feminism (which criticizes the patriarchal model of society), the third wave (which endorses multivocality and inclusivity), and the fourth wave (which extends the causes of the third wave in the cyber space), must pass the process of becoming-woman.

of becoming-woman receives stark criticism from feminist scholars.³⁸ Their repudiation of the philosophy of becoming-woman is only legitimized when it is pondered as a stable concept and perspective (speaking-position), not as a molecular process of creative becoming that lies at the middle of man and woman. Moreover, becoming-woman is not tantamount to the obliteration of gender politics in particular, and all kinds of molar politics in general. It simply aims for the enhancement, differentialization, and the magnanimous call for all of us to “ungender itself [ourselves], creating a non-molarizing socius that fosters carnal invention rather than containing it.”³⁹

The creative interplay between the molar segments of the majoritarian and the molecular flows of the minoritarian, and the virtual potentials of becoming-minoritarian are ubiquitous in all fields—gender, cultural studies, music, science, among others. In this manner, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the history of societies is not shaped by the contradiction between socioeconomic classes (which are all majoritarian or molar) as Marxists scholars would claim. Rather, it is differentialized by the molecular fissures emerging underneath rigid segments, and more importantly, it is deterritorialized by the lines of flight toward a superlative kind of creativity. For them, a micropolitics of society:

(I)s defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something that flows or ... escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a “change in values,” the youth, women, the mad, etc. May 1968 in France was molecular, making what led up to it all the more imperceptible from the viewpoint of micropolitics.⁴⁰

Deleuze and Guattari use the events behind the May 1968 struggle as a case in point. A significant problem occurs at the interstices of the said event. Being theoretical captives of obsolete philosophical theories such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and phenomenology, the French people evaluate the said struggle through macropolitical terms. Unfortunately, they misrecognize the radical alterity or singularity of such an event irreducible to

³⁸ One of the foremost critics of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy in the domain of gender is Rosi Braidotti. See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

³⁹ Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 89. See also Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 82.

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216

any forms of representation and more prominently, that which opens them to a future plane of existence. According to them:

(T)he people ... understood nothing of the event because something unaccountable was escaping. The politicians, the parties, the unions, many leftists, were utterly vexed; they kept repeating over and over again that 'conditions were not ripe. It was as though they had been temporarily deprived of the entire dualism machine that made them valid spokespeople. ... A molecular flow was escaping, minuscule at first, then swelling, without, however, ceasing to be unassignable.⁴¹

At this juncture, let me emphasize that it is incorrect to think that the Deleuzian minoritarian politics only deals with perpetual and polymorphous becomings. Neither should scholars view it as an arborescent principle isolated from the sedentary frames of the majoritarian. Minoritarian and majoritarian politics operate in a continuous interplay via the principle of becoming-minoritarian, and they must remain inexorable to avoid or escape representation, marginalization, and pure anarchy. As Deleuze and Guattari underscore, "molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties."⁴²

Becoming-Democratic as Becoming-Minoritarian

Becoming-Democratic as Becoming-Anti-Democratic

The absence of a normative reference to democracy is one of the reasons why the Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophic project is hastily accused of being apolitical. Democracy does not occupy a very significant role in their political philosophy primarily because they do not understand democracy as a kind of majoritarian or normative political theory. Liberal democracy, for instance, is only discussed as one of the models of societal investment under capitalism.⁴³ Although a straightforward mention of democracy was only

⁴¹ See *ibid.* The legacies of May 1968 can only become pragmatic upon our critical analysis and intervention of the manifold subterranean occurrences, if not the collective decadence, which are overridden by the crowd's frenzied posture. In short, contemporary humanity and scholarship must learn the lessons it conveyed positively and negatively, especially *contra* various micro-fascisms that calls for micropolitical diagnosis and reevaluation.

⁴² *Ibid.* 216-217.

⁴³ See Paul Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 162. Most of my discussions here are inspired by Patton's book.

made in *What Is Philosophy?*, the democratic guise of despotic states or despotism was already articulated in *Anti-Oedipus*. Deleuze and Guattari write:

As for democracies, how could one fail to recognize in them the despot who has become colder and more hypocritical, more calculating, since he must himself count and code instead of overcoding the accounts? It is useless to compose the list of differences after the manner of conscientious historians The differences could be determining only if the despotic State were one concrete formation among others, to be treated comparatively. But the despotic State is the abstraction that is realized-in imperial formations, to be sure-only as an abstraction (the overcoding eminent unity). It assumes its immanent concrete existence only in the subsequent forms that cause it to return under other guises and conditions.⁴⁴

Democracy is a kind of government that underscores the value of equality among individuals. From a more philosophical standpoint, Derrida in *Politics of Friendship* elucidates the historical association between democracy and friendship. Democracy, for him, is a complex term constitutive of various conceptual components such as involvement, equality, and consent in relation to the development of the majority rule.⁴⁵ Ideally, in a democratic society, the voice of every individual and group is considered significant,

Capitalism's influence on democratic states authors more complex forms of dehumanizations that are aesthetically concealed by its promises of greater individual liberties, equitable social services, and ethical relations. In fact, advanced capitalism has engendered even some totalitarian and socialist states to reterritorialize into capitalist conduits.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 220. The association of the Marxist critical diagnosis of capitalism with the principles of distributive justice before the 1980s has contributed to the copious efforts of English-speaking scholars to synthesize Marxism and the normative principles of left-liberal political theory. Concurrent with this innovation, the French political grain gained a renewed interest to discourse on equality, human rights, and freedom. One of the contributions of these advancements to Deleuze and Guattari's career is the evolution from the problematic of the state apparatus and nomad toward the discussion on the critical relation between the universal capitalist market and virtual universality of a global democratic state. From the critique of psychoanalysis, Marxism, capitalism, and the State apparatus, the said shift from the 1980s onward widened and included engagement with existing institutions in conjunction with liberal democratic values, especially in relation to human rights and jurisprudence. All of these more manifest engagements with democratic principles and practices are articulated in *What Is Philosophy?* along with other interviews and essays such as his "Open Letters to Negri's Judges."

⁴⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. by T. Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

especially in relation to personal welfare, public policies, and political deliberations (such as the local and national elections). An egalitarian form of society does not arbitrarily privilege and exclude any individual, class, or group based on economic stature, religious affiliation, and cultural orientation. Although in reality, from the Ancient times until the modern period, Plato and Nietzsche, for instance, would attest that the practice of democracy is characterized by none other than a politics of oppression and degeneration regulated by the power-greedy elites. However, despite the criticism of democracy's imperfections by philosophers, it has gained more friends than foes throughout the history of political thought.

Deleuze and Guattari's project focuses on a diagnosis and critique of democracy and its pitfalls. Deleuzo-Guattarian politics may be of relevance on issues where a student's human rights are violated by his or her university authorities, where a member of the LGBTQ community is prohibited from running an administrative position in an office, and where an employee is prevented from being regularized in a company. However, while Deleuze and Guattari are still committed to the values of equality and freedom, which are known pillars of the democratic ideal, they do not subscribe to the logic of collective will, otherwise known as the rule of the majority. Minoritarian politics aspires to critically examine how laws are created and interpreted, and how minoritarians can challenge majoritarian principles in society so as to produce novel laws and relations. Moreover, minoritarian politics resuscitates desire's ability to fashion heterogeneous constellations and becomings. Democracy, as a minoritarian political principle, involves incessant agonism between conflicting opinions via experimentation and creation, thereby cultivating it into a politics of pure immanence.⁴⁶ Thus, we can call this new brand of democracy as minoritarian democracy or becoming-democracy.

Minoritarian democracy,⁴⁷ for example, would claim that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations should not be construed as a final document. Of course, it would only be considered as something definitive when we presuppose that human rights is an ahistorical concept, which is the fundamental assumption of traditional democracy. For minoritarian democracy, the application of the said declaration of human rights should not be performed in a 'one-size-fits-all' fashion because it would misrecognize the historico-cultural contexts and contingencies. As such, new rights or laws must be created if certain situations push our current laws to their limits. In Deleuze's interview with Negri, he claims that "it is jurisprudence that truly creates laws: this should

⁴⁶ See Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 165.

⁴⁷ See also Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 107.

not be left to judges."⁴⁸ It means that the conceptualization of new laws or rights must always recognize the voices of the citizens (especially of the human rights violations victims) and their dynamics with various social factors and circumstances or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the people's immanent mode of existence.⁴⁹

Deleuze's penchant for jurisprudence over universal rights entails his valorization of localized and open-ended creative processes that engender the emergence of novel and opportune rights. It is because jurisprudence is the creative modification of existing laws and rights to address varying and present circumstances. Such definition of jurisprudence serves as a springboard to the philosophy of becoming-revolutionary because it is faithful to the Deleuzo-Guattarian definition of philosophy as the invention of new concepts capable of counteractualizing the grain and becoming closer to life. As Deleuze argues:

To act for freedom, becoming-revolutionary, is to operate in jurisprudence when one turns to the justice system ... that's what the invention of law is ... it's not a question of applying 'the rights of man' but rather of inventing new forms of jurisprudence I have always been fascinated by jurisprudence, by law If I hadn't studied philosophy, I would have studied law, but precisely not 'the rights of man,' rather I'd have studied jurisprudence. That's what life is. There are no "rights of man," only rights of life, and so, life unfolds case by case.⁵⁰

Further, Deleuze and Guattari's enigmatic relation to the idea of democracy has resulted in a division among contemporary scholars, as cogently elucidated by Patton in *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, and Politics*. On the one hand, Nicholas Thoburn is sympathetic to the idea that Deleuze and Guattari are pursuing an alternative democratic politics. For Thoburn, the Deleuzo-Guattarian micropolitics is an alternative to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's neo-Gramscian post-Marxism.⁵¹ In the chapter "The Grandeur of Marx" of the book *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, Thoburn asserts that Deleuze's last book was supposed to be called *The Grandeur of*

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 230. See also *ibid.* 169.

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 103.

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "G comme Gauche," *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang (Paris: DVD Editions Montparnasse, 1996).

⁵¹ Cf. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 169.

Marx.⁵² Despite the challenges that haunt Marxism, it is still a very convincing critique of capitalism.⁵³ Despite Deleuze and Guattari's intellectual gratitude to Marx's philosophy and their revolutionary project which diverges from traditional Marxist revolutionary struggles that focus on the emancipation of the proletariat from capitalist alienation, they focus on the liberation of individual and collective desire-production from Oedipal and capitalist totalization (schizoanalysis) and the minoritarianization of codified and hierarchized principles and relations (becoming-minoritarian). In addition, their concept of revolution does not aspire for the capture of state power; rather, it seeks the crafting of new relations and subjectivity-formations by undermining all representationalist or molar codes in the society.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the scholar Philip Mengue thinks that the Deleuzo-Guattarian political philosophy completely departs from democracy. Mengue thinks that democracy is either devalued or merely given a secondary importance in the Deleuzo-Guattarian political philosophy. This antipathy to democracy is based on an uncritical acceptance of the Marxist *doxa* prevalent among French scholars in the post-1968 period.⁵⁵ Mengue argues that even though Deleuze and Guattari deserted the praxis of class struggle, their conceptualization of the relationship between modern forms of state and capital is still reliant on the principle of economic determinism. This allows them to replicate their version of the classical Marxist denunciation of liberal democracy as little more than a concession or alibi that serves only to maintain the capitalist system of exploitation and repression.⁵⁶ Mengue's accusation that Deleuze's politics is devoid of any positive relation with democracy is only legitimized from the vantage point of majoritarian or normative politics. However, as I argued earlier, this is beyond the scope of their democratic politics. After discussing the specificity of Deleuzian politics, we must now confront the question: *What is the place of democracy in Deleuze's political philosophy?*

In relation to the aforesaid query, Mengue asserts that Deleuzian politics is devoid of any institutional space to legitimize the value of any

⁵² Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003), 142.

⁵³ In relation to this, Deleuze develops his project as a kind of a politics of invention that surpasses the borders of normative politics and antagonizes the capitalist system. When Marx's philosophy of communism is creatively fused with Deleuze's politics, a new materialist ontology of the society characterized by difference and virtuality becomes a great possibility.

⁵⁴ At present, capital has survived the collapse of grand narrative and reconstructs its relation of production into an immanent system and force capable of configuring its own territory, limits, and overcoming. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1973), 37; Nicholas Thoburn, "The Grandeur of Marx," in *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

⁵⁵ Philip Mengue, *Deleuze et la question de la démocratie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 43.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-110.

political exchange. This is the consequence of a political theory bereft of transcendental categories and rigid codes that would backbone political normativity. Of course, Deleuze does not deny the importance of institutional spaces and regulative principles in the forms of laws to ground manifold actions within a political community. Otherwise, their project would simply end up being a populist politics in anarchy.

This problematic necessitates us to return to my discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's triadic politics. Going back to the essay, "Who are Our Nomads Today?," Lundy claims that contrary to the general belief that Deleuze's political philosophy espouses the felicitation of absolute deterritorialization and pure lines of flight, his project is informed by an "ethics of prudence."⁵⁷ Lundy's discussion presupposes that when the molecular line metamorphoses as the governing principle of politics, political instability is of high possibility. The same is true with the molar line because the segmentarized majoritarian politics is the sphere of State philosophy and rigid molar codes—the nemesis of the nomad. For Lundy, because the nomad is the figure of transfiguration, it might be more appropriate to delegate the nomad to the perpetually shifting space in-between the molar (striated) and the molecular (supple) lines, which they call the holey space.⁵⁸ This means that the Deleuzo-Guattarian politics is not simply concerned with perpetual transfiguration, polysemy, and fluidity in the same vein that it does not categorically despise the existence of certain infrastructures or institutions. Hardt and Negri support this claim in *Empire*:

Difference, hybridity, and mobility are not liberatory in themselves, but neither are truth, purity and stasis. The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of production. Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixture is.⁵⁹

The principles of difference, hybridity, and mobility, according to Hardt and Negri, are not by default revolutionary. Societal mechanisms, such as institutions, are necessary to regulate their productive processes and emancipatory potentials. Going back to Deleuzo-Guattarian politics, because

⁵⁷ Craig Lundy, "Who are Our Nomads Today? Deleuze's Political Ontology and the Revolutionary Problematic," in *Deleuze Studies*, 7:2 (2013), 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁹ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 156.

it embodies an ethics of prudence, then there is a place for institutions that would serve as sites for political discourses, transactions, and evaluations. For example, a legal institution must be established so that the rule of law would override everyone, especially in times when the minorities are abused by the majority. But it should be noted that these principles must be derived from a multilevel and multisectoral engagements, which is an alternative to normative or transcendental authority.

With the absence of a higher authority, politics in the Deleuzo-Guattarian context transforms into a vertical differentialization into the political field where dissenting opinions and political orientations are played out.⁶⁰ Of course, this is a difficult challenge because the pluralistic character of the modern and contemporary world does not revolve around a single notion of a democratic state. Concurrent with the singularities of democratic states are dissenting opinions (populist, nationalist, or philosophical) regarding justice and fairness that further support the institutional structure of democracy. Philosophical or national opinions are indispensable in the local configuration of each democratic society. As Deleuze and Guattari claim in *What Is Philosophy?*: “In each case philosophy finds a way of reterritorializing itself in the modern world in conformity with the spirit of a people and its conception of right. The history of philosophy therefore is marked by national characteristics or rather by nationalitarianisms which are like philosophical opinions.”⁶¹

Unfortunately, advanced capitalism universalizes all singular democratic states under the axiomatic and overarching principle of global capital. As Deleuze and Guattari critically elucidate:

If there is no universal democratic State ... It is because the market is the only thing that is universal in capitalism ... capitalism functions as an immanent axiomatic of decoded flows (money, labor, products). National States are no longer paradigms of overcoding but constitute the “models of realization” of this immanent axiomatic. In an axiomatic, models do not refer back to a transcendence ... It is as if the deterritorialization of States tempered that of capital and provided it with compensatory reterritorializations. Now, models of realization may be very diverse (democratic, dictatorial, totalitarian), they may be heterogeneous, but they are nonetheless isomorphous

⁶⁰ See Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 162.

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 104.

with regard to the world market insofar as the latter not only presupposes but produces determinate inequalities of development. That is why ... democratic States are so bound up with, and compromised by, dictatorial States that the defense of human rights must necessarily take up the internal criticism of every democracy.⁶²

An utter debasement of democratic politics or states occurs when everything about democracy is subsumed under the axiomatic of advanced or global capitalism. As such, all the egalitarian values of democracy reterritorialize into capitalist values that benefit the capitalist system alone. In his 1990 interview with Negri, Deleuze juxtaposes the sense in which the market as a sphere of exchange of commodities and capital is universal that further with the sense in which it generates both wealth and misery and distributes these in a manner that is neither universalizing nor homogenizing.⁶³ When there is a conflict between some fundamental political rights and the security of private property, for example, a higher priority is relegated to the latter. To be more specific, “when private property in the means of production,” Patton explains, “exists alongside the absence of mechanisms to provide minimal healthcare, housing or education, the basic welfare rights of the poor are effectively suspended.”⁶⁴ Capitalism’s supremacy over democracy only proves that “rights can save neither men nor a philosophy that is reterritorialized on the democratic State. Human rights will not make us bless capitalism.”⁶⁵ In particular, human rights based on capitalist configuration will not pave the way for the birth of a new people.⁶⁶ In general, democratic States that regulate them and serve as their milieu do not map a new earth.

⁶² Ibid., 106.

⁶³ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 234, 173. It is the principle of equality and the idea that such undeserved inequalities of condition are unjust that underpin Deleuze’s criticism of both capitalism and the liberal democratic states through which its control of populations is exercised. See Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 169.

⁶⁴ Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 188.

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 107

⁶⁶ Deleuze asserts in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, that the “people are what is missing.” See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 215. As such, absence is inextricably linked with the notion of a creative minority he explicates in *Negotiations*. The people’s existence is premised on the principle of minority or minoritarian; that is why they are absent. The fabulation of the ‘people-to-come’—“mass-people, world-people, brain-people, chaos-people” (Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?*, 218)—have certain attributes in common with philosophy and art: “their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame and to the present” (ibid., 110). Moreover, fabulation compensates the people’s incapacity to create art. They can participate in the very act of artistic fabulation, while art fabulates by addressing itself to a virtual people. The alliance between the people and the artistic minority, and their inclusion in artistic fabulation assumes the Deleuzo-Guattarian politicization of the Bergsonian fabulation.

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari contend that “this people and earth will not be found in our democracies,” but only in the thinking of the most untimely and radical of philosophers such as Nietzsche.⁶⁷

Deleuzian politics acts as an antithesis to the numerous infractions found in capitalist-configured democracy, which Thoburn refers to as social democratic politics.⁶⁸ Moreover, its anti-capitalist stance is directed toward the totalizing character of advanced capitalism that obliterates the singularities of present democratic states and subordinates all democratic principles, exchanges, and processes into the axiomatic of global capital. The variegated faces of misery it has introduced to mankind and to the world banalize human existence and numb our critical or revolutionary impulse. Although it is equipped with a self-reflexive attribute that offers the possibility of inaugurating universal history, it is a critical process that simply aspires for its internal fortification and expansion. A capitalist-configured democracy, therefore, does not provide us radical and creative means to antagonize the present state of affairs toward a people and world-to-come. It is only at this critical point, I should say, that Mengue’s main argument makes sense.

Becoming-Democracy and Minoritarian Becoming

Given the various capitalist-authored injustices and democracy-related predicaments, Parnet interrogates Deleuze in *L’Abécédaire* interview: *what does it mean to be on the Left?* Enormous poverty experienced by millions of people worldwide invalidates the belief that the good life is still possible. In several depressed places, the variegated appearances and implications of poverty such as massive death and moribund healthcare system dishearten us to find any reason for existence anymore. Being on the Left, for Deleuze, implies, “starting with the edges ... and knowing how, and say what one might, knowing that these problems that must be dealt with ... [Being on the Left] is really finding arrangements, finding world-wide assemblages.”⁶⁹

In other words, starting with the edges and searching for minoritarian constellations that would aid us to critically engage with different forms of injustices (specifically poverty) entail one’s adherence to the principle of becoming-minoritarian. In general, the said principle of becoming contends that the ‘majority’ or majoritarian rule is an abstract concept and arbitrary standard because its political identity is simply

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 108

⁶⁸ Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics*, 9, 42.

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Parnet, “G comme Gauche,” *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet*.

grounded in a particular configuration of power and control.⁷⁰ The problem behind this majority rule paradigm is that it is prone to being manipulated by any prevailing collectivity or system (capitalist system) by which a particular configuration of power and control can assume a universal dominion over things.

Becoming-minoritarian, in addition, is nonteleological and does not privilege any minority as the sole revolutionary agent of the future or the collectivity that would antagonize all forms of oppression emanating from the majoritarian rule. The rhizomatic and molecularized trajectories of revolutionary transformations and the democratization of the revolutionary agency portray becoming-minoritarian as becoming-democratic. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that becoming-minoritarian refers to the potentiality of an individual or groups to deviate from the majoritarian politics or the normative standards in the society and to craft novel relations and intensities.⁷¹

Becoming-minoritarian not only undermines the rigid walls of majoritarian codifications in the society. More importantly, it puts a premium on the “process” of differentializing totalized representations in the same vein that Deleuze and Guattari valorize the “schizophrenic process,” instead of the schizophrenic himself or herself as articulated in *Anti-Oedipus*. Put differently, becoming-minoritarian empowers free and creative desiring-machines to radicalize the manifold sedentary spaces maintained by State philosophy through continuous mutations. In this manner, its interstitial distance from majoritarian politics is conditioned by its thrust of not acquiring the terrain of the majority.⁷²

Minoritarian politics’ divergence from the majoritarian does not necessarily indicate their opposition with each other. For Deleuze and Guattari, the relation between the majoritarian and the minoritarian must be viewed in terms of difference between degree or configuration. Majoritarian standards and political activities are oftentimes fostered via democratic and legal procedures. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari perceive the majoritarian as a symbol of emptiness, for it represents no specific individual or group, they view the minoritarian as a representation of a departure from the representative politics of the majoritarian.⁷³ Becoming-minoritarian or minoritarian politics does not propose a definitive alternative to majoritarian

⁷⁰ See Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 170.

⁷¹ Cf. Mengue, *Deleuze et la question de la démocratie*, 53. For Mengue, the majoritarian democratic politics belongs to the realm of the segmentary line because it is not hospitable to becomings. In relation to political exchanges of dissenting opinions, politics, for him, must reconcile all dissenting voices toward the end.

⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 106

⁷³ Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 176.

politics. By alternative, I mean another codified molar category that would substitute the existing one. Such initiative, if pursued, simply reintroduces the old predicament disguised in a new appearance. Rather, becoming-minoritarian operates alongside the majoritarian in the sense that it critically antagonizes the latter to fashion new relations, connections, and intensities. In recent years, certain legislative standards (by virtue of becoming-minoritarian) already extend to nonwhites, nonmales, and non-Christians (in a nonbinary fashion) as a differentialization of the majoritarian categories of white, male, and Christian.⁷⁴ In short, even normative politics in today's time has already started to configure its own concept of creativity and has opened its doors to the kaleidoscopic voices of the subalterns (as a process, not as privileged or majoritarian subjectivities).

While there are incongruities between Mengue's description of democratic politics and Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian politics, the latter finds a kindred spirit in William Connolly. For Connolly, democracy is a distinctive form of cultural and political practice because it allows participation in collective decisions while enabling contestation of past settlements.⁷⁵ In this kind of politics, legal and institutional judgments, and convictions are always open for critical diagnosis and revision. In Deleuze's "Open Letter to Negri's Judges," he questions the legal basis of the charges against Antonio Negri, specifically "the lack of consistency in the charges themselves, the failure to follow ordinary logical principles of reasoning in the examination of evidence, and the role of the media in relation to this judicial procedure."⁷⁶ This self-critical typology of democracy undoubtedly crafts a space where even the subaltern groups and subaltern discourses are recognized in the reformulation of laws and policies. This becomes possible because this fluid politics is configured by subterranean shifts in the attitudes, sensibilities, and beliefs of people and communities. Deleuzian politics runs parallel to this democratic *ethos* in the sense that it challenges liberal democracy to always consider micropolitical processes, especially in the domains of decision-making and critical dialogical exchange.⁷⁷

Minority becomings modify the overall configurations of different social institutions. But these modifications always work alongside the majoritarian. Hence, minoritarian politics is not an alternative, but a critical complement to majoritarian politics or normative democratic politics where individuals and societies do not wholly succumb to the molar standards of

⁷⁴ Of course, alongside these judicial or legal developments are cultural initiatives or complements of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak.

⁷⁵ William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 103.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, 168.

the majoritarian but exist in a process of unremitting mutation and/or variation. If the quantity of the ways in becoming-minoritarian depends on the number of majoritarian principles in the society, then the same applies to becoming-democratic in relation to the various forms of democracy.

Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* ponder the principle of becoming-democratic as a becoming-revolutionary against the current state of affairs that further necessitates the invention of novel types of resistance and philosophical concepts toward a new plane of existence. The ardent call for resistance against the present is premised on philosophy's unrelenting antagonism against opinion.⁷⁸ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, additionally, Deleuze and Guattari claim that philosophy is the enemy of opinion. What is presupposed at this point is that collective and enlightened opinions matter in the *agora* of a democratic society. However, opinion becomes an object of censure when it is merely reduced to the voice of the majority capitulation and hence annihilates its dynamism and creativity.⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari write: "Political decision making necessarily descends into a world of micro-determinations, attractions and desires, which it must sound out or evaluate in a different fashion. Beneath linear conceptions and segmentary decisions, quanta."⁸⁰

In countries such as the Philippines, the vicious connivance of anti-intellectualism and populism has really vitiated the different sectors of the Philippine society such as education, industry, and politics.⁸¹ In the realm of politics, for instance, the anti-intellectualist and populist mindset of voters has resulted in the election of questionable representatives. This is the reason why humanities in general, and arts and philosophy in particular are indisputably underrated in this country. Although arts and philosophy cannot give us luxurious material rewards, their critical and emancipatory imports can inspire us to untiringly seek for greater causes in life and open us to the nonphilosophical aspects of life.

⁷⁸ See Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?*, 203

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 165.

⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 220-221. The struggle between popular and philosophical opinions is a quintessential problem in the history of philosophy. As early as Plato's time, the prevalence of opinions undoubtedly engendered the banality of ethico-political existence of the Ancient people. Such societal debasement became extremely hostile to great thinkers who wanted to search for the truth behind the illusions provided by different opinions. The Ancient triumvirate (i.e., Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) eventually devised their respective philosophical projects to liberate their fellowmen from the yoke of ignorance or deception.

⁸¹ See Caroline Hau, "Privileging Roots and Routes: Filipino Intellectuals and the Contest over Epistemic Power and Authority," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 62:1 (2014), 29-65.

Like equality, fairness, and freedom, Deleuze asserts in *Negotiations* that philosophy is not a Power in the sense that states, capitalism, and public opinion are. According to him:

Philosophy may have its great internal battles ... but they are mock battles. Not being a power, philosophy can't bathe with the powers that be, but it fights a war without battles, a *guerilla campaign* against them. And it can't converse with them ... nothing to communicate, and can only negotiate. Since the powers aren't just external things, but permeate each of us, philosophy throws us all into constant negotiations with, and a guerilla campaign against, ourselves.⁸²

The precarious pathway for philosophical opinions and thinking to flourish in society is to actively and critically engage with existing popular opinions and scheme of things that grounds the fair or just—the political vocation of philosophy.⁸³ What succeeds philosophy's negotiations with the powers that be is the creation of ways to confront manifold occurrences of dehumanization at present.⁸⁴ In this regard, becoming-democratic as the political vocation of philosophy is counteractualizing the "liberal democratic present." By 'counteractualize,' I mean a way of articulating movements of relative deterritorialization, that is, modifications in a people's opinions in relation to equality and fairness, among others. In addition, to counteractualize entails extending democracy's actualization and relevance within contemporary societies.⁸⁵

The minoritarian subjection of the majoritarian to different types of minority-becomings has broadened the configuration of democracy. In some parts of the world, women can now join the military; minorities can now enjoy the right to suffrage, and even marginalized groups can now form party-list organizations. Likewise, public institutions and infrastructures are reconfigured to become more politically and culturally accommodating. Restaurants and fastfood chains are presently more accessible to people with disabilities; public transportation already provides reserved seats for senior citizens, and universities administered by religious institutions already accept students from different religious orientations. These are only some of the legacies of a democratic space whose political exchange is characterized

⁸² Deleuze, *Negotiations*, vii. Emphasis mine.

⁸³ Cf. Paul Patton, "Becoming-Democratic," in *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 189.

⁸⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 171.

⁸⁵ Cf. Patton, "Becoming-Democratic," 190.

by openness, criticality, and fluidity. Such minoritarian-becomings advance one of the significant vectors of becoming-democratic in the contemporary period.

Concluding Remarks

Contemporary versions of becoming-democracy are not limited to the Deleuzian philosophical milieu. Chantal Mouffe's theorization of radical democracy is one example. In *The Return of the Political*, she expounds her theory of radical democracy. Informed by the diversity and complexity of current societal relations, her radical democracy project does not presuppose a universal or ahistorical subject. Rather, it is constitutive of decentered agencies, which are products of various conjunctions and disjunctions of subject positions. As Mouffe opines:

(N)o identity is ever definitively established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject positions are articulated. What emerges are entirely new perspectives for political action, which neither liberalism, with its idea of the individual who only pursues his or her own interest, nor Marxism, with its reduction of all subject positions to that of class, can sanction, let alone imagine.⁸⁶

Another illustration of becoming-democracy can be found in Rosi Braidotti's philosophy of Posthumanism. It is informed by various ecological catastrophes and the threat of extinction posed by technological advancements (artificial intelligence). Primarily, her brand of critical posthumanism antagonizes the humanist tradition and western philosophy's disregard of the *zoe* (nonhuman life). These predicaments are aggravated by the intricacies and perils posed by technological advancements. Moreover, her critical posthumanism critically diagnoses advanced capitalism's recomposition of man, i.e., in creatively appropriating these humanist and global crises toward a pseudo-united humanity, which is merely a capitalist ploy to convert life itself into a capital.

The different vectors or ways of becoming-democratic or becoming-minoritarian (as becoming-revolutionary) portrayed in and outside the Deleuzian territory, would always receive critical oppositions from the very

⁸⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 12-13.

principle they attempt to undermine or differentialize. The axiomatic of capitalism, which is always operating and overcoming itself, would craft its version of counteractualization to respond to our minoritarian struggle against several expressions of dehumanization, injustice, and inequality.⁸⁷ Once the dynamic, agonistic, and minoritarian features of political relations and the affirmative conviction of philosophers to counteractualize the intolerable present vanish, everything would be totalized by advanced capitalism, and more human miseries would plague the world. More importantly, the invention of concepts toward a people-to-come and the “conjunction of philosophy or of the concept with the present milieu”⁸⁸ would just be an empty vision.

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⁸⁷ In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari lucidly describe capitalism’s immanence and creativity: “the strength of capitalism indeed resides in the fact that its axiomatic is never saturated, that it is always capable of adding a new axiom to the previous ones. Capitalism defines a field of immanence and never ceases to fully occupy this field. But this deterritorialized field finds itself determined by an axiomatic, in contrast to the territorial field determined by primitive codes.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 250.

⁸⁸ Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?*, 100.

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Toward an Aesthetic Community: A Manifesto for a Revolution to Come¹

Jesus Emmanuel S. Villafuerte

Abstract: The artist has been given a much-privileged role in modern society; a profession which in earlier times was considered not different from other types of professions is now regarded in higher esteem, indeed not just as another form of labor but a divine calling. In modern times, the artist has become a sort of god himself, a creator. It is thus without surprise that the artist-creator, with the awareness of his special role in society, has claimed more than once, and in varying ways, the autonomy of his position and his art; for the artist-creator, art is detached from the exigencies of class conflict, and can circumvent the politics and ideology that operate in the production of almost everything, from chairs and utensils to cultural artefacts, under this era of global capitalism. Art has veered away from its original ethico-representative logic and has closely resembled a cult that asks for uncritical veneration. Theodor Adorno for his part, offers a negation of this arrogant belief. He mentions in his last book and magnum opus, *Aesthetic Theory*, that “for absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole.”² This specific passage questions the notion of freedom in art, or its possibility of truly being free, in relation to the general unfreedom being experienced by man. With this in mind, I will attempt to engage the artist’s perception of his superiority and offer ways on how he could reformat his modes of thinking and making. First, I will discuss the historical circumstances that caused the elevation of the artist’s position and perception in society; second, I will discuss the rise of the curator, the prophet of the museums and galleries, and how his recognition of his power or lack thereof could play a vital role in ushering the museums and galleries of the future; third, I will talk

¹ An earlier version of this paper bearing the title “The Task of the Artist in a Systematized Society: A Manifesto for A Revolution to Come” was presented at the First *Kritike* Conference: *Critical Theory at the Margins* held at the Martyrs’ Hall, University of Santo Tomas, 1-2 December 2017.

² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. and ed. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 1.

about the tasks of the artist and his art in this era where genuine freedom is almost impossible to achieve; and fourth, drawing from Rancière, I will argue that the artist must leave the museums and galleries and forge connections with the common people, in order to “invent new models of social relations,” which would ultimately lead to the creation of an aesthetic community.

Keywords: aesthetic community, curator, artistic resistance, homo aestheticus

Burn the Museums, Ransack the Galleries

“There is no art without eyes that see it as art.”
—Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*

There was a point in history when artistic objects, instead of being fetishized commodities sold at auction houses for hefty, almost scandalous, amounts, had utilitarian purpose because they were deeply rooted in the community. Rancière calls this mode of artistic production as the ethical regime of art, which is “characteristic of Platonism” and “is primarily concerned with the origin and telos of imagery in relationship to the ethos of the community. It establishes a distribution of images—without, however, identifying ‘art’ in the singular—that rigorously distinguishes between artistic simulacra and the ‘true arts’ used to educate the citizenry concerning their role in the communal body.”³ The divide between simulacra and the true arts, between art as a poor imitation of reality and art as a vessel of didactic discourse, because exhibiting and emphasizing the necessity of an individual’s participation in the community, would be the primary concern of artificers and philosophers for a long time. But this model of artistic production proved to be unsustainable. As the artistic practice developed over time, it was imperative that new models of artistic production would be formed. In Rancière’s cartography of artistic modes, what followed the ethical regime is the representative regime. This regime is “an artistic system of Aristotelian heritage” in which imitation and simulacra have been liberated “from the constraints of ethical utility and isolates a normatively autonomous domain with its own rules for fabrication and criteria of evaluation.”⁴ In the representative regime, art lost its ethical value and became divorced from the idea of the community—during the advent of the representative regime, the artist started viewing himself as an autonomous

³ Gabriel Rockhill, Translator’s Introduction to Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

figure, a creature with special faculties that must be treated differently from the rest of the society.

At the turn of the 19th century, the representative regime of the artistic order, which was the primary mode of artistic practice at that time, was superseded by the aesthetic regime of art. The representative regime, until then, had been the dominant force in the artistic landscape. In this regime, there is rigidity in terms of subject matter for the arts, meaning, not everything can be represented and transformed into art. In some ways, this specific artistic mode functioned as an extension, albeit a rewired one, of the ethical regime of the arts which originated during the time of Plato. While both the ethical and representative regimes carried the logic of “mimesis,” the representative regime, which effected a break from the ethical regime, is different in that representation in this particular regime had lost its ethical value, whereas representation in the ethical regime served a utilitarian purpose while simultaneously critiquing “visual simulacra.”

In the current aesthetic regime of art, representation has been democratized, as Rancière would say in his book *The Future of the Image*, in the advent of the latest regime: “there are no longer appropriate subjects for art ... but a general availability for all subjects for all artistic form whatsoever,” that is, in the current regime “hierarchies, and genres, and subject matter” have been effectively overturned and replaced, which, in effect, liquefied the borders of art.⁵ Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes*, a painting depicting a worn and overused pair of peasant shoes would not have been a viable artistic piece during the time of the Renaissance when artistic pieces aside from portraying biblical moments, portrayed the extravagance of kings and nobles.

During the time of the shift to the new regime, the commodification of art intensified: critics would consider the establishment of museums and galleries as one of the main contributing factors to this, which is correct, but oftentimes the critique stops at this point, which is disastrous as it does not explain the historical condition responsible for the rise of museums and galleries. What should be mentioned is that the rise of galleries and museums was brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe. And when capital started expanding, it overturned the old feudalistic modes of production, and this expansionist logic of capital, which operated initially in the economic aspect of social relations, eventually exercised its dominance over the field of artistic production. While capital’s exercise of dominance over economic and artistic fields arguably did not happen simultaneously but rather at very close intervals, we cannot deny that after World War I, when

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 118.

kingdoms and empires collapsed and the geopolitical boundaries of the world were re-established, different (not necessarily new) modes of artistic practices emerged and were put under the spotlight: for example, literary works would gain popularity because of mass market paperbacks and film would establish itself as a legitimate form of art that is different from the theater, from which, many argue, it originated. That art is not art without eyes that see it as such means that what is art is based solely on perception. It is a construct of the ruling ideology.

The galleries and museums helped expand the market of artworks, and by giving these artworks a common space where they could be observed and marveled at, removed from the walls and hallways of ordinary homes, museums and galleries effectively perched the status of the artwork as similar to that of the creations of God: one has to go to the church to worship God who created the universe; one has to go to the museum to admire a painting created by an artist. This commodification of art would be a recurring object of theoretical critiques, philosophical treatises, and manifestoes. The museum is a space where the sensible is created, where the passive spectators get interpellated. Rancière says that a museum “is not only a specific building but also a form of apportioning the common space and a specific mode of visibility.”⁶ A common sensorium is created in the museum, this sensorium is then transferred and distributed among those who visit it.

Some artists have recognized the necessity to critique this fetishism and the existing relations in the mode of production in creative industries. In 1974, artist Gustav Mertzger provided a two-paragraph manifesto when he was asked to participate in an exhibit by the London Institute of Contemporary Arts titled *Art into Society – Society into Art: Seven German Artists*. The manifesto calls for fellow artists to stop making art for a period of three years, because for him, “the total withdrawal of labor is the most extreme challenge that artists can make to the state.”⁷ Raunig explains that this call by Mertzger is an attempt to “break through the dialectic of

⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 69.

⁷ Here is Mertzger’s entire text: “Throughout the entire twentieth century, artists have attacked the prevailing methods of production, distribution and consumption of art. These attacks on the organization of the art world have gained momentum in recent years. This struggle, aimed at the destruction of existing commercial and public marketing and patronage systems, can be brought to a successful conclusion in the course of the present decade.

“The refusal to labour is the chief weapon of workers fighting the system: artists can use the same weapon. To bring down the art system, it is necessary to call for years without art, a period of three years—1977–1980—when artists will not produce work, sell work, permit work to go on exhibitions, and refuse collaboration with any part of the publicity machinery of the art world. This total withdrawal of labour is the most extreme collective challenge that artists can make to the state.” As quoted in Gerald Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge: Industries of Creativity*, trans. by Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2013), 138.

destruction and creation.”⁸ The roles of artists imposed by the market are either as a creator or as a destroyer; Mertzger provided a possible escape from this dichotomy. The radical logic behind Mertzger’s solution must be talked about. He compared the labor of the artists to that of the proletarians, the common wagedworkers; with this, he arrived at the solution that to paralyze the art market, artists should imitate what the workers do when they try to paralyze the capitalist system, that is, participate in strikes.

During the 1968 student revolt in France, one of the most famous slogans of the revolutionaries was “*l’art est mort, ne consommez pas son cadavre*” which translates to “*art is dead, do not consume its corpse.*”⁹ This death that we speak of does not necessarily mean the death or collapse of artistic modes and systems; rather, what the revolutionaries of May 1968 refer to with death is the *bourgeoisification* of art that has stymied its liberative potential, and how because of this very same *bourgeoisification*, art veered away from its original ethical purpose of educating individuals about their function in the community. It is art’s historical role that died. The slogan is important as it shows a specific form of resistance to the prevailing notion of art, exposing its contradictions and offering an agenda to change it. But as radical as slogans could be, they, paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* do not survive the triumph or failure of revolutions. Slogans exist in the moment of the revolution, at particular and specific temporal junctures and become obsolete afterwards, once the new system has been introduced. As we all know, the 1968 student revolt would fail and would create disillusionment among its participants. And Rancière would even go so far as to say that the 1968 student revolt in France equipped capital in a time of crisis with new ideas, and new weapons, in dealing with contrary movements. And yet, failures as they may appear to some, it is up to us to derive from these failures lessons that we can utilize in our future engagements with enemies.

In Germany, in the ‘50s, Theodor Adorno became infamous among scribes for his pronouncement in the essay *Cultural Criticism and Society* that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”¹⁰ This passage is often misinterpreted or read reductively as saying that art has reached a point when it has become obsolete or useless. Indeed, this misreading is most unfortunate as it fails to underscore the issue at which Adorno was pointing his finger and instead makes Adorno appear as if he was an incorrigible pessimist (which we can argue that he was but that requires another paper)

⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁹ See Red Marriott, “Slogans of 68,” in *libcom.org* (30 April 2008), <<https://libcom.org/history/slogans-68>>.

¹⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 34.

who believed that beauty can never be achieved especially after an event as dreadful as World War II.¹¹ What Adorno really meant was that poetry, as part and symptom of the project of enlightenment which signifies the new heights achieved by the intellect of man, has become a failure because enlightenment which was supposed to bring about civilization, progress, and all the positive values that come with it, such as harmony, technological advancement, and so on, has instead brought war, doom and countless deaths, and fascist regimes. Art was even used as a channel for spreading propaganda. Even artists, who supposedly are the “antennae of the race,” supported openly and even in secret fascist leaders.¹² Everyone is familiar with the anecdote that when the *Valkyrie* played at an opera house in Israel, the Jews in the audience stood up and walked out, rage visible on their faces, because Wagner, the composer of the piece, while did not openly support the Nazis, had been a huge influence on them in promoting German nationalism. Hence, the end of poetry or the barbarism of poetry is necessarily the manifestation of what Adorno calls the irresistible regression which is the curse of irresistible progress. What Adorno effectively says is that if the project of enlightenment is a failure, continuing it is an exercise in futility.

But to face the problem of the arts and artistic production with only pessimism in mind would simply be disastrous. What we should do instead is hold on to that utopian agenda of art and strive for a form of art that is emancipatory, and which is necessarily utopian. But what specific form of art is this? And additionally, what is to be done to achieve this form of art that we mentioned?

¹¹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer further elaborate the failures of the project of enlightenment in their book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The project of Enlightenment, which began as a break from the Dark Ages, was, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, “the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.” See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), 3.

¹² I use the quotation “antennae of the race” ironically as the one who said it was Ezra Pound, a known fascist supporter. In the 1940s, when Ezra Pound worked as a broadcaster for Rome Radio, he infamously espoused anti-Semitic and fascist propaganda, much to the chagrin of people who belong to his circle, including Ernest Hemingway, the famous novelist and an erstwhile friend. Hemingway eventually said of Pound that the latter deserves “punishment and disgrace but what he really deserves more is ridicule.” See Josh Jones, “Ernest Hemingway Writes of His Fascist Friend Ezra Pound: ‘He Deserves Punishment and Disgrace’ (1943),” in *Open Culture* (22 August 2013), <<http://www.openculture.com/2013/08/hemingway-writes-of-his-friend-the-fascist-ezra-pound-he-deserves-punishment-and-disgrace-1943.html>>.

The Birth of the Curator

“It is evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore,
not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.”

—Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

Not only had the expansion of capital in the cultural field created new forms of art or elevated the status of previously existing ones, it also paved the way for the birthing of a new kind of intellectual as a consequence of the institutionalization of museums and galleries: the curator.¹³ A product of necessity, the curator would serve as the mediator between the artwork and the spectator. In his book *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, Austrian philosopher and theorist Gerald Raunig utilizes *The Courage of Truth*, one of Foucault’s last lectures, to explain the dynamics of knowledge production. Raunig explains that, according to Foucault, there are three main figures of knowledge transference: the teacher, the wise man, and the prophet. The teacher is the “expert” who “passes a uniform and static form of knowledge from one pupil to another as part of long chain of tradition.” The wise man is the hermit, the one who has shunned the world and has “withdrawn into himself;” he has “knowledge of the being of the world and of things.” Lastly, the prophet has “the role of the teacher, but at the same time he does not speak for himself, in his own name.”¹⁴ The curator belongs to two of these categories: the teacher and the prophet. As a teacher, the curator explains to the uninitiated the essence of the exhibit, the rhyme and reason behind the assemblage of artworks, even the individual merits of the artistic pieces that constitute the exhibit; as a prophet, the curator enunciates, whether he is conscious of it or not, the language of his Absolute—hence, the curatorial assessment is the very manifestation of the curator’s subjectivity. The prophet is God’s representative on Earth, the purveyor of truth. The curator is the prophet of the galleries and the museums.

Art critic Boris Groys likens museums to cemeteries and curators to gravediggers. According to Groys, a museum is “much more a cemetery than

¹³ In an informal conversation with activist and art critic Angelo Suarez, I asked him if my assumption regarding the rise, or birthing as mentioned above, of the curator as an event necessitated by the rise of museums and galleries is correct, he replied that it is not so much a birthing of a new breed of intellectual than the professionalization of what was already a previously existing one. Angelo Suarez is a poet, artist, and critic. He won the Palanca for poetry when he was just 19 years old after which he became an instant celebrity among the literati, with some even calling him the new *enfant terrible* of Philippine letters. He would later on abandon traditional poetry and produce some of the most refreshing works of poetry and fiction in the last decade: *Circuit: The Blurb Project*, *Philippine English: A Novel*, and *Dissonant Umbrellas: Notes Toward a Gesamtkunstwerk*, among others. As an art critic, he is known as one of the few intellectuals who engage in institutional critique.

¹⁴ Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge*, 56-57.

any other” because “real cemeteries do not expose the corpses of the dead, but rather conceal them, just as the Egyptian pyramids did.”¹⁵ In museums, the corpses of the past regimes are exposed, aestheticized, and glorified. Museums do not only remind us of the past, there are moments when a museum even privileges the past over the present. Take as an example Hito Steyerl’s reaction when she saw a refurbished World War II tank displayed inside a museum:

One might think that the active role of a tank would be over once it became part of a historical display. But this pedestal seems to have acted as a temporary storage from which the tank could be redeployed directly into battle. Apparently, the way into a museum—or even into history itself—is not a one-way street. Is the museum a garage? An arsenal?¹⁶

The position of the curator is powerful. As mediator, he pulls down the artwork from the realm of the sublime and presents it, like an offering, to the spectator. He exists in that interstitial space between understanding and obscurity—the curator makes understanding possible and at the same time, he can be a hindrance to understanding. With these said, it begs us the question: is the curator an agent of capital who plays an active role in the reproduction of the fetishizing logic of the galleries and museums? The answer is dialectical: while we can say that the curator is necessarily always already trapped in logic propagation as in Foucault’s figure of the teacher who imparts knowledge which is the knowledge he received from his predecessors, the emancipated curator (as I would like to call) who is self-reflexive—meaning, someone who is aware of the inherent contradictions in his role and power would, by virtue of his awareness, be able to subvert the logic imposed on him—instead of being a mere tool in propagating and reproducing the logic of museums and galleries, would be able to appropriate the very same space given to him as a locus of launching his critique—a locus where he could offer, borrowing a term from Frederic Jameson, *radical alternatives* to the status quo. In the end, what we should look for as the primary characteristic of a curator is his recognition of art’s historico-ethical function: that is, art is representative as it springs from the collective experiences of the people; it must serve not an individual but a community.

¹⁵ Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016), 18.

¹⁶ Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (London: Verso, 2017), 1.

Bring Art Back to the People

We should burn museum and galleries. Not literally, of course. What is being proposed in this paper is not material destruction in the manner of the Nazis during World War II or the Romans when they burned the library of Alexandria. It is not because we should be averse to violence, nor because revolutions should be despised. There are times that call for bloody revolutions and upheavals. A utopian world, a future which is unlike the present as one theoretician calls it, would not be possible on the parleying table. But in this specific case, we must recognize the potentialities of museums and galleries, the possibility of them serving as repositories of knowledge and collective wisdom, a place where cultural artefacts can be found, not for capitalist consumption but as a reminder, following Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?*, for the people to come and make sense of how they should continuously struggle against renewed forms of power and systems of domination. As this is not the current orientation of museums, we should all aspire of seeing the museums and galleries of the future the way we aspire and fight for a society which is unlike what we have today. The museums and galleries are the locus of our contention. This is the place where we will launch our war.

What is meant by burning museums and galleries is simple: to get rid of the old in favor of the new. What we should seek is the refunctioning of the logic of museums and galleries and to overhaul our archaic perception of art. What we should do in order to achieve it is to critique, in every way imaginable and as relentlessly belligerently as possible, the notion of art as a part of the logic of capital which renders it always already commodified and which has confined it in its gilded cage. We must recognize that the artwork is not a commodity but an assemblage of sensory fabrics and, according to Rancière, this common fabric is what binds us together as a community. Simultaneously, our critiques should contain a recognition of art's historicity, an attempt to bring art back to the people, that is, back to its previous historical function—after all, Rancière believes, art and aesthetics defined as “ways of doing and making” spring from the collective endeavors of people. Rancière writes in his book *Aisthesis*:

Poetry is the flowering of a form of life, the expression of a poeticity immanent to the ways of life of a people and its individuals. Poetry exists in poems only if it already exists latently in forms of life It exists in the sensations, gestures and attitudes of these peasants, grooms, coachmen, hunters and butchers, who celebrate the symbolic potential of nature ‘in the choice of their

life, and not in their choice of words.' Finally, it exists in words, of which everyone is a silent poem, the translation of an original relation with those other words that are visible things.¹⁷

Poetry or art in general is an expression of a poeticity immanent to the collective experiences of people. And by bringing art to the people, by asserting its historical function as a way of life, a way of representing an individual role in the community, and wresting it away from the clutches of capital and commodity fetishism, we are not only fostering what Rancière calls "demiurgic projects of a 'new life'," but more importantly, we are "[weaving] a common temporality of art best encapsulated in the formula: a new life needs a new art."¹⁸ This temporality ensures the unimpeded production of art and artistic modes thereby paving the way for the creation of new forms of "doing and making" which the community needs. This will give art a certain sense of ethical utility similar to the ethical regime in the time of Plato, far from its current function as a commodified spectacle.

But the task does not end with bringing art back to the people; it is only the beginning, as the final goal is to create an aesthetic community, the function of which will be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first step in bringing art back to the people is to follow what Adorno proposes in his book, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, which is to take the market out of the equation in the process of producing art, or to produce art that is not marketable at all because "he who offers for sale something that no one wants to buy, represents even against his will, freedom from exchange."¹⁹ Art that has escaped commodification is the form of art that Rancière talks about when he says that it is something that is rooted in the community. But if it being sold out is inevitable, then, at least the art produced should function as an immanent critique of its very own contradictions, or the process that made it possible.²⁰

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. by Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), 60.

¹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. By Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 121.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2004), 68.

²⁰ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 178. Drawing from Adorno, Rancière explains at length the idea of art's social function: "The idea of an art that accompanies the resistance of the dominated and promises a liberty and an equality come to the very extent that it affirms its absolute resistance to engaging in any compromise with the tasks of political militancy or of the aestheticization of forms of daily life. This is summed up by Adorno's expression: 'art's social function is not to have one.' On this view, art does not resist purely by ensuring its distance because it occupies the site of an impassable contradiction. For Adorno its autonomous appearance and the reality of the division of labor, mast, Ulysses' mastery is separated from the work of the sailors, their

Raunig narrates in his book, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, how in the '30s, in response to rise of fascism in Europe, activists led by Bertolt Brecht tried to develop an anti-fascist theater practice, "yet this theater did not want to stop at conveying political contents, but sought to overturn the hierarchical and organizational forms of bourgeois time at the same time."²¹ This form of theater, while acting as a platform for the expression of political and anti-fascist sentiments, also acted as an immanent critique of the bourgeois politics and logic that operate within the medium of the theater and the artistic plane as a whole. Hence, the function of the genuine political theater is necessarily dialectical.

Subvert the Logic of the Theater, Emancipate the Spectator

Nikolai Ceausescu, the late leader of Romania, was known for many things: his extravagance, his eccentricity, and his Stalinist "cult of personality," among others. His regime had established a lot of notable programs on culture and the arts, one of which is the pioneering of a type of socialist theater which was viewed by outsiders as rather quirky, weird, even bizarre. In his form of theater, when all the performances were over, the performers would gather on the stage, as all theater performers do. However, instead of wallowing in the glory and applause showered on them by the audience as appreciation for their impeccable performance, they would defy the logic of the theater, that is, they would face Ceausescu, smile at him and clap, as if it was Ceausescu, and not them, who just finished giving a brilliant performance. Ceausescu with his wife and aides would smile back and acknowledge the applause of the performers. In this process, there is a reversal of roles: the performer becomes the spectator, and the spectator, the performer. The theater's logic of domination is subverted. Of course, this might sound to be a perversion of the project of emancipation proposed by Rancière. After all, Ceausescu was deemed to be an evil dictator by western countries—if we follow this, what we will see is the power of the dictator at play. Additionally, it highlights the powerlessness of the thousands of ordinary spectators who are caught in the middle of two converging spectacles, because in this instance, the theater is duplicated: on one hand you have the performers on the stage, and on the other, you have Ceausescu himself who usurps the power of the theater and creates an invisible theater with him as the primary actor.

ears covered, and the song of the sirens. To denounce the capitalist division of labor and the commodity embellishment more effectively, Schoenberg's music must even be more mechanical, even more 'inhuman' than the Fordist assembly line."

²¹ Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge*, 54.

Following Rancière, the idea of the emancipation of the spectator is to narrow, if not totally destroy, the gap between the spectator and the work of art. The Ceausescu spectacle, although a perversion of the logic of emancipation, offers us a glimpse of its possibilities, of the passive spectator becoming active—only, the spectator, in this case Ceausescu, does not offer a critique of the spectacle rather, he becomes part of the spectacle itself:

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar, she observes, selects, compares and interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in in her own way—by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that is supposed to transmit it in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them.²²

An emancipated spectator is someone who recognizes that the theater renders him powerless and tries to subvert what the theater imposes on him.

Jacques Rancière urges us to prepare for a revolution that is sure to come, a revolution which “will be at once the consummation and abolition of philosophy; no longer merely ‘formal’ and ‘political’ it will be a ‘human’ revolution,” and this “human revolution is an offspring of the aesthetic paradigm.”²³ This revolution, abstract as it may seem to us now, is expected to change categories of meaning and destroy systems of domination in the artistic (where it will be waged first) and social fields. Perhaps this revolution which Rancière speaks of refers to the new regime of arts that will supersede the current regime of arts which asserts the continuity of history. Or perhaps, although seemingly highly unlikely, it refers to some revolution that will

²² Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 13.

²³ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 120.

overturn the social order. After all, he believes that a social revolution necessarily brings about artistic and intellectual emancipation. At any rate, we must prepare the groundwork for this revolution—the aesthetic field is not a neutral unmediated space; it is also a field of contention—we must recognize this, and most importantly, we must be actors on the theater of this coming revolution.

The Task of the Artist: Toward an Aesthetic Community

“Social emancipation was simultaneously an aesthetic emancipation, a break with the ways of feeling, seeing and saying that characterized working-class identity in the old hierarchical order.”
—Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*

The burning of museums and galleries could come in many forms, as earlier mentioned. It is a metaphor that signifies not the actual burning of museums and galleries, but the refunctioning of their logic. By burning museums and galleries, we are radicalizing and taking control of these spaces which are otherwise under the control of capital. The artist, of course, plays a vital role in this endeavor:

Although we no longer share early twentieth-century dreams of collective rhythmic or Futurist and Constructivist symphonies of the new mechanical world, we continue to believe that art has to leave the art world to be effective in “real life”: we continue to try to overturn the logic of the theatre by making the spectator active, by turning the art exhibition into a place of political activism or by sending artists into the streets of derelict suburbs to invent new models of social relations.²⁴

The artist must turn his back on the museum and the gallery and be with the people. He must immerse himself in their struggles, in effect “inventing new models of social relations.” The artist must shed the title of god-creator and be a producer instead. Perhaps a toiler for he must dirty his hands with the grime of labor together with wageworkers, peasants, petite-bourgeoisie. He must view his art as necessarily a product of the same system that renders other people powerless and impotent. By turning his back on museum and galleries, by fleeing the art world and connecting with ordinary people, the artist will reproduce/replicate what has been a recurring idea in this paper:

²⁴ Ibid., 137.

his ethico-historical role of depicting not just beauty or pain, but most importantly, the importance of an individual to the society. The artist must abandon claims of autonomy and freedom because, following Adorno, this freedom is just a mirage considering the relative unfreedom of the whole. Does this entail that the artist must be political in his art in the manner, for example, of the Soviet socialist realist? The answer is not necessarily. Politicization here means that the artist must recognize his problematic position in the current artistic grid, and corollarily, that he must devise ways of resisting the tyranny of the current dispensation through his art.

This fleeing from the art world, reminds us of what Deleuze says in *Dialogues*, that the highest aim of literature, and by extension, art in general, is to “to leave, to leave, to escape ... to cross the horizon, enter into another life ...” In other words, to flee and to trace lines of flight. The artist must, just like the figure of the schizoid, come out of his confinement inside the walls of galleries and museums and experience the world. The artist must not be transfixed in a single space, he must not cease moving, because to be transfixed, to cease movement and exist in a singular space is to necessarily grow roots, to be a tree planted on where he stands; one must instead be in multitudes of spaces. This flight is necessary because, according to Deleuze, “to fly is to trace a line, a whole cartography, one only discovers the world through a long, broken flight.”²⁵ An artist will only be capable of understanding his task the moment he effaces himself and becomes one with the multitude. The artist must, as Rancière proposed, be instrumental in the creation of an aesthetic community.

An aesthetic community is not a community of artists but a community bound by a common sensorial fabric, a community where the logic of the theater has been overturned and where each member treat each other as equals: “A ‘common sense’ is in the first instance, a community of sensible data: things whose visibility is supposed to be shared by all, modes of perception of these things, and the equally shareable meanings that are conferred on them.”²⁶ The current social setup has made thinking individuals unable to see themselves as part of a community. The logic of the museums and galleries has created gods out of normal human beings:

According to the idea of a ‘social nature’, forms of domination were a matter of sensory inequality. The human beings who were destined to think and rule did not have the same humanity as those who were destined to work, earn a living and reproduce. As Plato had put

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, rev. ed., trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 36.

²⁶ Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 102.

it, one had to 'believe' that God had put gold in the souls of the rulers and iron in the souls of the artisans. That nature was a matter of 'as if'; it existed in the form of the "as if" and it is necessary to proceed as if it existed. The artisans did not need to be convinced by the story in their innermost being. It was enough that they sensed it and that they used their arms, their eyes and their minds as if it were true. And they did so all the better in so far as this lie about their condition being adapted to their kind of soul corresponded to the reality of their condition. This is the point where the *as if* of the community constructed by aesthetic experience meets the *as if* at play in social emancipation. Social emancipation was an aesthetic matter because it meant the dismemberment of the body animated by that 'belief'.²⁷

The problem, as stated by Rancière, is sensorial—"sensory inequality" as he calls it, wherein some humans are deemed better than others precisely because some feel better than the others, some have "souls of gold" while others have "souls of iron." And the only way to destroy this specific mode of power relations/perception, of course, is by tinkling with the very foundation of this power relations, these problematic senses; by cutting the parts of the body that have become defective, by gouging the eyes that do not see and severing the gangrenous arms that could not feel. Social emancipation is aesthetic emancipation because by cutting the defective body parts and providing new parts whose sensorial capabilities are in tune with the sensorial capabilities of the others, we are effectively destroying forms of perceptions. Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* propose that a writer/artist must "wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion in view, one hopes, of the still missing people."²⁸ The aesthetic community will be populated by the still missing

²⁷ Ibid.,70.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), 76. Here is an extended quotation from the same section: "The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rend it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion – in view, one hopes, of the still missing people This is precisely, the task of all art and, from colors to sounds, both music and painting similarly extract new harmonies, new plastic or melodic landscapes, and new rhythmic characters that raise them to the height of the earth's song and the cry of humanity: that which constitutes tone, health, becoming, a visual sonorous bloc. A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering

people, by the people to come, the *homo aestheticus*, whose limbs move in unison, whose skin could feel the warmth of the sun or the cold touch of the wind, whose ears could hear the sonorous inflection of voices from different moments in history, whose eyes could see and distinguish the varicolored trees on a foreign landscape. The *homo aestheticus* is an individual, yet he knows that he is part of the multitude, the community; he has learned to erase his face but not his individuality. In the process of becoming, the artist must keep in mind that he does not produce art for the market, for the museums and the galleries, nor for the present; he produces art in anticipation of the people to come, in anticipation of the aesthetic community which he is trying to build.

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of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle. Will this all be in vain because suffering is eternal and revolutions do not survive their victory? But the success of a revolution resides only in itself, precisely in the vibrations, clinches, and openings it gave to men and women at the moment of its making and that composes in itself a monument that is always in the process of becoming, like those tumuli to which each new traveler adds stone."

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Ang SMisasyon ng Lipunang Pinoy

Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez

Abstract: Taking its cue from phenomena called *McDonaldization*, *Disneyfication*, *Wal-Martization*, and the like, *SMization* is a neologism derived from the acronym “SM” that stands for Shoe Mart. SM is a business conglomerate in the Philippines and is deemed to be the most successful Filipino business enterprise. By *SMization*, I refer to the effective perpetuation and fortification of the neoliberal process in the Philippines and the broadening of its effect in all aspects of the lives of Filipinos: economic, social, religious, political, cultural, psychological, moral, ecological, and others. The SM conglomerate symbolizes the successful and effective entry of neoliberalism in the country. *SMization* may have many features but on this preliminary investigation, I will only explore three phenomena: hyper-consumerism, survival-of-the-fittest culture, and myth of upward mobility.

Keywords: *SMization*, neoliberalism, consumerism, survival-of-the-fittest

Nakakainip ang ganitong buhay
Nakakainis ang ganitong buhay
Nakakabaliw ang ganitong buhay
Di nakakaaliw ang ganitong buhay
—Yano (isang bandang Pinoy), “Esem” (*Yano*, 1994)

Panimula

Usung-uso na talagang gawing pandiwa ang maraming makabagong pangngalan: *Google* at *googling*, *YouTube* at *youtubing*, *Facebook* at *facebooking*. Subalit bago pa naging palasak ang mga ito, sumikat na noong dekada '80 ang salitang *McDonaldization* nang ilathala noong 1983 ng Amerikanong sosyolohistang si George Ritzer ang kanyang sanaysay na “The

McDonaldization of Society.”¹ Gamit ang kaisipan ng Alemang pilosopo na si Max Weber, sinabi ni Ritzer na tumutukoy ang *McDonaldization* sa patuloy na paglawak ng instrumental na rasonalidad—isaing rasonalidad na nagbibigay-diin sa kahusayan ng trabaho (*efficiency*), kasiguruhan at maaasahang resulta nito (*predictability*), katiyakan (*calculability*), at kontrol (*control*).² Pagkatapos mailathala ang sanaysay ni Ritzer, naging palasak na rin ang mga salita tulad ng *Disneyization* at *Disneyfication*,³ *Wal-Martization*,⁴ *Las Vegasization*,⁵ *Coca-Colonization*,⁶ at *eBayization*.⁷ Sa papel na ito, isasama ko na rin sa hanay ang isang penomenon sa Pilipinas na tatawagin kong *SMization* o *SMisasyon*.⁸

Bagama’t marami na ang nag-aaral tungkol sa *mall culture* sa larangan ng *media studies* at *consumer studies*, hindi pa rin kalabisang ituloy ang pagsusuri tungkol dito lalo na sa konteksto ng pinagpanibagong anyo ng Kapitalismo. Maituturo siguro sina Dong Abay ng bandang Yano at Rolando Tolentino na isang guro naman sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas bilang mga tagahawan ng gawaing-pagsusuri ng *malling phenomenon* sa bansa. Sa isang awit ni Abay na may pamagat na “Esem,” pinuna na niya ang magkahalong aliw at lungkot, salat at sagana, na nararanasan ng mga Pilipino sa tuwing papasok sa SM. Bahagi ng awit ang sumusunod na mga linya:

¹ George Ritzer, “The McDonaldization of Society,” *The Journal of American Culture* 6 (1983), 100-107. Pagkatapos ng sampung taon, inilathala ni Ritzer ang aklat na may parehong pamagat.

² Tingnan sa George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* (California: Pine Forge, 1993).

³ Sinabi ni A. E. Bryman na magkaiba raw ang *Disneyfication* at *Disneyization*. Tingnan sa A. E. Bryman, “The Disneyization of Society,” *The Sociological Review*, 47: 1 (1999), 25-47.

⁴ “...a change in the social relations of production where power shifts from suppliers-manufacturers to giant retailers, with the former trickling insecurity downwards to their flexible workforce in their search for disciplinary low-cost strategy.” Daryl Reed, Peter Utting, and Ananya Mukherjee-Reed, eds., *Business Regulations and Non-State Actors: Whose Standards, Whose Development?* (London: Routledge, 2012), 178.

⁵ Gamit ang kaisipan ni Neil Postman, sinabi ni Aaron Duncan na ang *Las Vegasization* ay tumutukoy sa unti-unting pagkahirati ng lipunan sa *glamor* at mga nagkikislapang ilaw, sa pustahan at sugal, at sa pangangailangan na laging dapat ay inaaliw at naaaliw. Aaron Duncan, *Gambling with the Myth of American Dream* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁶ Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (London: University of North Carolina, 1994).

⁷ Vladimir Madik, Aaron Ahuvia, and Elif Izberk-Bilgin, “Ebayization,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. by George Ritzer (USA: Blackwell, 2007).

⁸ Noong 2014, tiningnan ko sa *internet* kung meron nang gumamit ng salitang *SMization*. Wala akong nakita. Ang nakita ko ay ang salitang “smize” na ang ibig sabihin ay “to smile with your eyes.” Itinuturo raw ito sa mga nagmo-modelo: hindi lamang ngiti ng labi kundi mga matang ngumingiti rin. Walang kaugnayan dito ang nabuo kong salita na *SMization* na una kong binanggit sa isang panayam noong 2014. (Binasang papel bilang reaksiyon sa panayam ni Antonio M. Aureada, “St. Thomas and Education,” *Pope Leo XIII Lecture Series* (University of Santo Tomas, February 2014).

Patingin-tingin, di naman makabili
 Patingin-tingin, di makapanood ng sine
 ...
 Paamoy-amoy, di naman makakain.
 Busog na sa tubig
 Gutom ay lilipas din
 Patuloy ang laboy
 Walang iisipin
 Kailangang magsaya, kailangang magpahangin

Sa isang aklat naman tungkol sa kulturang popular, tinalakay at sinuri ni Tolentino ang pulitikang bumabalot sa mga penomenon katulad ng *computer games*, *skin whitener*, droga, at *mall*. Bagama't ang pagtangkilik ng mga Pilipino sa *mall* ay nagdudulot ng maraming kasiyahan, ipinaliwanag ni Tolentino na kaakibat din nito ang kasawian.⁹ Ipinagpatuloy ni Tolentino ang masusing pag-aaral ukol sa kultura ng mall sa Pilipinas sa kanyang aklat na *Kulturang Mall*.¹⁰

Itong kasalukuyang sanaysay ay isa na ring pagpupugay, pagpapatuloy, at pagpapasigla ng mga kaisipan nina Abay at Tolentino. Susuriin ko kung paanong nagkaroon ng ugnayan ang ideolohiya ng neoliberalismo at ang pagdanas ng mga Pilipino sa SM.

Ano ang Neoliberalismo?

Ayon kay David Harvey, mula pa noong dekada '70 bumaling na ang maraming mga lipunan patungo sa neoliberalistang pag-iisip at praktis.¹¹ Noong 1999, binanggit ni Robert McChesney na ang neoliberalismo ang namamayaning politikal at ekonomikong teorya ng ating panahon.¹² Sinabi naman nina Saad-Filho at Johnston na nabubuhay tayo ngayon sa panahon ng neoliberalismo.¹³ Samantalang sa palagay ni Perry Anderson, ito na nga ang pinakamatagumpay na ideolohiya sa kasaysayan ng daigdig.¹⁴ Dagdag

⁹ Rolando Tolentino, *Sa Loob at Labas ng Mall Kong Sawi / Kaliluha'y Siyang Nangyayaring Hari: Ang Pagkatuto at Pagtatanghal ng Kulturang Popular* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 2001).

¹⁰ Rolando Tolentino, *Kulturang Mall* (Manila: Anvil, 2004).

¹¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

¹² Robert McChesney, Introduction to Noam Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories, 1999), 7.

¹³ Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, Introduction to *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto, 2005), 1.

¹⁴ Perry Anderson, "Renewals," *New Left Review* 1 (January to February 2000), 17.

pa ni Edward Said, nilamon na nga raw ng neoliberalismo ang daigdig kaakibat ang dulot nitong panganib sa demokrasya at kalikasan.¹⁵ Sa palagay ng maraming kritiko, ito rin ang dahilan kung bakit patuloy na lumalaki ang agwat ng kawalan ng pagkakapantay-pantay sa pagkamit ng iba't ibang uri ng kapital—kultural, ekonomiko, sosyal, politikal, at enbayronmental.¹⁶

Hindi madaling bigyan ng ganap na pakahulugan ang neoliberalismo.¹⁷ Tinuran ni Wendy Larner na maaaring tingnan ang neoliberalismo bilang polisiya, ideolohiya, at pamamahala (*governmentality*).¹⁸ Maaari ngang tumukoy ang neoliberalismo sa napakaraming bagay, kaisipan, proseso, programa, polisiya, at resulta.¹⁹

Walang dudang ang salitang-ugat ng neoliberalismo ay “liberalismo.” Nakaugat ito sa *classical liberal economics* nina Adam Smith at David Ricardo noong ika-18 siglo. Sa pananaw ng mga ekonomistang ito, mabuti ang Kapitalismo bilang isang sistemang ekonomiko na nakabatay sa *laissez-faire* at malayang merkado. Hindi raw dapat nakikialam ang pamahalaan sa pagpapatakbo ng ekonomiya sapagkat merong mga sariling batas-likás ang merkado at merong “di-nakikitang kamay” na sapat na upang maging maayos ang takbo ng larangang ekonomiko.²⁰ Pagkatapos ng napakahabang panahong pamamayagpag ng *classical liberal economics*, pinagdudahan at tinalikuran ito nang bumagsak ang merkado noong 1929 na nagdulot ng *Great Depression*. Namayani ang ekonomikong kaisipan ni John Maynard Keynes, ang utak sa likod ng *New Deal* at ng makabagong *welfare state* o *social democratic state*. Sa sistemang *Keynesian*, itinataguyod ang malaking papel ng pamahalaan sa pamamahagi ng yaman ng lipunan at sa pangangasiwa ng ekonomiya.²¹ Subalit nang magkaroon ng krisis ang *Keynesian economics* noong dekada '70, muling nabuhay, nanumbalik, at sumigla ang mga pinagpanibagong saligan ng *classical liberal economics* sa tulong ng mga kaisipan nina Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, at Milton

¹⁵ Edward Said, “Problems of Neoliberalism,” in *ZNet* (20 September 2000), <<https://zcomm.org/zcommentary/problems-of-neoliberalism-by-edward-said/>>.

¹⁶ Kevin Ward and Kim England, “Introduction: Reading Neoliberalization,” in *Neoliberalization: States, Networks, Peoples*, ed. by Kim England and Kevin Ward (USA: Blackwell, 2007), 2.

¹⁷ Philip Mirowski, “Postface: Defining Neoliberalism,” in *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. by Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 421.

¹⁸ Wendy Larner, “Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 63:1 (Autumn 2000).

¹⁹ Ward and England, “Introduction: Reading Neoliberalization,” 11.

²⁰ Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-3.

²¹ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2007), 17.

Friedman.²² Ito na nga ang tinatawag na neoliberalismo na agad nagkaroon ng kongkretong mukha sa mga polisiya nina Auguste Pinoche ng Chile, Ronald Reagan ng Estados Unidos, at Margaret Thatcher ng Gran Britanya.²³

Bilang isang polisiya, tinatalikuran ng neoliberalismo ang *welfare state* habang mas masigasig na isinusulong ang malayang merkado. Sabi nga, “*Markets good. Government bad.*”²⁴ Kaakibat nito, inililipat ang mga pag-aaring pampubliko patungo sa pribadong sektor. Nakabatay ito sa paninindigang mas mahusay ang merkado kaysa gobyerno sa pagtugon sa mga pangangailangan ng tao, pagtamo ng ekonomikong kaunlaran, at pagtaguyod ng kagalingang panlipunan.²⁵ Bumabandila ang mga konsepto at polisiyang pribatisasyon, deregulasyon, liberalisasyon, malayang kalakalan, at pribadong pag-aari. Ito raw ang pinakamabisang kasagutan sa paglutas ng mga suliranin ng daigdig. Ganito ang paglalarawan ni Harvey:

*Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.*²⁶

Para sa mga nagtataguyod ng neoliberalismo, mas mapabubuti raw ang lipunan at ang sangkatauhan kung bibigyang-laya ang bawat indibidwal sa pamamagitan ng pagpapaigting ng kanilang mga karapatan sa pribadong pag-aari at pagpapalakas ng isang merkadong malaya sa regulasyon ng pamahalaan. Itinataguyod daw nito ang kalayaan ng bawat isa, ang pagkakapantay-pantay at ang pangako ng kaginhawahan at pag-unlad. Makabubuti sa lahat ng tao na bigyan ng ganap na kalayaan ang merkado at huwag itong pakialaman at pangasiwaan ng pamahalaan.²⁷

Subalit ang neoliberalismo ay hindi lang naman patungkol sa buhay-ekonomiko na may kinalaman sa produksiyon, distribusyon, at pagbili ng

²² Simon Clarke, “The Neoliberal Theory of Society,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, 58.

²³ Daniel Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Campbell Jones, Rene ten Bos, and Martin Parker, *For Business Ethics: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2005), 100.

²⁵ J. McCarthy, “Privatizing Conditions of Production: Trade Agreements as Neoliberal Environmental Governance,” in *Neoliberal Environments: False Promises and Unnatural Consequences*, ed. by N. Heynen, J. McCarthy, S. Prudham, and P. Robbins (London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

²⁷ Jones, ten Bos, and Parker, *For Business Ethics*, 96.

mga kalakal. Sa mas malawakang pananaw, ipinapalagay na ang merkado ay siyang angkop na gabay sa lahat ng mga gawain at aspekto ng buhay-*tao*.²⁸ Kung kaya, tumutukoy rin ito sa mas malawak na aspekto at kontekstong kultural, politikal, at sosyal.²⁹ Sinabi ni McChesney: “*It is precisely in its oppression of nonmarket forces that we see how neoliberalism operates not only as an economic system, but as a political and cultural system as well.*”³⁰ Mas nagbibigay-linaw ang pahayag ni Giroux:

*Central to its philosophy is the assumption [that] the market drives not just the economy but all of social life. It construes profit-making as the essence of democracy and consuming as the only operable form of agency. It redefines identities, desires and values through a market logic that favors self-interest, a survival-of-the-fittest ethos and unchecked individualism. Under neoliberalism, life-draining and unending competition is a central concept for defining human freedom.*³¹

Isa ang Pilipinas sa mga bansang tinukoy bilang *guinea pig* ng eksperimentong neoliberal.³² Sa obserbasyon nina Broad at Cavanagh, mahabang panahon na na isa ang Pilipinas sa mga “*poster child[ren] of an open economy.*”³³ Noong mga huling taon ng dekada ‘70 sa ilalim ng rehimen ni Ferdinand Marcos, isinagawa na nga ang *structural adjustment program* (SAP) sa pangunguna at pamamahala ng tinatawag ni Richard Peet na *unholy trinity: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, at World Trade Organization*.³⁴ Nakapaloob sa SAP ang pangakong pagpapautang sa Pilipinas kapalit ang isang kondisyon: “*submit your economies to international market forces. And that*

²⁸ Henry Giroux, “Neoliberal Fascism and the Echoes of History,” in *Truthdig* (2 August 2018), <<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/neoliberal-fascism-and-the-echoes-of-history/>>.

²⁹ Jennifer Lawn and Chris Prentice, “Introduction: Neoliberal Culture/The Cultures of Neoliberalism,” *Sites: New Series*, 12:1 (2015), 8.

³⁰ McChesney, Introduction to Chomsky, *Profit Over People*, 9.

³¹ Giroux, “Neoliberal Fascism and the Echoes of History.”

³² Timothy Mitchell, “How Neoliberalism Makes Its World,” in *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of Neoliberal Thought Collective*, 393; Walden Bello, “How neoliberalism killed the Philippines’ EDSA Republic,” in *Green Left Weekly* (24 June 2016), <<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/walden-bello-how-neoliberalism-killed-philippines-edsa-republic>>.

³³ Robin Broad and John Cavanagh, “Reframing Development in the Age of Vulnerability: From Case Studies of the Philippines and Trinidad to New Measures of Rootedness,” *Third World Quarterly*, 32:6 (2011), 1134.

³⁴ Richard Peet, *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Book, 2003).

means privatize, open up, liberalize, offer more incentives to private foreign investment. In short: inject Reaganomics into the Third World."³⁵

Bagama't naramdaman agad sa ekonomiya ng Pilipinas ang bagsik ng SAP, para sa maraming Pilipino, hindi neoliberalismo kundi si Marcos mismo ang tunay na dahilan ng krisis ng bansa.³⁶ Ipinapalagay ni Walden Bello na maraming mga salik sa naging patuloy na pamamayagpag ng ideolohiyang neoliberal noong panahon ni Pangulong Corazon Aquino: pagtatalaga sa pamahalaan ng mga teknokrat at ekonomistang neoliberal, mapait na karanasan sa *crony capitalism*, kawalan ng alternatibo sa neoliberalismo, pagbagsak ng Sosyalismo sa gitnang Europa, krisis ng sosyo-demokratikong estado ng Sweden, ang tila matagumpay na ekonomiya ng Amerika at Gran Britanya dulot ng mga pagbabagong sinimulan nina Reagan at Thatcher, at ang pagpailanglang ng mga bagong industriyalisadong bansa sa Silangang Asya.³⁷ Noong panahon ni Pangulong Fidel Ramos, mas lalong naging maimpluwensiya at sumidhi ang pananampalataya sa neoliberalismo.³⁸ Ang mga sumunod pang administrasyon mula kay Pangulong Joseph Estrada hanggang kay Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ay pagpapatuloy lamang ng mga polisiyang nakaugat sa doktrinang neoliberal.³⁹

Sa pangkalahatan, ipinapalagay na mas malaki ang naging masamang epekto ng eksperimentong neoliberal sa ating bansa. Lalong lumala ang kahirapan lalong-lalo na ng mga nasa laylayan, samantalang lalo lamang yumaman ang iilan.⁴⁰ Sangkot ang polisiyang neoliberal sa malawakang kawalan ng disenteng hanapbuhay, pagkasira ng kalikasan at di-makatarungang bahagihan ng yaman ng lipunan.⁴¹

³⁵ Robin Broad and John Cavanagh, Preface to *Unequal Alliance: The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xvii.

³⁶ Walden Bello, "Neoliberalism as Hegemonic Ideology in the Philippines: Rise, Apogee, and Crisis," in *Focus on the Global South* (18 October 2009), <<https://focusweb.org/neoliberalism-as-hegemonic-ideology-in-the-philippines-rise-apogee-and-crisis/>>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Walden Bello, "EDSA, Neoliberalism, and Globalization" in *Walden Bello* (23 March 2017), <<https://www.waldenbello.org/edsa-neoliberalism-and-globalization/>>.

³⁹ "Rehashed neoliberal policies: One year of Dutertenomics," in *Ibon* (28 June 2017), <<https://www.ibon.org/rehashed-neoliberal-policies-one-year-of-dutertenomics/>>.

⁴⁰ Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, "Neoliberal Globalization in the Philippines: Its Impact on Filipino Women and Their Forms of Resistance," *Journal of Developing Societies*, 23:1-2 (2007).

⁴¹ Benjie Oliveros, "Neoliberalism and greater Inequality," *Bulatlat: Journalism for the people* (9 June 2016), <<https://www.bulatlat.com/2016/06/09/neoliberalism-and-greater-inequality/>>.

Ang SM (Shoe Mart)

Walang duda na ang pinanggalingan ng salitang SMisasyon ay ang SM, isang negosyo na naging penomenal sa bansang Pilipinas. Halos lahat na yata ng Pilipino ay alam kung ano ang SM. Habang ginagawa ko ang sanaysay na ito, hindi mabibilang kung ilang beses na tumigil ako sapagkat kailangan kong samahan ang aking asawa at anak sa SM. Ang SM ay bahagi na ng buhay Pinoy. Pinoy na Pinoy ang SM. At SM na SM ang Pinoy.

Hindi rin lingid sa maraming Pinoy na ang kamamatay lamang na si Henry Sy, Sr. ang may-ari ng SM, na nagsimula bilang isang maliit na tindahan ng sapatos sa Quiapo, Maynila noong Oktubre 1958. Mula sa isang pangkaraniwang tindahan ng sapatos, nagtayo si Sy ng *department stores* sa Quiapo, Cubao, at Makati noong dekada '70. Sa gitna raw ng mga agam-agam at pagtutol ng maraming malapit kay Sy, buong tapang na binuksan niya sa publiko ang kanyang unang *mall* noong 1985 sa North EDSA, Quezon City. Bagama't hindi naman siya ang nagtayo ng unang *mall* sa Pilipinas,⁴² walang duda na noong nabubuhay pa si Sy, itinuturing siyang hari ng *mall* at bathala ng mga *malls* sa ating bansa. Pinangarap nga raw niya na magkaroon ng *branch* ng SM "kada-30 hanggang 45 minutong pagmamaneho sa Metro Manila."⁴³ Noong 2015, pangako naman ni Hans Sy, isa sa mga anak ni Henry Sy at pangulo ng *SM Prime Holdings, Inc.*, na magiging 75 na ang mga SM *malls* pagdating ng taong 2018.⁴⁴ Hindi nambubuladas ang batang Sy sapagkat sa pagtatapos ng taong 2016, 60 na ang SM *malls* sa bansa, bukod pa sa 6 na SM *malls* sa Tsina.⁴⁵ Sa pagtatapos naman ng 2017, 7 pang *malls* sa Pilipinas ang magbubukas.⁴⁶ Batay sa ulat ng *online news outlet* na *Rappler* noong 19 Enero 2019, ang SM ay meron nang halos 1,000 *retail stores* at 77 *malls*.

⁴² Ipinangalan sa boksingerong si Muhammad Ali ang Ali Mall sa Araneta Center, Cubao na binuksan noong 1976. Ito ang itinuturing na kauna-unahang *mall* sa Pilipinas. Kung mas malayang pakahulugan ng *mall*, babalik tayo sa panahon ng mga Kastila noong 1877 sa Iloilo City kung saan itinayo ng Ingles na si Henry Hoskyns ang unang *department store*, ang Hoskyns Department Store. Hindi pwedeng tumawad at nagtitinda raw ito ng lahat mula karayom hanggang angkla. Constantino Tejero, "Iloilo: Discover its history, decode its modernity," in *Inquirer Lifestyle* (11 February 2017), <<https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/254095/iloilo-discover-history-decode-modernity/>>.

⁴³ Rolando Tolentino, "Syudad ng malls, Kulturang Popular," in *Rolando Tolentino* (21 April 2009), <<https://rolandotolentino.wordpress.com/2009/04/21/syudad-ng-malls-kulturang-popular-kultura-column-bulatlatcom/>>.

⁴⁴ Iris Gonzales, "SM Prime eyes 75 malls by 2018," in *Philippine Star* (2 September 2015), <<https://www.philstar.com/business/2015/09/02/1495238/sm-prime-eyes-75-malls-2018>>.

⁴⁵ "SM Prime to open 7 new malls in 2017," in *Rappler* (30 August 2016), <<https://www.rappler.com/business/industries/175-real-estate/144625-sm-prime-new-malls-2017>>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Bukod pa rito, walang duda rin ang galing sa pagnenegosyo ni Sy at ng kanyang mga kasama nang lumawak na ang negosyo mula *retailing* papunta sa *property (mall and office) development, banking, real estate*, mga negosyong may kaugnayan sa turismo, at marami pang iba. Ngayon, ang negosyo na nagsimula bilang isang maliit na tindahan ng sapatos sa Quiapo ay ang pinaka-malaki nang *business conglomerate* sa Pilipinas.⁴⁷ Sampung taon ding itinala ng *Forbes* si Henry Sy, Sr. bilang pinaka-mayamang Pilipino at naputol lamang ito dahil sa kanyang pagpanaw kamakailan lamang.⁴⁸ Inilarawan ng *Forbes* na *self-made* o sariling-sikap si Sy at *diversified* ang pinanggagalingan ng kanyang kayamanan.⁴⁹

Ano ang SMisasyon?

Ang ibig kong sabihin sa SMisasyon ng lipunang Pinoy ay ang pagpapatuloy ng proseso ng neoliberalisasyon sa Pilipinas at ang paglawak at pag-iging ng epekto nito sa halos lahat ng aspekto ng buhay ng mga Pilipino: pang-ekonomiya, panlipunan, panrelihiyon, pampulitika, kultural, sikolohikal, moral, ekolohikal, at marami pang iba. Isinasagisag ng SM ang matagumpay at epektibong pagpasok ng neoliberalismo sa bansa.

Hindi ko sinasabi na si Henry Sy ang may pakana ng SMisasyon. Nanagana lamang siya sa bunga ng SMisasyon. Kung nasanay na tayo sa kasabihang "*Time is gold*," sa kalagayan ni Sy totoong-totoo rin ang "*Timing is gold*." At dahil siya mismo ang isa sa may pinakamalaking pakinabang, ang buong prosesong ito ay maaaring ipangalan sa mismong negosyo na kanyang itinatag.

Kaugnay ng nabanggit, mahalaga ring bigyang diin na sa proseso ng SMisasyon, hindi lamang SM ang aking pinatutungkulan. Tulad ng sinasabi ni Ritzer ukol sa *McDonaldization* at ni Bryman sa *Disneyization* na hindi lamang ito tumutukoy sa McDonald's at sa Disney Company,⁵⁰ sinasabi ko naman ngayon na ang SM ay kumakatawan at sumisimbolo lamang sa mga prosesong may kaugnayan nga sa neoliberalisasyon.

Maraming katangian itong SMisasyon at maraming penomenon ang maaaring pag-aralan na may kaugnayan sa mga praktis ng SM at iba pang malalaking korporasyon sa Pilipinas. Subalit sa pag-aaral na ito, babanggit

⁴⁷ Chrissee Dela Paz, "Fast Facts: SM Investments Corporation," *Rappler* (28 June 2017), <<https://www.rappler.com/business/170638-fast-facts-sm-investments-corporation-henry-sy-malls>>.

⁴⁸ "Henry Sy tops richest Filipinos list for 10th year in a row — Forbes," in *CNN Philippines* (25 August 2017), <<http://nine.cnnphilippines.com/business/2017/08/24/Forbes-riches-Filipinos.html>>.

⁴⁹ "Henry Sy," in "2018 Philippines 50 Richest Net Worth," in *Forbes* (as of 5 September 2018), <<https://www.forbes.com/profile/henry-sy/?list=philippines-billionaires#2cec94e14a10>>.

⁵⁰ Bryman, "The Disneyization of Society," 160.

lamang ako ng tatlong penomenon na masasabi kong bahagi ng proseso ng SMisasyon: (1) walang-patumanggang pagkonsumo, (2) kultura ng matirang-matibay, at (3) mito ng sipag at tiyaga.⁵¹ Ipinapakita nito na ang neoliberalismo ay hindi lamang ekonomikong kalabisan ng Kapitalismo. Isa rin itong ideolohiya at anyo ng pamamahala na sabay nagpapalakas at nagpapatibay ng mga pagpapahalagang pinanghahawakan ng pinagpanibagong mukha ng Kapitalismo.

Walang-Patumanggang Pag-Konsumo (*Hyper-Consumerism*)

Ang isang ibig kong sabihin sa SMisasyon ay ang pag-igting ng kultura ng konsumerismo sa Pilipinas. Noong 1998, sinabi ni Steven Miles na sa mga huling taon ng ika-20 siglo, konsumerismo na nga ang bagong relihiyon habang pinapasok na nito ang ating pang-araw-araw na buhay.⁵² Mga ilang taon bago pa nito, inilarawan ni Brian Appleyard ang konsumerismo bilang isang relihiyon: ang mga naglalakihang *mall* ang mga katedral at ang pag-konsumo ng mga produkto at serbisyo ang anyo ng pagsamba.⁵³ Binanggit nina Rico at De Leon na isinasagisag ng pagdami ng mga *mall* sa Pilipinas ang kultura ng konsumerismo.⁵⁴ Ayon kay Tolentino, “galing sa global na istruktura ng konsumerismo ang *mall*, at kaiba lang ang adaptasyon ng negosyante at konsumeristang Filipino sa istrukturang ito.”⁵⁵

Magkaiba ang *consumption* sa *consumerism*. Ang *consumption* ay tumutukoy lamang sa payak na pagbili at paggamit ng produkto, isang awtomatikong gawain na para kay Zygmunt Bauman ay maihahanay sa mga

⁵¹ Tinanong ng *reviewer* ng papel na ito kung bakit hindi nabanggit ang usapin ng “kontraktwalisasyon, pambabarat sa mga kawani, *union busting*, panggagago sa mga kababaihan sa pamamagitan ng pagsusuot ng mga high heels at make up at maikling palda.” Naisip ko na rin na bahagi ng SMisasyon ang mga penomenang ito. Subalit hindi sapat ang espasyo upang talakayin ang mga ito. Pinaplano ko na itong maging bahagi ng pagpapatuloy ng pag-aaral ukol sa SMisasyon. O kaya naman, baka merong mambabasa na mahikayat na pag-aralan ang iba pang mukha ng SMisasyon ng lipunang Pinoy. Ang aking papel (*paper*) ay isang paanyaya. At ang aking papel (*role*) din ay pumukaw ng kaisipan.

⁵² Steven Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (London: Sage, 1998), 1.

⁵³ Brian Appleyard, “Shopping around for salvation: The new religion is consumerism and massive malls are its cathedrals. Let us bow our heads and pay,” in *The Independent* (3 November 1993), <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/shopping-around-for-salvation-the-new-religion-is-consumerism-and-massive-malls-are-its-cathedrals-1501792.html>>.

⁵⁴ Jore-Annie Rico and Kim Robert C. de Leon, “Mall culture and consumerism in the Philippines,” in *State of Power 2017*, ed. by Nick Buxton and Deborah Eade (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Transnational Institute, 2017), 1-9, <<https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/stateofpower2017-mall-culture.pdf>>.

⁵⁵ Rolando B. Tolentino, “Mall, malling, nagmo-malling...,” in *Pinoy Weekly* (23 January 2010), <<https://www.pinoyweekly.org/2010/01/mall-malling-nagmo-malling%e2%80%a6/>>.

biyolohikal na proseso na kailangang gawin upang mabuhay.⁵⁶ Samantalang ang *consumerism* ay tumutukoy sa mas kumplikadong paraan ng pamumuhay na sobra-sobrang nakatuon sa pagbili at paggamit ng produkto.⁵⁷ Sinabi pa ni Bauman na kung ang *consumption* ay katangian ng isang indibidwal na tao, ang konsumerismo ay katangian ng lipunan.⁵⁸

Sa kasalukuyang anyo ng lipunan na pinapangisawaan ng mga polisiyang nakabatay sa pinagpanibagong Kapitalismo, ang kultura ng konsumerismo ay higit pang bumabaon sa kaibuturan ng pagkatao ng mga kasapi nito. Dahil maraming produksyon, kailangang maraming bumili ng mga produkto. Dahil hindi titigil ang paggawa, kailangang hindi rin tumigil ang pag-ubos ng mga ginawa. Isang proseso na parang walang katapusan. Isang proseso na kakambal na ng Kapitalismo mismo.⁵⁹

Ang pag-igting ng kultura ng konsumerismo ay masasabing bahagi ng proseso ng SMisasyon sapagkat malaki ang nagiging papel ng naglalakihang *mall* sa Pilipinas sa prosesong ito.⁶⁰ Kabilang ang *mall* sa tinatawag ni Ritzer na *sites of consumption*.⁶¹ Oo nga't hindi naman ang penomenon ng *mall* at *mall*ing ang ugat ng konsumerismo. Oo nga't bago pa ipinatayo ang unang *mall* sa Pilipinas, nagsimula na ang paglaganap ng kulturang ito. Oo nga't masasabi rin na ang konsumerismo ay nangyayari sa pagsasanib ng iba't ibang pwersa na makikita sa loob at labas ng *mall*. Ang mga institusyon katulad ng pamilya, paaralan, media, negosyo, at pamahalaan ay sangkot sa pag-igting ng konsumerismo.

Subalit hindi rin maipagkakaila na ang *mall*ing *phenomenon* na pangunahing kinakatawan ng mga SM *mall* ay may malaking ambag sa pag-igting ng kultura ng konsumerismo sa maraming Pilipino. Sa loob ng isang *mall*, kalimitang isinasakatuparan ang konsumeristikong *nasà* (*consumeristic desire*) sa pamamagitan ng pagbili at pagkonsumo ng mga produkto at serbisyo. Naka-disenyo ang mga *mall* upang maghalo at maglaho ang mga hangganan ng pangangailangan at pagnanasa. Ang ideya ng *window shopping* ay isang mapanuksyong eksena upang bumili. Ang kabi-kabilang *sale* at *eat-*

⁵⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 25.

⁵⁷ "[C]onsumerism is the cultural expression and manifestation of the apparently ubiquitous act of consumption." Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life*, 4.

⁵⁸ Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 29.

⁵⁹ Chris Arthur, *Financial Literacy Education: Neoliberalism, the Consumer and the Citizen* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012).

⁶⁰ "...those places in society where commodities are most dramatically present in our lives—the shopping mall, the showroom, the advertisement—have become sites of cultural production in which economic goods are transformed into components of complex meaning systems, reversing the evolutionary separation of culture and economy." Robert Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 64.

⁶¹ George Ritzer, Douglas Goodman, and Wendy Wiedenhoft, "Theories of Consumption," in *Handbook of Social Theory*, ed. by George Ritzer and Barry Smart (London: Sage, 2001), 421.

all-you-can ay isang panunukso upang bumili nang bumili kahit hindi naman kailangan at kumain nang kumain kahit busog naman. Ang mga makukulit at mapanlitong istrategiya ng pagsasabi sa mamimili na magmadali kung hindi ay mauubusan ay katulad ng sinasabi rin ni Stephen Bertman na *hurried culture* at *nowist culture* na kaugnay na rin ng kultura ng konsumerismo.⁶² Pinadadali at pinadudulas din ang proseso ng paggastos sa pamamagitan ng paglalagay ng mga ATM at bangko sa loob ng mga *mall*. Ang pagkasalat sa pera ay panandaliang nilulutas ng mga *credit card* at iba't ibang programa ng pagpapautang. Ang pagkasawa sa produkto—mapa-sapatos, damit, cellphone, o telebisyon man—ay nalulunasan sa pamamagitan ng patuloy at mabilisang pagbabago ng mga *display*⁶³ o planado at inaakalang pagkaloos ng mga produkto.⁶⁴ Sa aliw ng mga ilaw, halina ng mga ingay, laro ng mga kulay, maginhawang karanasan, at larawan ng mga masasayang modelo at naggagandahang artista, nahahalina ang *flâneur* na bumili nang bumili, kumain nang kumain, gumastos nang gumastos kahit na sa mga bagay na hindi naman talaga tunay na kailangan. Sa pamamagitan ng magulong pagkakaayos (o maayos na pagkakagulo?) ng SM, nalilito at nabubulagan ang mamimili sa kanilang pagpili kung ano ang pagkakaiba ng pangangailangan sa pagnanasa lamang. Kaya nga, pag masaya nang nabili ang isang bagay, uuwi at mapagtatanto na hindi naman pala talaga kailangan ang mga ito. Masayang pagsasayang.

Kung sinasabi ni Bryman na sa *Disneyization*, ang mamimili ang soberenya, sa SMisasyon, kunwari lamang ang kalayaang pumili ng mamimili. Sa sinasabi kong SMisasyon, ang mamimili (*consumer/buyer*) ay hindi mamimili (*one who chooses or makes a choice*). Totoong-totoo ang sinasabi ni Jean Baudrillard na kunwari lamang ang rasyonalidad at kalayaan ng tao sa proseso ng konsumerismo; lahat ay napapailalim sa kapangyarihan ng mga tanda (*sign*) at imahe (*image*).⁶⁵

Dahil sa iba't ibang mga taktikang nabanggit, mas makatwirang tanungin kung meron ba talagang soberenya at kalayaan ang mamimili. Sa *set-up* ng mall, mukhang wala talaga. Sa pananaw ni Tolentino:

⁶² Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture: Human Cost of Speed* (Westport: Praeger, 1998).

⁶³ Michael Billig, "Commodity Fetishism and Repression: Reflections on Marx, Freud and the Psychology of Consumer Capitalism," *Theory and Psychology*, 9:3 (1999), 325.

⁶⁴ "...the advent of consumerism augurs the era of inbuilt obsolescence of goods offered on the market and signals a spectacular rise in the waste-disposal industry..." Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 31. Tungkol sa usapin naman ng *planned and perceived obsolescence*, tingnan: Tim Hindle, *The Economist Guide to Management Ideas and Gurus* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 147-148; Giles Slade, *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Joseph Guiltinan, "Creative Destruction and Destructive Creations: Environmental Ethics and Planned Obsolescence," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 89 (2009), 19-28.

⁶⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 79-80.

Iniiwan ng maller ang kaniyang moda ng produksyon ng paggawa, para gawing purong sityo ng libangan ang mall. Hindi niya maalala kung paano siyang nakarating dito—kung paanong nagpursigi para kumita, ginamit ang lakas-paggawa, ibinenta ito sa eksplotatibong relasyon—pero masaya siya sa pagdating dito.⁶⁶

Hindi nakapagtataka ang pagkalimot na ito na sinasabi ni Tolentino sapagkat sinadya at pinag-isipan ang lahat-lahat nitong sangkap upang ang tao ay bumili at magwaldas. Ang mga unang *mall* na parang mga kahon ng sapatos ay naghihiwalay ng labas at loob at nagpapalabo ng kanina, ngayon, at mamaya.

Mabuti ring tingnan ang ugnayan ng *hyper-consumerism* at ang sinasabi ni Karl Marx na *commodity fetishism*. Kung may halaga man si Marx para sa atin ngayon, itinuturing ko na ang konsepto ng *commodity fetishism* ang isa sa mga halagang ito. Sa isang maikling bahagi ng *Das Kapital*, ipinaliwanag ni Marx ang *fetishism of commodity*. Sa aking payak na pag-unawa, sinasabi ni Marx na kapag ang isang bagay, tulad ng mesa, ay naging isang produkto na dinala sa pamilihan (*commodity*), nakakalimutan na ang iba't ibang ugnayang panlipunan (*social relations*) na pinagdaanan ng nasabing produkto: ang pumutol ng kahoy, ang gumawa ng mesa, ang naghatid sa pamilihan, at iba pa. Sa halip, napapalitan ito ng ugnayan sa pagitan ng mga bagay: pera at produkto;⁶⁷ para bang nagkakaroon ng kakaibang kapangyarihan ang produkto: anting-anting, agimat, *fetish*.

Ngayon, sa loob ng *mall*, tuluyan na ngang natabunan ang mga ugnayang panlipunan na ito. Hindi na maisasaisip ng bumibili ng sapatos o damit o prutas o *cellphone* o *diamond ring*, ang mga manggagawang nagbuhos ng dugo, pawis, at luha upang mabuo ang mga produktong ito. Hindi na mamamalayan ng mga mamimili kung meron bang karahasan, kawalang-katarungan, at pagsagasa sa mga karapatang pantao habang hinuhukay, itinanim, ginagawa, at inililipat ang mga nasabing produkto.⁶⁸ Sa isang kultura ng *hyper-consumerism*, naglaho na ang makataong karakter ng produkto. Sa halip, nagiging purong bagay na nga lamang ito na may katumbas na halagang pera.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Rolando Tolentino "Kabataang Katawan, Mall at Siyudad: Mga Tala sa Gitnang Uring Karanasan at Neoliberalismo" *Philippine Humanities Review*, 14:12 (April 2012), 70.

⁶⁷ Tingnan sa Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1976), 163-177.

⁶⁸ Jones, ten Bos, and Parker, *For Business Ethics*, 103-105.

⁶⁹ Billig, "Commodity Fetishism and Repression," 315-316.

Makatutulong din ang pagsusuri ni Baudrillard tungkol sa *consumer society*. Malawak ang kanyang pag-aaral kaya hihiramin ko lang ang kanyang konsepto ng *profusion* na isasalin ko bilang “kasandamakmakan.”⁷⁰ Sa obserbasyon ni Baudrillard, ang gabunton at sandamakmak na mga produkto sa mga *Parisian department store* at *drugstore*⁷¹ ay nagpapakita na labis-labis ang mga produkto para sa lahat at na nalutas na ang problema ng kakulangan. Paano nga namang masasabing may kakulangan kung nakabuyangyang ang kasandamakmakan?

*There is something more in this piling high than the quantity of products: the manifest presence of surplus, the magical, definitive negation of scarcity... Our markets, major shopping thoroughfares and superstores also mimic a new-found nature of prodigious fecundity. These are our Valleys of Canaan where, in place of milk and honey, streams of neon flow down over ketchup and plastic.*⁷²

Pinansin din ni Baudrillard kung paanong nagawang pagsama-samahin sa loob ng *Parisian drugstore* ang halos lahat ng mga gawain ng tao.

*Work, leisure, nature and culture: all these things which were once dispersed, which once generated anxiety and complexity in real life, in our ‘anarchic and archaic towns and cities,’ all these sundered activities, these activities which were more or less irreducible one to another, are now at last mixed and blended, climatized and homogenized in the same sweeping vista of perpetual shopping.*⁷³

Makatwiran at angkop nga marahil na tawaging “city” ang mga *mall* na ginagawa ng SM. Sa isang banda, maihahanay sila sa Quezon City, Cebu City, Davao City, Batangas City, at iba pa. Ang *mall* ay isang *city within a city*. Halos lahat na nga yata ng pang-araw-araw na gawain ng tao ay maaari na niyang

⁷⁰ Ang “sandamakmak” ay isang palasak na pang-uring nangangahulugan ng pagiging “sobra-sobra” o “labis-labis.” Kahalintulad ito ng mga palasak ding salitang “sangaterba,” “sanlaksa,” at “sandamukal.” Halimbawa, “Sandamakmak na basura ang nakuha sa Manila Bay.” Tingnan ang Michael L. Tan, “‘Sandamakmak,’” in *Inquirer Opinion* (15 August 2018), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/115379/sandamakmak>>. Ang “kasandamakmakan” ay ang pangngalan ng “sandamakmak.”

⁷¹ Hindi dapat maligaw ang mga mambabasa. Sa konteksto ni Baudrillard, ang *drugstore* sa Paris ay hindi lamang nagbebenta ng gamot. Kahalintulad ito ng mga makabagong *shopping centers*.

⁷² Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.

isagawa rito. Bumili ng sapatos, sipilyo, at sinulid. Mamalengke at kumain sa *eat-all-you-can*. Manalangin sa Diyos, manood ng sine, at maka-*meet-and-greet* ang paboritong artista. Magpasuso ng sanggol, magpa-alaga ng musmos at magpa-*tutor* ng anak. Pumasok sa museo at *massage sauna*. Magbayad ng kuryente at mag-deposito sa bangko. Magpagawa ng relo at magpa-*xerox* ng *biodata*. Magbayad ng buwis, mag-*renew* ng lisensya, at bumoto. Magpatingin sa doktor at kumanta sa *videoke*. *Ad infinitum*. Sabi nga ng *tagline* ng SM: *We've got it all for you!* Sandamakmak ang makikita at maaaring gawin sa SM. *Profusion*. Kasandamakmakan ng produkto, serbisyo, at ng kung ano pang maaaring ikonsumo.

Hindi maralita ang Pilipinas. At hindi naghihirap ang mga Pilipino. Maayos ang lipunan. Sagana ang produkto. Umaapaw ang yaman. Sobrasobra para sa lahat. Ito ang imahe ng kasandamakdamakan na nais ipahiwatig at iparanas sa loob ng *mall*. Ito ang pangako ng neoliberalismo: kalayaang pumili mula sa kasandamakmakan. Pwedeng tumingin, humawak, at umamoy. May produktong naaangkop sa bawat isa. At kung hindi mo kayang bilhin, wala sa kasaganaan ang problema. Sapagkat paanong magiging mali ang isang sistemang nakalilikha ng kasandamakmakan? Paanong magiging mali ang kasandamakmakan na sabay na nagbibigay ng kalayaang pumili?⁷⁴ Kung may mali man, naroon ito sa indibidwal na hindi marunong maghanda ng sarili at bumagay sa kontemporaryong balangkas ng ekonomiya at lipunan.⁷⁵

Matira ang Matibay (*Survival of the Fittest*)

Ang ibig ko pang sabihin sa SMisasyon ng lipunang Pinoy ay ang pagpapalaganap at pagpapatibay ng paniniwala na ang larangan ng negosyo at buhay ekonomiko ay maihahalintulad sa isang gubat na kung saan matira ang matibay, isang mabalasik at madugong paligsahan. Itong ganitong uri ng pananaw ay karaniwang iniuugat sa isang anyo ng *Social Darwinism* na pinangangalandakan ni William Graham Sumner, isang Amerikanong antropolohista. Para kay Sumner, upang magkaroon ng pag-unlad sa isang lipunan, kailangan talaga na makipagbuno ang mga matitibay at sukdulang masagasaan ang mga mahihina.⁷⁶ Ang batas daw ng *biological evolution* ni Charles Darwin ay totoo at angkop din sa pag-unlad ng mga institusyon ng lipunan, kasama na ang komersyo.

⁷⁴ Eva-Lotta Hedman and John Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Trajectories* (London: Routledge, 2000), 134.

⁷⁵ Amirhosein Khandizaji, *Baudrillard and the Culture Industry: Returning to the First Generation of the Frankfurt School* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2017), 103.

⁷⁶ David Lea, "Darwinism and Ethics," in *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics*, ed. by Robert Kolb (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 545.

Gamit ang kaisipan ni Sumner, ikinatwiran ng mga kapitalista noong mga huling taon ng ika-19 na siglo na ang mga milyonyong burgis tulad nina John D. Rockefeller at Andrew Carnegie ang modelo ng pag-unlad ng ebolusyon ng lipunan. Sila ang matitibay at angkop na magpatuloy sa paggulong ng pag-unlad ng lipunan. Sila ang nanatiling nakatayo sa paligsahan ng merkado. Gamit ang kaisipan ni Adam Smith tungkol sa “invisible hand” at ang pag-aaral ni Charles Darwin ukol sa *biological evolution*, sinabi ng mga taga-suporta ng ganitong anyo ng *Social Darwinism* na kahit na sa larangan ng pagnenegosyo, merong batas ng kalikasan na matitira at magtatagumpay ang matitibay at malalakas, samantalang titiklop naman at maglalaho ang mga mahihina at mga walang kakayahang sumabay sa mga pagbabago.

Sa panahon ng neoliberalismo, lalong umigting ang paniniwala sa prinsipyo ng “matira ang matibay.” Kahit si Pope Francis ay ganito ang hinaing:

*Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.*⁷⁷

Ipinaliwanag naman ni Pierre Bourdieu na ang *Darwinian world* na pinalakas muli ng neoliberalismo ay nagpapaigting din ng kumpetisyon hindi lamang sa pagitan ng mga korporasyon kundi sa lebel din ng mga indibidwal sa loob mismo ng isang organisasyon.⁷⁸ Sa pananaw naman ni Harvey, ipinapalagay ng neoliberalismo na ang kumpetisyon sa pagitan ng bawat indibidwal, ng bawat organisasyon, ng bawat teritoryo ay isang pangunahing kagalingan (*virtue*) ng lipunan.⁷⁹

Sa Estados Unidos, merong tinatawag na penomenon ng *Walmartization*. Tumutukoy ito sa pagdating ng isang higanteng negosyong sumisira sa maliliit na negosyo at kung kaya’t ang mga nawalan ng trabaho ay napipilitang tumanggap ng mga trabaho sa dumating na higanteng negosyo sa kabila ng mas maliit na sweldo.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (24 November 2013), § 53, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html>.

⁷⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, trans. by Richard Nice (New York: The New Press, 1998), 97.

⁷⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 65.

⁸⁰ Sariling salin ng depenasyon ng “Walmartization” mula sa *New Word Suggestion* ng Collins Dictionary: “When a large chain store moves into a region and devastates local businesses driving displaced workers into low paying chain store jobs.”

Hindi naman mahirap makita ang pilosopiya ng matira-ang-matibay sa mga pagkilos ng SM. Katulad ng proseso ng *Walmartization*, ang SMisasyon din ay isang proseso na kung saan ang mga lokal na negosyante ay unti-unting sumusuko sa tibay, lakas, at kapangyarihan ng malalaking negosyante katulad ng SM. Kasabay ng tuwa at galak ng mga tao sa pagdating ng SM sa kanilang lugar ay ang panlulumo naman ng maraming maliliit na negosyo na nanganganib at mapipilitang magsara kung hindi maghahanda at magiging mas *entrepreneurial* pa lalo. Nilalamon ng higanteng negosyong ito ang maliliit na negosyo sa gilid-gilid. Oo nga't lumilikha ito ng trabaho, nag-aambag sa buwis ng mga lokal na pamahalaan, at maaaring lumikha rin ng iba pang maliliit na negosyo, ngunit hindi rin maipagkakaila na maraming nasasagasaan sa pagpasok ng SM. Kahit na nga ang simpleng tindera ng turon ay nanganganib sa turon ni Herbert Sy (*vice chairman* ng SM Markets) na nagpasok ng halagang PhP 360 milyon (24 milyong piraso ng turon) para lamang sa taong 2016.⁸¹ Ang tindahan ni Aling Nena ay titiklop sa SaveMore, HyperMart, at AlphaMart—mga maliliit (pero malalaki rin) na *retail store* na pag-aari rin ng konglomerasyon ng SM. Katulad ng *jeepney* na “hari ng kalsada,” marahil nanganganib ding maglaho ang *sari-sari store* na maituturing namang “reyna ng kanto.”

Ang paligsahang ito kung saan sigurado na kung sino ang mananalo ay hindi lamang nangyayari sa pagitan ng higanteng SM at mga bulilit na negosyante sa isang lokal na pamayanan. Mismong sa loob ng SM, nararamdaman ng mga nangungupahan kung paanong nakikipagpaligsahan mismo sa kanila ang panginoong may-*mall*. Kung merong tindang *lechon* ang Mila's, nagtitinda na rin ng *lechon* ang SM mismo. Kahit ang konsepto ng SM Bonus ay maaaring tingnan bilang isang anyo ng pakikipagpaligsahan ng SM sa mismong mga nangungupahan sa kanya.

Subalit sa pananaw ng neoliberalismo, ito nga raw ang punto ng kumpetisyon sa merkado: matira ang matibay—batas ng gubat, batas ng pamilihan, batas ng kalikasan ng tao at hayop. Hindi naman talaga pwedeng lahat ay mananalo. Merong malalagas at uuwing luhaan. Kahit si Hans Sy mismo kailangang maging alerto sa hamon ng *online selling* at makinig kay Jack Ma, may-ari ng Alibaba na binili na rin ang malaking bahagi ng Lazada.⁸²

Ipinapakita ng penomenon ng SM kung paanong natitira ang matibay at marunong sumabay. Ngunit sabay ring ipinapahiwatig ng SM ang isang kabalintunaan: na ang paligsahan sa merkado ay hindi naman talaga isang patas na paligsahan sapagkat meron laging malakas na tatalo sa mahina, matibay na tatalo sa mabuway, makapangyarihan na tatalo sa

⁸¹ “How SM won with turon,” in *SM Investments Corporation* (30 May 2017), <<https://www.sminvestments.com/company-releases/how-sm-won-turon>>.

⁸² Lala Rimando, “Forbes Philippines: Reinventing the mall,” in *SM Prime* (8 April 2016), <<https://smprime.com/media/news/forbes-philippines-reinventing-mall>>.

ordinaryo, tuso na tatalo sa matapat. Kahit na iniisip niya ang konteksto ng pandaigdigang merkado, nababagay rito ang puna ni Harvey: “While the virtues of competition are placed up front, the reality is the increasing consolidation of oligopolistic, monopoly, and transnational power within a few centralized multinational corporations...”⁸³ Hindi na kagulat-gulat kung, isang araw, magigising na lamang tayo na pag-aari na ng SM at ng iba pang malalaking negosyo kahit na ang kasuluk-sulukang bahagi ng Pilipinas. *Philippines under siege!*

Mito ng Sipag at Tiyaga

Ang ibig ko pang sabihin ng SMisasyon ng lipunang Pinoy ay ang lumalaganap nang kaisipan at pakiramdam na kapag masipag at matiyaga, meron talagang mapapalang nilaga. Ginamit pa nga itong *slogan* sa kampanya dati ni Manny Villar na itinuturing na ngayong pinakamayamang Pilipino dahil na rin sa negosyong *real estate* at mga *mall*.⁸⁴

Sa kaibuturan ng pananaw na ito, sinasabi na kahit saan ka pa nanggaling, kahit ano pa ang katayuan mo sa buhay, kumpleto man o kulang-kulang ang mga bahagi ng iyong katawan, binibigyan ka ng lipunan ng pag-asa at pagkakataon na umangat at umunlad. Lahat ay may oportunidad na marating ang tugatog ng tagumpay. Patas at patag ang palaruan. Ito ang tinatawag ni Jo Littler na *meritocratic feeling*.⁸⁵

Sa artikulo ni George Monbiot, sinabi niya na bahagi rin talaga ng ideolohikal na aspeto ng neoliberalismo ang pagpapalaganap ng kaisipan na umuunlad ang buhay ng mga taong nagsisikap at nagsasakripisyo.⁸⁶ Binigyang diin naman ni Simon Clark ang pag-aangat ng kaisipang ito sa lebel ng etika ng merkado: “[t]he market was not just an economic, but also a moral force, penalizing the idle and incompetent and rewarding the enterprising and hard-working.”⁸⁷ Para kay Littler, sa pangkasalukuyang panahon ng neoliberalismo, ang pangako ng meritokrasya ay mas lalong pinalalakas habang sabay na ipinapamukha na ang kumpetisyon ay isang obligasyong

⁸³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 80.

⁸⁴ Sa kasalukuyan din, naitayô na ang malawakang *livelihood program* ng mga Villar sa ilalim ng kanilang *Villar Sipag at Tiyaga Foundation*.

⁸⁵ Jo Littler, “Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of Equality within Neoliberalism,” *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 80-81 (2013), 52-72.

⁸⁶ George Monbiot, “Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems,” in *The Guardian* (15 April 2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>>.

⁸⁷ Simon Clarke, “The Neoliberal Theory of Society,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, 51.

moral. Kung kaya't hindi nag-atubili si Littler na tawagin itong *neoliberal meritocracy*.⁸⁸

Bakit ko naman nasabing angkop na isama ang meritokratikong pakiramdam sa penomenon ng SMisasyon? Meron pa nga bang kwento na mas *inspiring* pa kaysa sa *rags-to-riches story* nitong si Henry Sy?⁸⁹ Sabi nga ni Salvador Panelo, kinakatawan raw ni Sy ang Pilipinong masipag.⁹⁰ Ang naglalakihang SM *mall* at *condominium* ang animo'y mga buhay na larawan na kumikiliti sa imahinasyon ng Pinoy na talagang may pag-asang umunlad, kahit na ang pinaka-abang mamamayan ng Pilipinas. Huwag ka nang magugulat kung makita mo na lang si Sy at mga katulad niya sa ating mga aklat-aralin bilang modelo ng pagiging masikap, masipag, matiyaga, matapang, matalino, malikhain, madiskarte, marunong magsakripisyo para sa pangarap, at lahat na nga siguro ng mga katangian ng isang magaling na negosyante at *entrepreneur*. Hindi na lamang si Jose Rizal o Ninoy Aquino ang mga bayani na kung saan ang mga pangalan ay nakaukit sa mga gusali ng paaralan. Si Sy na rin ang bagong bayani para sa isang bagong Pilipinas na naghahangad ng ekonomikong kaunlaran. May mga gusali ngang nakapangalan na sa kanya at sa iba pang mga negosyanteng mga simbolo ng bagong mukha ng Kapitalismo. Mga gusaling katas ng sipag, sikap, tiyaga, determinasyon, tapang, paniniwala sa Maykapal, at galing ng mga negosyanteng Pinoy. Para bang sinasabi sa mga makakakita na sila ang dapat tularan. Sila ang mga makabagong halimbawa ng tagumpay. Sila ang mga bagong mukha nina Rizal, Bonifacio, Mabini, at Jacinto.

Subalit tulad ng barya, dalawa ang mukha ng meritokrasya: na kung hindi ka naging matagumpay bagkus ay naging hari ng sablay, malamang kaysa hindi, kulang ka sa sipag at tiyaga, sa sakripisyo at sampalataya, sa tapang at tiwala. Para bang nahawahan ng eksistensyalismo ang ideolohiyang ito: kung ikaw ay sumablay, wala kang ibang dapat sisihin kundi ang sarili. Sa diskurso ng neoliberalismo, nasa bawat indibidwal ang kanyang kapalaran. Kung wala kang trabaho, hindi balangkas ng ekonomiya at ng lipunan ang may problema, kundi ikaw. Hindi mo inihahanda ang iyong sarili sa mga pangangailangan ng sistemang kinapapalooban mo.⁹¹ Walang mali sa istruktura at sistema; nakatuon sa indibidwal ang sisi at papuri.

⁸⁸ Jo Littler, *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2018), 3 ff.

⁸⁹ Tingnan ang kanyang kwento sa Hedman and Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century*, 130-133.

⁹⁰ Aika Rey, "Malacañang: Henry Sy Sr a 'pillar of Philippine economy'," in *Rappler* (19 January 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/221351-malacanang-statement-henry-sy-sr-pillar-philippine-economy>>.

⁹¹ Julio Cesar de Castro, "The Consumer as Agent in Neoliberalism," *Matrix*, 9:2 (2015), 278.

Ngunit para sa mga kritiko ng neoliberalismo, hindi naman totoo na patas ang labanan at patag ang palaruan. Sa simula pa lang, doktorado na ang panuntunan at manipulado na ang paligsahan. Sa bawat isang matagumpay na Henry Sy, sangkaterbang masisipag at matitiyaga ang uuwing luhaan, na kung minamalas-malas pa, ay wala na ring mauuwian.⁹² Di-maliparang uwak ang espasyo sa ilalim samantalang parang *jeepney* sa *rush hour* ang lugar sa itaas: unahan, gulangan, siksikan, balyahan, bulyawan.⁹³

Hindi nabibigyang-pansin ang iba't ibang panlipunan, pampulitika, at pang-ekonomiyang salik, na para bang perpekto at swabe ang mga balangkas ng lipunan. Nakakalimutan ang sinasabi ni Aneel Karnani na malaking pagkakaiba ng materyal, sikolohikal, pang-ekonomiko, at panlipunang reyalidad ng mga mahihirap kung ihahambing sa mga mayayaman.⁹⁴ Ganito rin ang reklamo sa neoliberalismo ni Jeff Sugarman:

*There is diminishing appreciation that individuals' predicaments are a product of more than simply their individual choice, and include access to opportunities, how opportunities are made available, the capacity to take advantage of opportunities offered, and a host of factors regarding personal histories and the exigencies of lives.*⁹⁵

Kumakampi rin dito si Monbiot nang sinabi niya na:

*The rich persuade themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit, ignoring the advantages—such as education, inheritance and class—that may have helped to secure it. The poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances.*⁹⁶

Sa mito ng sipag at tiyaga, totoong totoo nga ang pahayag ni Pierre Bourdieu ng kahalagahan ng kultural na kapital sa pag-unlad ng isang tao sa lipunan. Hindi dumadaloy nang ganun-ganon na lamang ang yaman ng lipunan sa

⁹² "Neoliberalism is an economic and political program benefiting the top 1 percent of the world's population as it sends billions to poverty." Jodi Dean, "Enjoying Neoliberalism," *Cultural Politics*, 4:1 (2008), 67.

⁹³ Tingnan ang James Bloodworth, *The Myth of Meritocracy: Why Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016), 49 ff.

⁹⁴ Aneel Karnani, "Romanticizing the Poor," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2009), 38-43.

⁹⁵ Jeff Sugarman, "Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics," in *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 35:2 (1995), 105.

⁹⁶ Monbiot, "Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems."

lahat ng gustong lumahok. Lamáng ang nakakaalam ng pasikut-sikot. Lamáng din hindi lang ang may nalalaman kundi kung sino ang kanyang kakilala.⁹⁷ At iyong may pera at impluwensya ay lamáng sa pagkakataon, kakayahan, at maging sa motibasyon.⁹⁸

Mabuti ring usisain kung para ano, para kanino, at para saan ang pagsisipag at pagtitiyaga. Sa isang banda, nagsisikap at nagtitiyaga tayo para mabigyan ng magandang buhay ang ating pamilya; para maipagyabang natin sa ating mga sarili at sa iba na ginamit natin ng wasto ang ating talino, galing, at kadalubhasaan; para masabi natin sa ating mga sarili na narating natin ang tagumpay. Wala naman talagang masama rito. Kaya nga nakakahalina ang diskurso ng meritokrasya sapagkat nakabatay ito sa mga pagpapahalagang kagyat nating kinikilala at tinatanggap. Subalit sa sinasabi kong SMisasyon, ang modelo ng ganap na tagumpay ay mga taong nagtataguyod ng mga pagpapahalagang neoliberal. Nagsisikap at nagtitiyaga *para sa* at *sa loob ng* isang sistema ng walang-katapusang kumpetisyon. Nagsisikap at nagtitiyaga para sukdulang makayapak at makasagasa. Nagsisikap at nagtitiyaga para maging epektibong turnilyo ng makina ng konsumeristang lipunan. Nagsisikap at nagtitiyaga para hindi maging titser lang kundi maging *corporate man*. Ganito ang pagkakasabi ni Littler: “*Contemporary neoliberal discourses of meritocracy assume that all progressive movement must happen upwards and, in the process, contribute to the positioning of working-class cultures as the ‘underclass’, as abject zones and as lives to flee from.*”⁹⁹

Pangwakas

Ang SMisasyon ay pagpapalaganap ng kultura ng konsumerismo, pagtataguyod ng kultura ng matira-ang-matibay, at pagpapatatag ng mito ng sipag at tiyaga. Ang mga ito ay ilan lamang sa mga natatanging katangian ng neoliberalismo. Batid ko na ang sanaysay na ito ay isang munting hakbang sa isang mahaba-habang paglalakbay upang suriin ang mga bunga ng namamayaning ideolohiya sa ating lipunan.

Itong pag-usisa sa SMisasyon ay isang kakatwang gawain. Hindi ito madali sapagkat wala naman talaga sa labas itong sinusuri. At wala rin sa labas ang nagsusuri. Sa halina ng *shopping mall*, halos walang hindi maaakit. Sa kamandag ng mito ng meritokrasya, halos walang hindi mapaparalisa. Sa pananaig ng kultura ng matira-ang-matibay, halos walang hindi bibigay. Subalit kailangang ituloy ang gawain ng kritisismo. Kung saan at kailan

⁹⁷ Tingnan ang Stephen McNamee and Robert Miller, *The Meritocracy Myth*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

⁹⁸ Arthur, *Financial Literacy Education*, 105.

⁹⁹ Littler, *Against Meritocracy*, 7.

nagaganap ang dominasyon, doon din nagiging mas napapanahon ang pagtatanong, pag-iisip, pagsusuri at pagpupuna.

Mainam ding banggitin na wala akong nakikitang hangganan ng mga disiplina na susuri sa penomenon ng SMisasyon.¹⁰⁰ Kailangang lusawin ang mga hangganan at hayaang tumawid at magsanib ang mga disiplina: pilosopiya, sosyolohiya, ekonomiks, pampulitikang agham, sikolohiya, *cultural studies*, *media studies*, kasaysayan, *Philippine studies*, *postcolonialism*, at marami pang iba. Wala ring masasabing gitna at laylayan sa mga ito. Ang lahat ay may potensiyal na mag-ambag ng iba't ibang natatanging pagtanaw sa neoliberalismo bilang SMisasyon sa karanasan, kaisipan, kamalayan, karakter, at kilos ng bawat Pilipino.

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¹⁰⁰ Tingnan ang Henry Giroux, *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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