ATANG

an altar for listening to the beginning of the world

Atang: an altar for listening to the beginning of the world is a book-length essay composed in fragments prayers collages photos songs mistakes offerings thefts odes memories forgettings sins confessions whimsies wonders hallelujahs hallucinations untranslations spells confusions dreams conjectures lies curses incantations and other artifacts about history, ritual, play, the imagination, language, dance, and music. Made public in April 2021, the book emerges 500 years after Lapu Lapu and the people of Mactan defeated Magellan and his forces.

Here, too, is mutual regard.

Quili-Quili Power is an ad hoc press (sounds fancy but this is the only book we've done) and is kin to the Institute for Contemporary Collaborative Imagining (ICCI, baby!), the ad hoc experimental space which has done things like give microscopes away and attempted to send five writing journals to circumnavigate the globe (not an armada but a desarmada!) by passing the notebooks – each accompanied by a compass – between ordinary people heading as far (or near) west as they are going (details inside!). Quili-Quili Power also frequently ignores run-on sentences and various other grammatical norms.

The digital version of this book is available for free online.

a self-published improvisation
from Quili-Quili Power Press

ATANG an altar for listening to the beginning of the world   Rosal (and ghosts)   Quili Quili Power Press

500 years of making shit up as we go along

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… and mutual regard

PATRICK
ROSAL

ATANG

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(A SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK IMPROVISATION
FROM QUILI-QUILI POWER PRESS)
— RAHWAY, NJ, & THE LOVELY NOWHERE —
2021

Patrick Rosal and Collaborators

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...and mutual regard...

500 years of making shit up as we go along

This book is dedicated to the exiles, the wanderers, the truants,
the refugees, the fugitives, the homeless, the border crossers,
the banished, the roamers, and the improvisers

… and to the ghosts who taught me how to listen

… and to the memory of Uncle José

… and to my love, Mary Rose

Our lists of priorities in the nation seldom include how to function in disparate communities — disparate communities, not clubs or teams; how to be alone and competent in solitude; how to nurture friendship rather than how to network; how to approach and perceive beauty, not how to sell, collect it, or exclude it from others; how to inhabit the body, not reconstruct, decorate, or simply medicate it; how to discriminate among various truths and their claims; how to narrate the self; how to articulate and inform one's own experience, not how the self is spoken of, but how it speaks its own existence without erasing another's; most importantly, how to think about the quality of the quality of life; how to receive tremendous joy from problem solving, when the problems to be solved involve the improvement of real lives lived here on this planet; how to discover one is humanized from the participation in and contemplation of art and cultures and other aesthetic hierarchies, and that these contemplations are not leisure vacation activities, but major pursuits among all classes and groups.

—Toni Morrison, Chicago Humanities Festival, 1991

When people believe in boundaries, they become a part of them.

—Don Cherry

THE GROOVE

When I was in kindergarten, I asked my mom one morning if I could wear a tie to school. I distinctly remember her looking both confused and amused. When I showed up to ABZ, one of the kids asked why I was wearing a tie, and I said, "I got a gig later." And the kid said, "Like a concert?" And I said, "Yeah, like that."

I never really thought I'd be able to greet audiences around the world. This is a crazy ass sentence to me: I've performed in Madrid, Ithaca, Umbertide, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Granada (Nicaragua), Quezon City, London and all over the U.S. That little kid in a tie was a goddamned liar, but we know that dreaming and lying are made of the same complex material. That's what makes the imagination so complicated.

At this point, I've done more than a gig or two. I've been credentialed and professionalized, even won a few awards, all of which has meant a larger audience — especially in the last five years when my visibility has reached more traditional literary spaces. I sometimes wonder if other artists who have achieved similar things feel a kind of ambivalence about this expansion of one's audience. You see, for the better part of two decades, I'd spent most of my energy working with young people and giving readings almost entirely for free or for some nominal fee, driving hundreds of miles on my own dime, often sleeping in extra bedrooms or on couches, though there were a lot of pretty nice hotel rooms. And so, I saw a good part of my work as someone who acknowledged and was primarily in touch with communities who weren't seen as literary audiences. That has been truly one of the great rewards in my life. I have enjoyed the experience of seeing my work circulate through the local.

In writing workshops, you'll often hear some version of advice that urges writers to be specific and concrete. Advice like that, as we know, can be pretty thin and when it's turned into a universal rule, it flattens the complex ecology of writing. On the other hand, I think about what that approach has taught me. As I started to exercise the concrete and the specific in my writing, it very clearly changed my attention. It made me look more closely, more carefully. Concrete specificity — not just a tree, but the fifty-foot bare oak in the backyard with three plastic bags flapping in its branches — helped me cultivate a practice of paying attention to my immediate world. And the closer I paid attention to that world, the more I saw my parents' lives, their wishes, their secret delights, their immense sorrows, the puzzling circumstances of our family and cultural history. I often saw these things in fragments, but I did begin to see our story. I started to make meaning.

And so it's been my practice to start where I'm at. To pay attention here. A kind of devotional practice to the local, which seems to have infinite routes to the historical, the metaphysical, and the eternal. I don't think everyone can or should approach art this way. This happens to be how I do it. Maybe, as someone whose sense of belonging is so ambiguous and even painful, I'm trying to construct something like home out of this alien attention... which brings me back to the idea of an audience and this book.

After I won a major fellowship (and I had an essay on style virally mistaken as an essay about microaggression), highly regarded presses and agencies started to contact me. I loved the idea of reaching more people — or so I thought. There was a nuance missing in these much larger platforms, an intimacy that felt crucial to my work. I think, as a writer and a performer, I started to feel like I was being torn away from the folks, the streets, the sounds of my own neighborhood. I'm not sure I can completely explain it. I'd made these poems and books, based on my life among people in New Jersey and New York as well as their many elsewheres, all local nonetheless, and there was this implied mandate that I had to prove my subjects were worthy of grander stages — in essence, the universal. Some of the literature I love the most (I'm thinking of Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, Philip Levine and lately Renee Gladman) are of such a specific geographic or imaginative space that you'd figure that their work should shut me out, but instead their specificity reaches across our significant differences to my own quirks of the local, they touch my own strange and estranged imagination.

I wanted to make some things like music and collages and visual improvisations for the joy of working with material-at-hand. I wanted to use my body in the making. And I wanted to see if I could get down deep into the specificities of my estrangements. I also wanted to try out some new skills, as I never thought of myself as a visual artist — though both my brothers are incredibly talented in this way. I'm a forever student, after all. So I just wanted to play.

In addition to these artifacts of my own imagination, their compilation in a book took shape as a kind of experiment in play, too. Not only was I curious about the technical skills of designing a book (it's fuckin' hard). I was curious, inspired by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, how I could make the work free. And this caused me more anxiety than I thought it would. While I'm a tenured professor, the financial realities are that my bank account was overdrawn just last week, I'm still paying for the MFA I received in 1999, I bought my first house taking out a thirty-year mortage with my partner last year at the age of 51 after having been annually priced out of apartments in Brooklyn and Philly for a decade. When we moved into the new place, Mary Rose and I got excited at having enough money to not run out of toilet paper or toothpaste for the first time in our adult lives. Even with a full-time job that passed me into the middle class, I was racking up credit card debt to buy fresh produce. Now, I'm in a position to make a choice about my work, to make it essentially free and accessible. The decision, however, doesn't come from a place of psychological ease or financial comfort.

There were other worries. Will anybody read the book if it doesn't have an ISBN, doesn't appear on the big online book supermarkets? Because there's no formal copyright, what if somebody duplicates the concept or republishes the work under their name? Am I doing this book just to be oppositional or provocative? Will people think that it sucks because they didn't pay for it? Will I get in trouble with the university for self-publishing instead of going through the traditional gatekeeping routes? Won't the book be disqualified from awards and lists and won't it be disregarded for reviews? It wasn't long before those questions had me laughing, and more interesting questions started to emerge.

Wouldn't it be fucking awesome to charge nothing for work I've spent many hours over the course of many years making? What would it mean to try and exit the literary marketplace for a little bit? Am I not already replicating, refining, altering other people's concepts? What will it feel like to be disqualified from the sanctioning machines? What is individual genius and achievement anyway and is that the only way to make meaning? Could this work reach people it wouldn't reach if I went through the usual commercial channels? If I'm exiting the traditional literary marketplace, what other rooms might I enter?

*

Maybe because my dad was a priest and because I was a sensitive boy who had no outlet open enough for his considerable sadness or his vast exuberance, I've become interested in rituals. Case in point: like a lot of Filipinos, I love to dance. I dance so hard I can feel when I'm getting down. And the feeling of getting down is really the feeling of going into the earth, where the dead are, where life is about to spring up, and so even when I'm dancing alone in a rented kitchen in Toronto (where my mom — a solitary immigrant mother of a son born out of wedlock — escaped to from Chicago in 1963), I'm not really alone. I'm getting down. And I think that's what ritual is. Getting down so deep into the earth that you find your others. And let's be clear about something. There's been a lot of talk about ancestors. I'm under no illusion that my ancestors like me. It's just as likely they find my tastes highly questionable, if not downright offensive. But getting down doesn't have anything to do with liking the other person or agreeing with their tastes. It has to do with groove — whose etymology is shared with grave. All rituals are an occasion to get down. This shoddy, weird-ass book here is me trying to get down. Me trying to get to the grave for a little while. To the groove. Which is where the dancing happens. And the forgiveness.

Fig. 1

> *No se halla — dice el antiguo analista Colin — que tuviesen estas naciones (Filipinas en general) cosa ninguna por escrito cerca de su religión, como tampoco del gobierno politico, ni de sus historias antiguas. Todo lo que de esto se ha podido caber, es fundado en tradición de padres a hijos, conservada en el uso y en unos cantares, que tienen de memoria y repiten en sus navegaciones al compás del remo y en sus regocijos, fiestas, mortuorios y aun en sus faenas, cuando concurren muchos.*
>
> —Isabelo de los Reyes (*Historia de los Ilocos , Vol. 1*)

GUBBUAY

I come from the land of Big Light. I come from Lazarus. I come from Miniolas. I come from Ma-Yi, the land of all waves. I come from Chryse and Slit-a-Pig-Throat. I come from a village that worships a Black saint. Even the gangsters sing. Town of multos and mockingbirds. Where the card game is mean. Where the finest women dance ankle-deep in the mud to make the crawfish crawl out, the ones with hives on their necks from wading in the pond to pull out catfish with their bare hands.

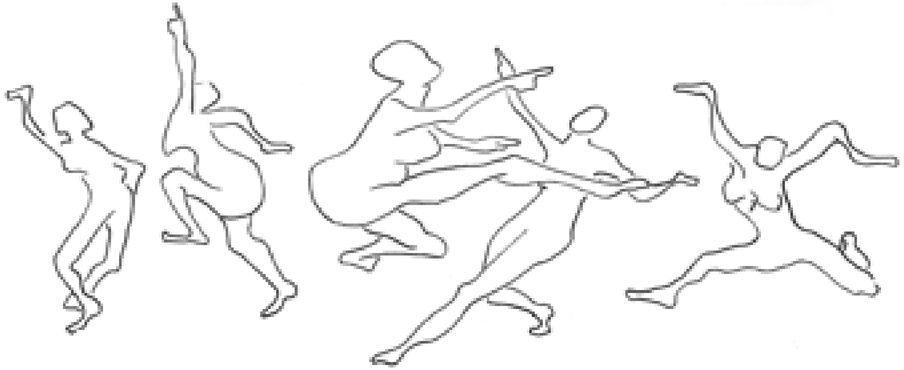


Fig. 2

AGSALA

Here is a hypothesis: We know there was dancing long before the Spaniards came. So what happens when all those rituals are outlawed and replaced? We know that the Spaniards, all over the lands they conquered throughout the world, built churches in the sacred spaces of the people who were already there. And so every Sunday, when a Filipino goes to attend service, they are probably tracing ancient routes of worship. Still singing. Still weeping. Still yearning.

But there is no dancing in the Catholic Mass (though there's a lot of kneeling, sitting, and standing up). I believe the dancing became "secular," moved to yards and salas and fields and temporarily converted basketball courts. So when a Filipino dances, they are invoking a spiritual self. To be filled with that spirit. That soul. Our dancing is soulful.

Agkatkatawa

My mother and father kept their mouths shut for decades so one day one of their children could air our grievances — so I could be angry and say it, so our big laughs might rattle doors. I'm here to claim half my inheritance.

Dung-aw

My grandmother, my mother, not just a sobbing, a wailing, a lament, not a half-singing but a beyond-singing. Is dung-aw the sound of someone who approaches the dead? Or is it the [unreadable], the body from which the dead departs? The extended body, the second body? Was it the sound made by sisters and mothers after my great uncles were hanged by the U.S.? Didn't their brothers, too, make the sound — in secret, there, in the same room? Or maybe they disappeared for a while into the woods to make that sound where no one would hear them. Except the trees.

DUMNGEG

Isn’t the beauty of sound a function of its inevitable disappearance, a function of time?

Even a sound played backward is a sound moving forward in time.

Listen: I’m speaking the opposite of English, even when I’m out of time.

A saxophone can warp time the way water refracts light.

The common light of day is owned by no one (yet).

You can pass sunlight through a lake to see what the light is made of.

I am a lake.

A lacuna.

I am a gap in language.

I am a gap in this country’s documentary.

America, my mouth is the impossibility of your heart.

I make your heart possible.

The heart is the site of your argument.

I make your argument possible.

I make an argument sound.

MANNANAKAW

My whole aesthetic comes from the mixtape era, pause button king, Latin-Rascal style, Mantronix, etc. those noon mixes on KTU. People with quick ears might hear the cut and know exactly where it came from, where they first heard it, and who was rocking the floor with them. It was a joy to hear the whole song from just a snippet, a reverberation of memory, sensual at that. And that was part of the prayer. So was the fact that some folks didn’t know where the cut was from—also prayer, also a way to signify on the low over a particular wavelength to folks who knew to get down to a particular vibration. Others — sure — they could dance, but they might not feel the history in the mix. This, by the way, is also a very Filipino practice of embedding something borrowed, stolen, grafted into what you are making as a way of praise, prayer, tricksterism, singing. I don’t know shit about the law. I don’t understand copyright. I invite many friends and foes to sing and talkstory in my books. They’re there. Sometimes I name them. Sometimes I don’t. It’s all prayer to me, by which I mean a kind of attention, discovery, devotion.

MADLAW

We think of improvisation as completely spontaneous and, therefore, in the moment. That is to say, improvisation is an immersion in the absolute present. And yet improvisation (which, in the end, is not wholly distinct from composition) enters the prophetic mode. Improvisation, by utterly surrendering to the momentary, invokes history and foresees the future at the same time.

NAGAN

Somewhere in my past I have a great grandfather and great grandmother who were Christianized. I was named Alfonse—my middle name—after my grandfather Alfonso who was named after Rey Alfonso II, who was the last Spanish monarch to rule the Philippines.

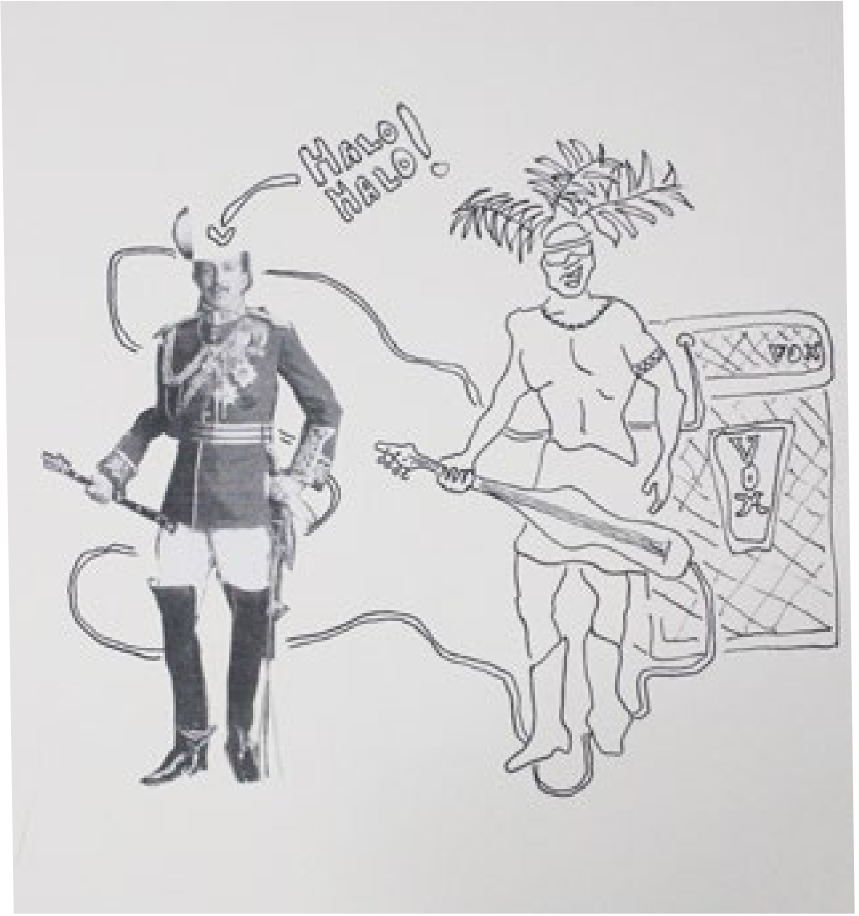


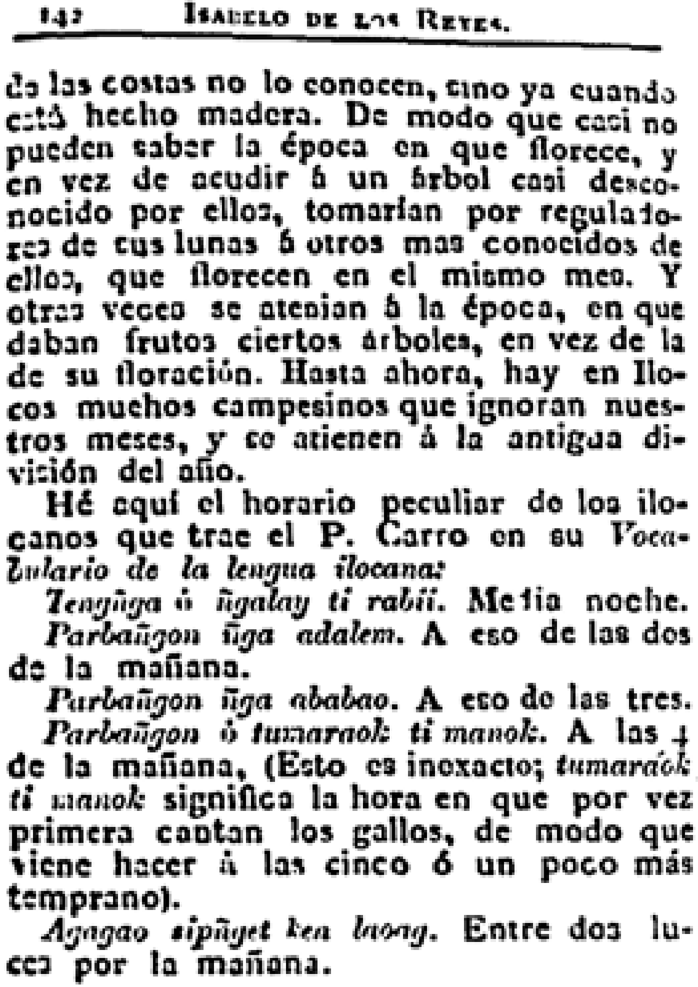
Fig. 3

Rey

I once touched the headstone where my father's father is buried. I once whispered into it. I once wished for a glass of water — kneeling there in the church's yard among all the R's. I sipped slowly because it was hot. My cousin, who took me there, said, "This is your grandfather." I'm his namesake. I wish for water. I don't know if I'm writing down someone else's name. It's no big deal to be given the name of a man you never met. It's not like receiving a sack of cash or a loaf of bread, but you are expected to live by it. You're supposed to come when called. You're supposed to forget that there is an old man walking in front of you with a muddy shirt and blistered hands. You're supposed to believe that neither of you will ever be a king.

On the Lateness of Filipinos

Flavor is a function of time



142 ISABELO DE LOS REYES.

de las costas no lo conocen, sino ya cuando está hecho madera. De modo que casi no pueden saber la época en que florece, y en vez de acudir á un árbol casi desconocido por ellos, tomarían por reguladores de sus lunas á otros mas conocidos de ellos, que florecen en el mismo mes. Y otras veces se atenían á la época, en que daban frutos ciertos árboles, en vez de la de su floración. Hasta ahora, hay en Ilocos muchos campesinos que ignoran nuestros meses, y se atienen á la antigua división del año.

Hé aquí el horario peculiar de los ilocanos que trae el P. Carro en su *Vocabulario de la lengua ilocana:*

Tengñga ó ñgalay ti rabii. Media noche.

Parbañgon ñga adalem. A eso de las dos de la mañana.

Parbañgon ñga ababao. A eso de las tres.

Parbañgon ó tumaraok ti manok. A las 4 de la mañana, (Esto es inexacto; *tumaraók ti manok* significa la hora en que por vez primera cantan los gallos, de modo que viene hacer á las cinco ó un poco más temprano).

Agagao sipñget ken laoag. Entre dos luces por la mañana.

Fig. 4

GULO

Everywhere I look, there is an order — I don't always understand that order, but it's always there. Art can make me feel a kind of order — even (especially) when the art itself is unruly

KARARAG

Once, on a tour through Bohol, I visited the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. Our guide was a light-hearted, goofy, likeable man who got up to sing seventies ballads with the band on our river cruise. He referred to the famous Chocolate Hills as a variety of tits, punctuating each of his quips with, "Joke. Joke. Joke lang." We responded with an obligatory laugh.

On the way to Immaculate Conception, we stopped first at a bronze sculpture that commemorates Sandugo (an elision of "isang dugo" or one blood), the compact between Spanish explorer Miguél López de Legazpi and the island's chieftan, Datu Sikatuna. Sandugo required the leader of each side to slice his own arm with a knife allowing blood to drip in a cup of wine from which they both drank, signaling an agreement of peace between the two peoples. After the previous murder of Magellan by Lapu Lapu and after Legazpi himself was turned back by furiously defended territories in Mindanao, the Spaniard was pleased to cut such a deal with the Boholano chief. Our guide went on to explain, prior to the arrival of the Spanish, Boholanos worshipped a god with big eyes to see all his people, big ears to listen to all of them, and a big mouth so that he'd always be heard. It was, the guide explained, "an ugly god." The Spaniards, our guide continued, showed Filipinos a statue of the Santo Niño, the child Christ, a light-skinned, light-eyed, well-proportioned figure whom the Filipinos took to immediately. According to the docent, the Filipinos cried, "What a beautiful God!" and surrendered their old, ugly figure of worship to get down on their knees before the Spanish one.

The Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is a gorgeous structure made of local coral, whole blocks of which were hauled from the sea by forced laborers who used only bamboo poles for leverage during construction. Spanish-era Philippine churches are remarkable for their simultaneous sense of glory and decay — a kind of hallelujah within the ruins. In the 100-degree heat and humidity, I was sweating profusely, though wearing a tank top. At the church's entrance, a polite, if dour-faced, guard handed me a shawl and pointed to my exposed shoulders. He was indicating I had to cover up before he'd let me in. So I took the bright green floral print and draped it over my back, feeling a delightful and dangerous drag among the other tourists, who impressed me as much more reverent than I was.

Even in dim light, the vibrant frescoes lent a splendor to the arched ceilings contrasting the hard, gray and jagged fortress-like exterior. At the head of the church, behind the altar, there was no crucifix — no nearly naked Christ crowned with thorns, impaled to a twelve-foot cross of the type one might see in most Catholic churches. Instead, there was a two-story baroque retablo, an ornately gilded third wall of statues, each figure, about the same size and painted in almost uniformly pale skin tones, and each set against an aureole of sky-blue light.

At the top of the retablo, center, was Christ in flowing blue robes and immediately below him a diorama of a scene from the Passion — Jesus en route to Calvary, clutching his cross which mostly hides the bareness of his body. Mary was prostrate before her son. Flanking the diorama was a figure with a sword, Michael the warrior saint, I suppose, and perhaps a winged Gabriel on the other side, though the archangel had no horn. The bottom row, center, was the Virgin herself, to her left another pious looking woman whom I can't identify, Veronica maybe, and lastly to Mary's right was a haggard Joseph. The walls on either side of the altar featured a separate retablo, each with its own collection of statues. I wondered if several weren't martyrs. All were posed equally peacefully, so it was hard to tell. Our guide gave us a ten-minute rundown of historical and architectural tidbits about the 18th century church, then gave us a little while to roam around.

What our guide didn't mention was a structure immediately adjacent to the church widely recognized among locals as a jail with torture chambers used during the centuries that followed the Legazpi-Sikatuna blood pact. Immaculate Conception is not the only church in the archipelago with such a building. Santa Monica Church in Sarrat (the birthplace of Ferdinand Marcos), similarly features a chamber where Filipinos were tortured and executed by Spanish authorities. Civil and church administrations often exerted their power in tandem. And so, here, a history, persisted, in Baclayon and Sarrat, the brutal examples of architecture that have survived natural calamities, wars, and tour guides.

DUNGO

I keep getting told brutality can't be forgiven, but then it's Tuesday night and I have to lift a five-year-old's body sprawled on a couch and put him over my shoulder and hold him steady, the small growing bones of his spine under the middle knuckle of my hand. Foolish adults. Here I am, putting my nephew to sleep. If anything lasts forever it isn't sweetness, let alone the perfect proportions of a boy in his brand new *Cars* pajamas. For all the dreaming I've done of whipping giants one-on-one, crushing their windpipes, the rehearsal of a bloody brawl, to be ready in case I get snuck on a corner or at the courts. Not this. I've never practiced holding the gentle neck steady, my left hand hooked under the knees of a child my brother loves with all his heart, easing the little one into the clutter of stuffed beasts. I'm not convinced I can learn tenderness. The wreckage is a safe place. If I have had to imagine being run down so I could survive it for real one day, if I was told I was the monster they've been looking for, there's no proving to them that love is natural, especially to wicked men like me. Our strangeness comes from trying to return to the ruins over and over. Murder or sleep. Either way, we dream of touch.

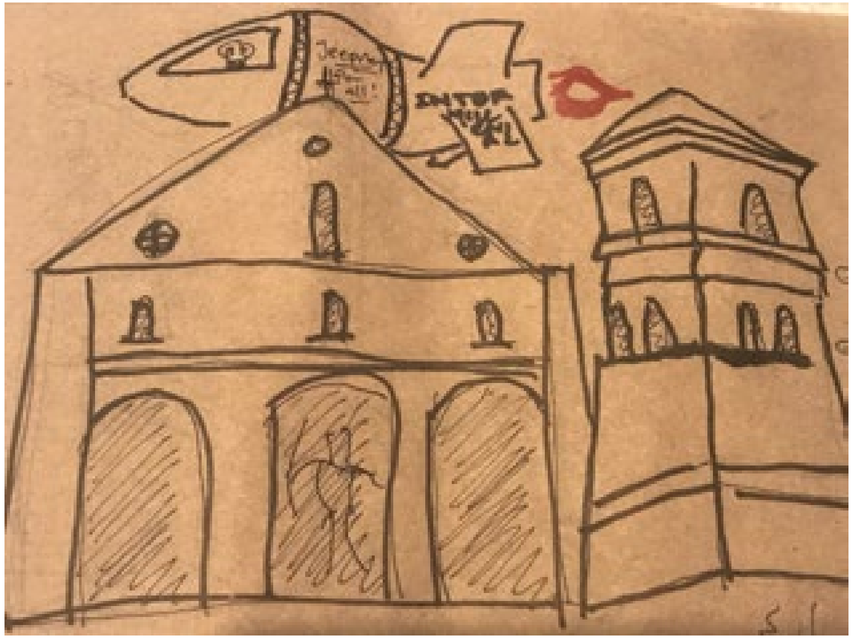


Fig. 5

Dumngeg

I was told that I am made in God’s image.

Not representative, but a representation.

The divine is present in image. The soul of the divine is derived (divined!) from sound.

A sound is made of a fundamental and its partials.

The harmonics comprise its timbre.

A hammer striking wood shares partials with a tree falling on a car. If they happen at the same time some of the sound might cancel out.

In such a case, those two events are said to have waves out of phase.

You can’t hear those frequencies. Perfect synchronicity makes nature silent.

Stealth depends upon a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rainwater.

They can make a machine to make rain say nothing.

Open your mouth.

Rain.

IGID

Power is the manipulation of forces in the structures around us.

Strength is an ability to withstand the coercive nature of power.

MAIKAWA

Dogma helps secure power. It makes power safe.

Imagination secures a space for strangeness. On the strength.

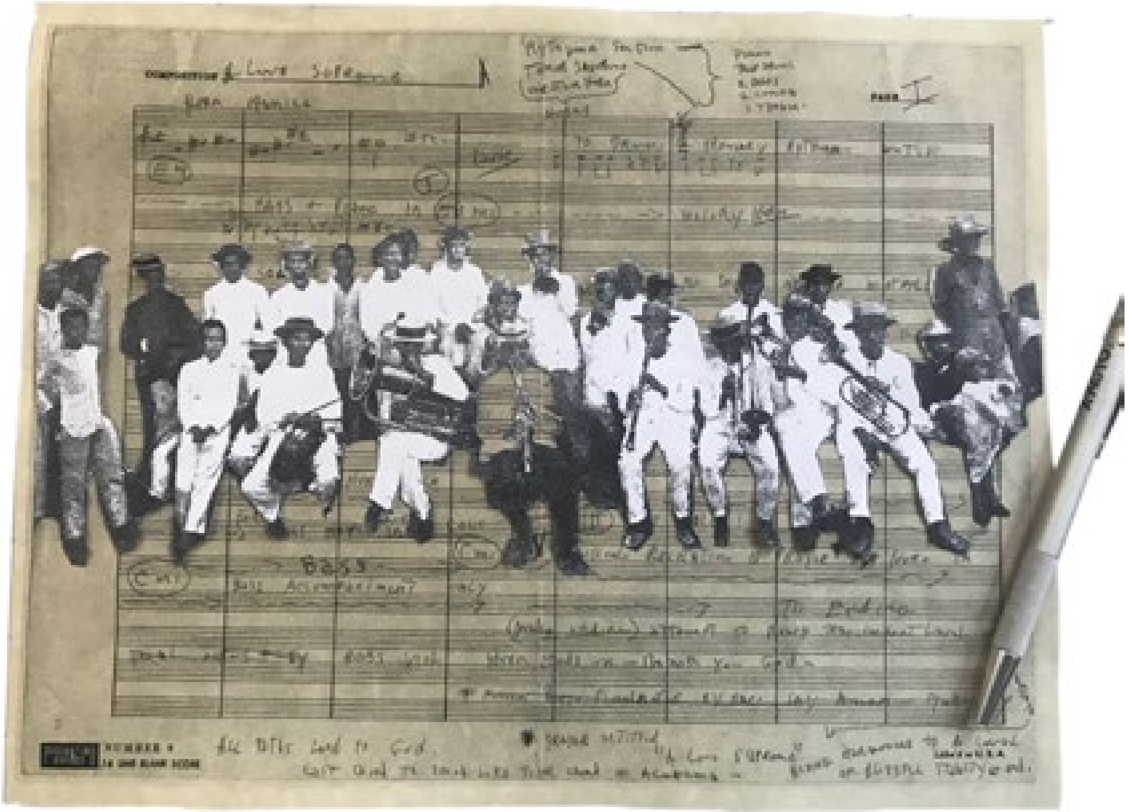


Fig. 6

Let it be remembered that most of these Filipinos are musicians, and that the character of their music is of the sentimental and appealing (to passions sort), and that the Filipinos dress flashily, spend their money lavishly on the girls…Chief Mann [of Toppenish, Wash.] said: 'They are just as dangerous when allowed free social contact with women as that of the negro when given the same liberty.'…One of the prominent men [also] in Toppenish, with whom I talked yesterday, said: 'If I had my way, I would declare an open season on all Filipinos and there would be no bag limit."

—C.O. Young, General Organizer, AFL
(as entered in Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Seventy-First Congress)

LUBONG

At the height of making many of the drawings and collages that would become part of this book, late summer 2020, smack dab in the pandemic, I woke up in the middle of the night with a ringing in my left ear. I have pretty heavy tinnitus from all those years of dancing and DJing in clubs and bars, but this was extra loud.

A lot of folks have a ringing in their ears that comes and goes. My tinnitus is always there, a mix of hissing and very high, very faraway singing. I've woken up some nights and thought I was hearing a chorus of children a block away. If you could hear the beginning of a toothache, turned the volume down to about 2.5, and made it sustain from the moment you woke up to the moment you dozed off, my tinnitus is a bit like that. It's like foil shaking. No. It's like hundreds of thousands of bits of foil shaking in the air around my ears. It's a stratosphere of mosquitos or a million hummingbirds blacking out the sky.

My tinnitus has changed my hearing enough that I forget exactly what bells sound like. I can hear them. But I know I don't hear them the same way most other people hear them. I know I don't hear them the way I used to hear them. Small bells especially.

Mary Rose asks me if my hearing is precious now. She asks if I'm scared that I'll lose all my hearing. And I say no. I mean, yes, I'm scared, but no, I'm accepting how my world will change. It already has.

That night last August, I managed to get back to sleep for a little while before waking again around dawn. The ringing wasn't just stronger than usual, it sounded like I was underwater. I got out of bed and made some coffee, thinking it was just a particularly long swell of my tinnitus, which happens occasionally. Sometimes the wave of ringing lasts as long as 10 or 15 minutes. So I took my hot cup, sat on a chair by our front window to quietly start my day.

It was close to 7am. We live on a wide residential artery with downtown just a block and a half east. The first commuter of the morning drove past. And it froze me. The engine, the rumble of the tires against the road were all muffled, as if they were far away. And whatever clarity of the sound I was processing was coming only from my right ear. I waited for another car. And not a minute later, the same. I couldn't tell which direction the cars were coming from. They may as well have been doing donuts under my nose. Then two cars drove by. I shoved my finger in my right ear and listened as more cars passed. It sounded like somebody had taken a speaker, knocked it on its back, and was holding it down with pillows and cushions. I could barely hear anything.

*

I've spent the last ten years or so learning how to talk to the dead. I feel a little funny saying this because I'm still pretty deeply American in sensibility, but I'd be lying if I pretended otherwise. My cousins who were born in the Philippines don't think talking to the dead is weird at all. They do it all the time. They tell me about the visits the dead make, not just in dreams but in the bodies of birds and spiders and butterflies. They tell me their mom — my Auntie Uding — visits. Our grandparents visit. My mom visits, too. They sometimes have messages of warning or comfort. Sometimes they come just to make us laugh. It has happened to several of us that the dead come to tickle our feet to scare the shit out of us. And then we, the living, can talk about the visit to someone who understands. And we, the living, can laugh really hard together. And I imagine the dead are still around when we're laughing. I imagine that's why the dead come to scare us in the middle of the night with such a feathery touch. The ones who have no choice to leave a body might understand the body best. They crack up at our stubborn unfamiliarity with death.

I'd gotten good enough at listening to the dead that I could call them in. Not like they'd come every time I called, but time to time they'd come. And that's how I'd heard stories from men and women who lived in other times and places. Ancestors. Not long ago. Some of them in California, during the twenties and thirties. Some of them had worked with my grandfather in Hawai'i before picking lettuce in the Pajaro Valley. Some of them were living in Watsonville when Fermin Tobera was shot in his sleep. One elder told me how they had kite making contests, each man trying to better the other in style. Some of them drawing pictures on their kites of cars or angels. Some of the manongs writing the names of a sweetheart or inscribing a little wish in the corner. And then they'd run out like boys all the way past the dunes to the water and they'd test their kites out, some of their slapdash inventions smashing into the sandy hillocks, some snagged in the trees, and others flying way up.

A picture of Perfecto Bandalan and Esther Schmick appeared in the Watsonville newspaper in December 1929. The image of this Filipino and a white girl embracing riled racial anxieties barely a month before The Palm Beach Club dancehall was set to open at the edge of town.

On January 20, 1930, posses of local men formed to hunt Filipinos down. They were assaulted throughout Watsonville. Some of those manongs were thrown off the Pajaro River Bridge. One posse arrived with weapons on the Murphy Ranch to stand outside one of the bunkhouses where the laborers lived. One of the white men shot the bunkhouse up. And Fermin Tobera was killed in his sleep. Sometimes I'm asking questions that the dead won't answer. And I have to see it for myself. And I think, there were no fine suits or hand-crafted shoes. No half-finished letters to family back in Pangasinan. Probably no kites hanging from the ceiling. There probably wasn't a guitar. The men responsible for Tobera's death were tried and let go. That is neither speculation nor a dream of the dead.

Those men were field laborers — and dancers, so in their visits they gave me stories of making music with nothing but a tabletop and a stolen guitar, these men holding each other close in a bunkhouse before they got all dressed up in their fine suits with a pocket full of dimes. No matter how exhausted, bruised, or sore, they dug down deep into the reserves to shave, clean up, and head to the dancehall. No matter — in California, in 1929 — that it could cost them their job or their lives.

*

I've mostly played guitar and keys throughout my life. And a few years ago, I started playing percussion. I practiced every day, before and after work, in between phone calls. I quietly worked on rhythms and rudiments on my lap at meetings, in the slow moving traffic of I-676, on my walks to the laundromat, testing all the syncopated subdivisions, studying time. I listened to records and more records. I watched videos of Tata Güines, Angá Díaz, Ray Barretto, Johnny Rivero, Jerry Gonzalez, Raul Rekow. Mary Rose tells me I fall asleep tapping on her thigh or wrist and

sometimes the drumming starts again in the middle of the night. I hear a rhythm in rock and roll or jazz or experimental electronic music and it's calling out to Bantú songs or Abakuá or bembé. Sometimes I hear the gangsa of the Kalinga or the plosives of the ipu. Sometimes I hear the rhythm of the song my dad used to sing to my baby brother to help him shit — takkiiiiiiii, takki! The more I studied, the more closely I listened, the more I remembered.

I love percussion (and just playing music in general) because touch is a part of the listening. What most people don't realize is that when they're listening to music, they are listening to someone's listening. And so much of a musician's listening happens through touch. I believe having a "feel" for the music is about a kind of unnamed sense, one in which all the available physical senses heighten and converge to make meaning — before language, before thought, a nearly simultaneous electricity and chemistry in the blood and in the neurons and in the bones.

In the film *Sound of Metal*, Riz Ahmed plays Ruben, a drummer who loses his hearing. His character goes to school with hearing disabled children to learn how to be deaf. And there's a scene where Ruben, the children, and the teacher are gathered around a man playing classical music on a grand piano. And they all have their hands on the body of the instrument. And I know that feeling. I feel it through the keys when I play piano. I've put my hands on a piano when my father was playing and these days when my wife plays. I don't just feel it in my fingers and palms. I can feel it in my chest, and if I'm still enough I can feel it in my scalp and the bottoms of my feet.

*

I was trying to keep my mind off the uncertainty of my hearing. My left ear still felt walled in when Mary Rose and I tuned into a live conversation about the Hōkūleʻa, a Polynesian vessel whose construction became both a symbol and materialization of the genius of Native Hawaiian maritime seafaring. Overhead, our ceiling fan was spinning, letting out a squeaky pulse. I'd joked for months that it's my metronome while I practice rudiments on drums.

The Hōkūleʻa isn't just built in Polynesian tradition, it is navigated with traditional Polynesian wayfinding techniques — no Western technology. Kālepa Baybayan, who has served as captain of the Hōkūleʻa, was talking about the star compass, or using the altitudes of celestial bodies to orient their boat on the sea. They find their way by something called dead reckoning. He explains further that even when they're sleeping they can tell by the sound and the feel of the waves that they're off course. "Our compass is visual, yeah? It's also based upon feeling and internalizing the movement of the canoe. There's a certain beat and rhythm the canoe makes as you're sailing on the ocean on an extended course. You internalize the motion. If the motion changes, if the pulse changes, then two things have either happened. Either the environmental conditions have changed or you've gone off course. More likely, you've gone off course," Kālepa says.

And then mid-sentence, the regular squeaking of the fan fell apart. The sound started breaking up like crazy. It started multiplying. The window was open. I realized it wasn't the fan, which I could still hear. I stopped the video and turned my head toward our front yard. It was geese. I could hear the geese, honking around the same pitch as our fan. It was one of those cool days in late summer. I'd just told Mary Rose this feels like autumn weather. And the honking of the geese outside, the overlapping rhythms — they must have been right overhead. It was all mixing with the squeak of the ceiling fan. The cat let out a soft meow in the kitchen, too. Hungry probably. And it all belongs. All the sounds belong together — the geese, the fan, the cat in the kitchen, and now somewhere in the overcast gulls were yucking near the same pitch as the geese. I was weeping then. My hearing had been changed for a long time. I was just traveling deeper into a world I'd already been living in.

*

The dead are always with us. You hear me? Maybe they do come to give us insight or knowledge. But they also come to lead us astray. And somewhere in the ghastly tapestry of wisdom and trick, prank and sagacity, the dead remind us that our bodies are theirs. Not just our ears and hands. Not just the belly and the spine and eyes. But the heart and lung and muscle. It's how we hear them. You feel me? It's how we listen. The dead carry the past, all the listening of their past, all the solitude of their listening, all the gathering of their solitude. They carry the past of their past. And we carry the dead.

We have an entire body for carrying. We have an entire body for listening. They're playing their guitars. They're crafting their kites. They're scribbling their names, their wishes. They're drawing a bird, a boat, a cross. They're hanging the kites from the rafters of a bunkhouse, from the ceiling of a dancehall, from the beams of a bombed out house. They are bidding one another farewell by smashing the glasses against the walls. They are holding each other tight in the dark. They're kissing someone's hair in the dark. They're listening for the waves in the dark to find their way in the sea. They're plucking the flies from the rice bin and sifting the moths from the flour. Listen. They're counting the gulls. They're spitting into a cup full of blood. They're birthing our grandfathers. Listen now. Listen. They're holding each other's hands as they weep. They're ringing their bells and so are the dead of the dead of the dead, which is to say their sounds are so old. So very, very old. Their sounds are our sounds. Listen. Their listening is our listening. Everywhere in our bodies is the end of our lives. Everywhere in our bodies is the beginning of time.

Daniw

For many years I thought a poet was meant to sing so hard that he could speak to the dead. The wonder of poetry, though, is that a poet can speak *from the dead*.

OUR ACQUISITION OF THE GARDEN
OF EDEN.

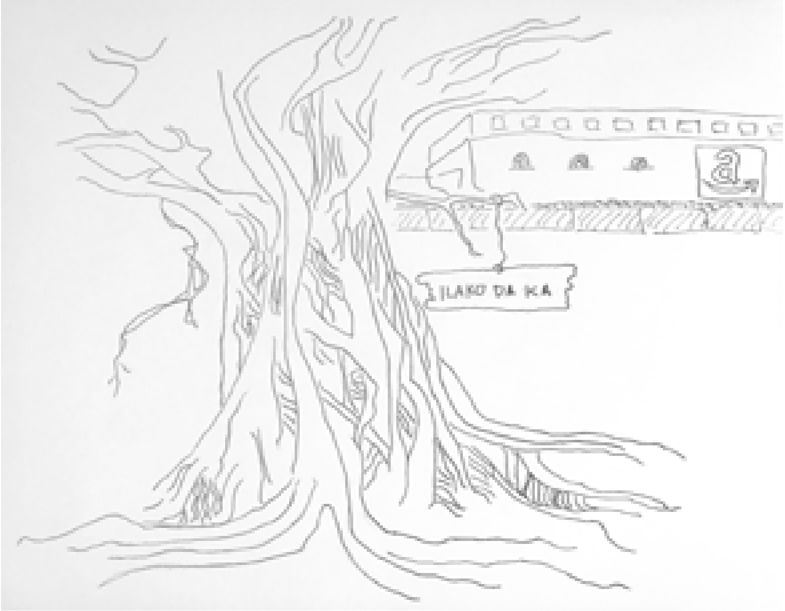


Fig. 7

Langit

When I was twelve years old, I played guitar at mass occasionally for St. Francis Cathedral. During Communion one Sunday, the hymn ran short, so I filled the silence with the intro to "Stairway to Heaven." The younger kid who was playing guitar with me heard me starting the familiar fifth-fret plucking and foamed through his gritted teeth, "Noooo…Don't play that!"… I rocked on anyway.

Oido

It's one of the indelible images of my mother: mid-afternoon, sometime in spring, I think. The grandfather clock in the corner hasn't worked for years. There are week-old newspapers strewn on the floor and on the coffee table. My mother already has a gorgeous shock of gray spraying from her temple across the top of her head at an angle. She's wearing her big round eyeglass frames. She is settled into one corner of the couch, the pillows pushed to the side, her one leg tucked under her butt on the floral sofa in shorts and a baggy t-shirt. The other leg is pulled up gently, her heel propped on the cushion's edge so that neither of her feet is touching the ground. How relaxed she looks with her left arm along the back of the sofa, her other elbow resting on her raised knee with her hand open and turned downward as if she were about to pick up something very light.

"Play, 'Nakko" asking for one of her favorite songs by name. "I love that one."

I learned only recently that "Bewitched" was recorded by Chicago jazz singer Anita O'Day in 1957 — the year before my mom arrived in the Midwest.

For as long as I can remember I have always loved to try to do things I didn't completely understand. I never had a piano lesson in my life. I learned music the way I learned my mother's language, Ilocano — by error and more error; I learned by ear. And as I did with my mother's language, I trusted jazz held an order and coherence that I didn't yet nearly understand.

I don't remember how long I played for or how long my mother listened. But she stuck around for all the stops and stutters, the misplayed harmonies and changes, the stumbled runs and bad voicings. Every day, there must have been so many things she wanted to ask me: why did I stay away for days at a time, why, coming home mid-morning, mid-week, I reeked of liquor, how I made it home anyway, was I fighting again? how much? with whom? And every day, I'd either hole up in my room or lean into the piano, shutting out the world to get lost, or I'd walk out the door without saying a word.

AWAN

And what can I do about it Nothing I can't do anything I can wring my hands or look out at the rain coming down for hours now until the streets fill up Even when there's nothing there's something you can't see And what can I do now that everything I do is invisible I can't even see its legs any more that thing galloping now west carrying the sun on its back screaming for the murderers to exit their houses to use the front door to announce themselves We know you're in there You have nowhere to go You can do nothing There's nothing to do Move along Move along Nothing to see here even if you shine a light on it Even if you set the whole city on fire Look at the bells I mean listen to them They're as good as rain filling the neighborhood breaking into windows Men have dreamed of machines to travel as fast as them clap in the heavens all the Zeus-like engineers looking into the stratosphere seeing nothing Nothing at all just like what's haunting us just like what's jailing us just like what's keeping us on track in line on point Radar of the gods Come in Come in No response nothing Where is God the child asked after the towers fell Where is God God is everywhere If you think long enough about his location you arrive by logic not at his whereabouts but his substance which is nothing God is nothing Not even murder Not even mercy Not even the fly crawling out of the crow's mouth Even when the bird is talking he's not saying nothing Not a goddamned thing Not even the weight of a hatchet Not even the hole you dig to bury it Not even the ancient trees he'd trouble himself to reap until the whole hillside's blank Nothing Nothing there No branches No leaves Not even a flimsy twig to hang your hat or a log to which you can nail your feet

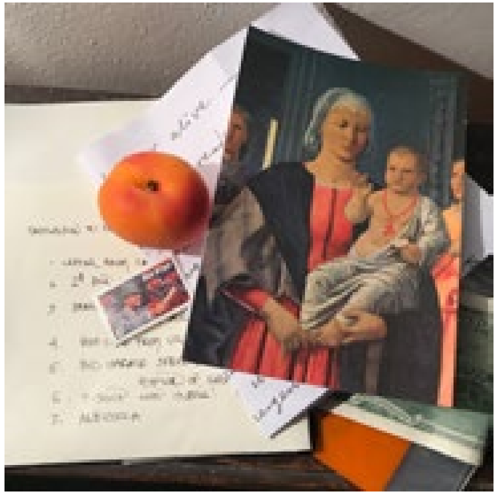


Fig. 8

Paawan

What is a monument made of sound? A tool of memory that is meant to disappear — whose disappearance is a meaning.

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

ANGAY

May 26, 2019 (Civitella Rainieri, Umbertide, Italy)

Friends,

Just a really informal note here. In my space, I have an altar (pictures, flowers, sugar, rum, etc.), as many Filipino households do. Every year around now, I celebrate my mom and our family's long mysterious migration (Ilocos, Hawaii, California, Chicago, Toronto, Brooklyn, Edison, Philadelphia). I'm renewing the altar over the next couple days, and I thought I'd invite you to contribute something. Really no pressure. I know folks have plenty of their own making/thinking to tend to.

Simeona Gelacio Rosal (aka Mimi, Manang Mimi, Auntie Mimi, Tita Mimi) was a person who gathered people. She made laughter and dancing and eating possible for everyone who came through her door. She taught me how to praise and how to curse. She loved a good time til the day she died. My mother turned no one away.

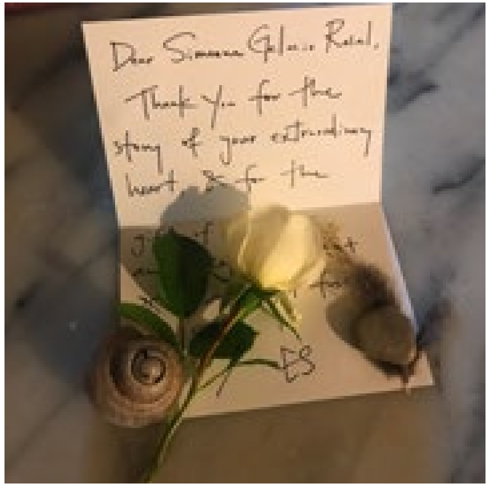
The altar space is just a very small window ledge. Feel free to share a leaf, or piece of fruit, or a word/phrase/wish written on a piece of paper; anything found is welcome (I certainly don't mean for you to give up anything valuable to you.) You can give the object to me directly or leave it in the castle kitchen with a note (anonymity welcome). Or if you want to come up to the tower to place it yourself, just let me know.

Thanks for the consideration. I'll see many of you tonight on the dance floor.

A dopo,

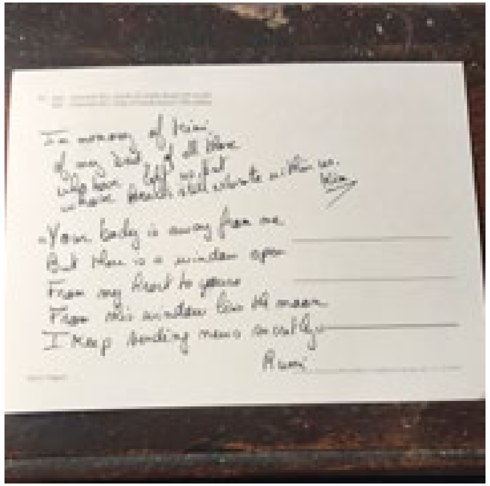
Patricio Alfonso Gelacio Llanes Rosal

Fig. 11

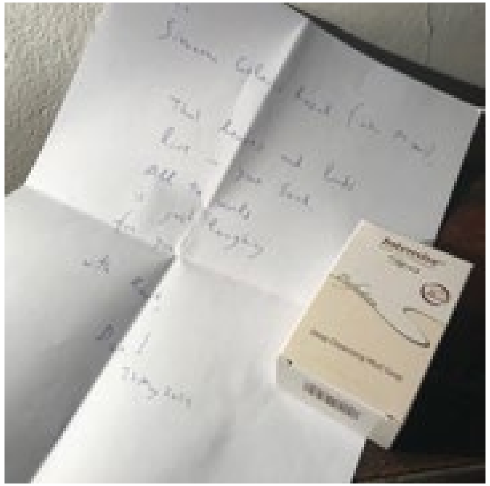


Dear Simeona Gelacio Rosal,
Thank You for the
story of your extraordinary
heart, & for the

Fig. 12

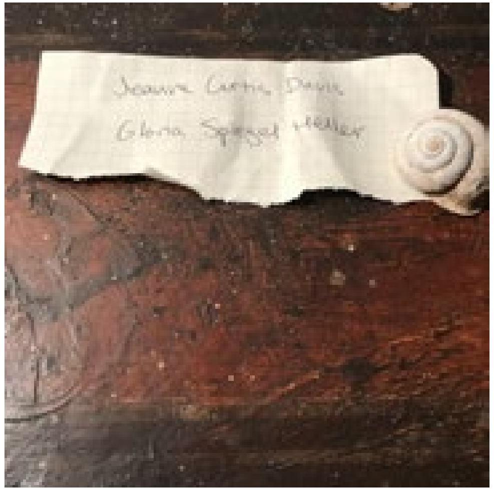


In memory of Mimi
[illegible]
Your body is away from me
But there is a window open
From my heart to yours
From this window like the moon
I keep sending news secretly
Rumi



Simeona Gelacio Rosal
[illegible]

Fig. 13



Joanne Curtis Davis
Gloria [illegible]

Fig. 14

Anghel

In some countries, men die to find out if they're material for angels. And then they're sent back to places that used to be strange so they can look at how beautiful everybody is, how the living keep trying to give it another order.

If you want to learn terror, come back as an infinite being unable to touch the world he finally realizes he loves. You can't even strike a match and kiss its flame to the corner of a pile of scrapwood and trash — the fire a small finger wobbling before it really catches so fast it doesn't even need stoking. And you and the boy stand there wondering if the whole city could burn or if they'll drop lake water on the blaze.

You can't even lead the boy by hand away from what he's made, though you can take him up a hill so he can watch his own home go down.

I know you've never dreamt of this. It's what I'm here for.

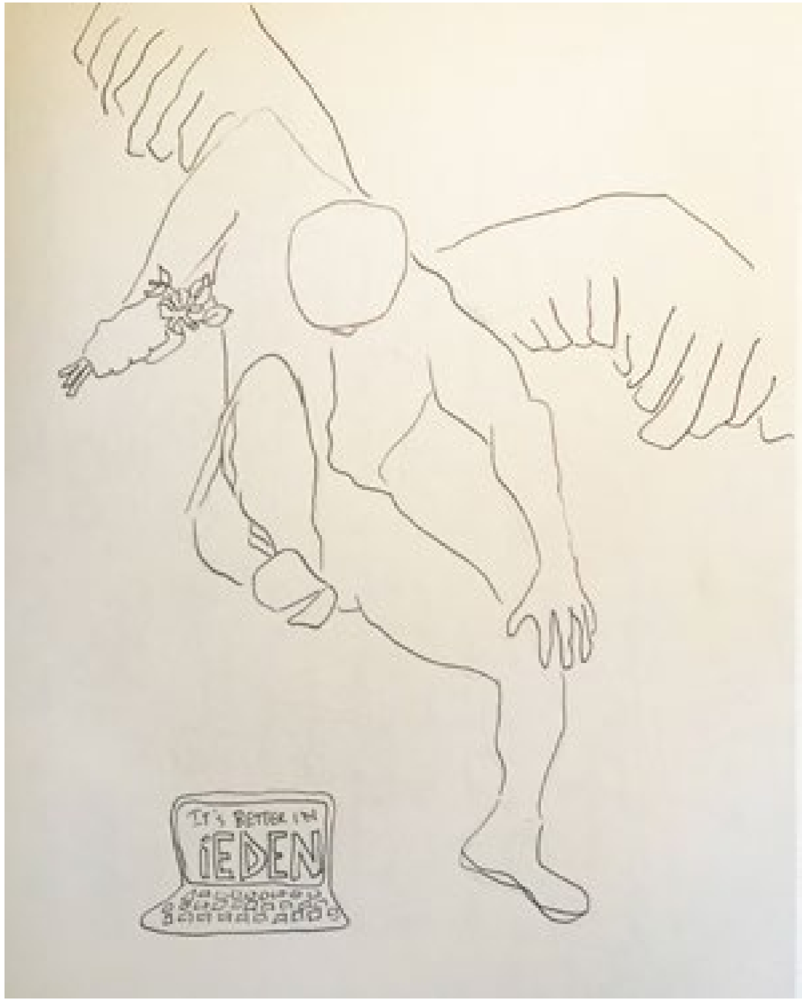


Fig. 15

REBBENG

Is it the job of an artist to be relevant? Or is it to be revelatory, revolutionary, revenant?

LEDDAANG

Reading Toi Derricotte, I have to put the book down time and time again because I feel my own grief rise up — not a generic grief and not necessarily a very particular grief, but maybe a grief made up of several griefs, a pool of grief or constellation of grief or a tree of grief growing up inside of me out my ears and eyes and fingertips and navel. Derricotte's images, her voice, the sound of it—they're each like a spark, if the tree I spoke of were made of fire blazing me up. Her work triggers a powerful feeling, and much of that feeling is pain, if sorrow is a version of pain, a consequence of pain, and even if pain and sorrow are not the same, they often show up together like heat and the fire it makes — I mean like fire and the heat it makes or both. We say trigger. I could say her work triggers me. And I'm drifting from this idea of trigger which is another kind of firing, whose specific meaning doesn't seem accurate or close to my feeling. Trigger, at its root, is related to trek — as in journey or migration. And in that way, Derricotte's poetry does trigger me. It triggers pain. It triggers sadness. I travel into my sadness. And trekking toward it, I understand sadness has a silence, and where there is silence there used to be a sound, or there will be a sound, and where there is sound there is the beginning of language. And the silence of sorrow is one aftermath of — and prelude to — language. "Pull the trigger" in an etymological sense is a redundancy; trigger comes from a word meaning to pull, and so, associatively, it seems to me, to be triggered by a word, image, object, sensory experience is to be pulled into one's self; it shows us pain we've turned our backs on; a trigger-as-trek is a revelation; an apocalypse of sorts. I go to art to be pulled. I go to art to be pulled closer to someone else's music. I go to art to be pulled closer to someone else's feeling. Closer — as if feeling were a place. A destination. A journey itself. There are places that are charged with memory and feeling, even places I've never physically been to before. I'm drawn to them. The places call me. I'm invoked by a place. Sometimes the name of the place is Pain. I'm invited. I'm beckoned. Sometimes the place is a feeling. And sometimes I answer the call. Sometimes I call back. And sometimes me and the place show up together at the same time. This is mutual invocation, a convocation. A migration? An exodus? Pilgrimage? Visitation… visit? Every feeling is a question, a space we don't understand, but like all spaces a feeling is a thing through which we can move. Every feeling, a movement. Toi's poems move me. Her voice moves me. I'm moved by her voice. Toward my own feeling, some of which is grief, some of which is joy. Pulled. A pulse. A push. I follow the impulse of feeling. And what follows the feeling, too, is a thought. I'm pulled by feeling into thought. Thought is one form of feeling, a break in feeling, a formal feeling come, like the poet says. The feeling breaks. And sometimes thought takes its place. And sometimes the break in feeling is where the dancing happens. That's what the break is for. And dancing is a kind of movement. Dancing moves me. It is also a migration deeper into feeling itself. A pull. I want this migration, I want this stillness. Sometimes I don't. Not the spectacle, but the pull. The movement. And the feeling after.

Salaysay

I have so many stories in my head. And every time I try to find a way to tell them, I find myself asking: Where does the song begin? And then I find the beginning of the story which is no beginning at all. Does my family's story start with my parents' affair in Chicago or my mom's arrival or my grandfather's sakada life in 1929? Aristotle, of course — beginnings, middles, endings. How did I become so obsessed with origins? Is it because I don't know my own origin? My own name even. Maybe I'm not obsessed with origins. Maybe I'm obsessed with names, which is the same thing as the unknown.

Fig. 16

DESPEDIDA

When one is about to leave to Australia or Germany or America for good, the ones who remain will send off the one who is leaving with a big celebration, food and rosaries and gifts. They don't simply say "Goodbye. Farewell." They don't say, "We'll miss you." My father was a Catholic priest, visiting the U.S. from the Philippines. It was August, 1962, the day every front page in LAX announced a couple doctors found Marilyn Monroe dead in her bedroom with a bottle of pills beside her. My dad weighed a buck-twenty at the time, still had a college-boy grin, but was known among his peers in the clergy for fasting seven days a week. Cigarettes, his one indulgence. He drank instant decaf.

I hear he was actually kind of a rotten kid. His mother used to gather the children every night to pray the rosary by candlelight in their sala, all prostrate before the shrine of Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and the spooky Santo Niño. By all accounts, my grandmother, Matilde, was a badass armed with a Spanish temper, a big wooden crucifix, leather slippers and awesome aim.

My father, nonetheless, was the most irreverent of her children. He'd habitually avoid his mother's evening call to prayer, hiding out or lingering in a bedroom. And when he showed up (he would eventually have to show up) he was bored to hell with the two-hour long drone of the holy mysteries and often got smacked on the ear for falling asleep mid-Hail Mary or pretending to remember the words of the Our Father. And the neighborhood got a good idea of my father's miscreant tendencies when he was seven or so and set loose their neighbor's twenty prize-winning fighting cocks, then sat there to watch the roosters maul each other to death.

My father's father, my grandfather, was a no-joke disciplinarian. He was a judge during the American occupation and a respected community leader through the War. The people of San Vicente, their hometown, would step aside on public roads to make way for my grandfather then remove their hats from their heads under the most brutal mid-day tropical heat as an act of reverence.

If my father or any of his eight siblings stepped out of line (a ninth died as an infant, and a tenth as an adolescent), they'd catch a beating from the judge himself with a leather belt or rattan stick, and were sometimes forced to stand facing the corner of their huge living room with arms extended until the patriarch sent them to their rooms weeping. My grandfather gave them a version of punishment he learned from his father during the Spanish era. If they were caught letting their arms drop to their sides, their father simply wacked them, striping their backsides and hamstrings bright red. And other times, Lolo Alfonso simply made them kneel on uncooked rice.

Well, the Japanese did invade the Philippines. And my father, barely thirteen, watched the first dogfights between the Americans and the newest would-be conquerors, as he and his brothers walked to school. News traveled quickly from barrio to barrio of the first American fuselage crashed and burned in a neighboring town. Two older brothers would join the guerilla movement, get captured by the Japanese, escape, get caught again, dig ditches at gunpoint, only to be stabbed in the back with bayonets and shoved into the graves they'd been forced to hollow out for themselves.

There weren't many ways to keep children safe in those days, but my father was the right age for the seminary, which he himself proposed to enter, to the delight and surprise of his insanely devout mother. In the seminary, he transformed himself from mischief-maker and brat into a paragon of self-abnegation, fasting every day, denying himself food, drink, even laughter — all in the name of the suffering Christ. Once he was ordained, he ascended ranks to become director of the Cathedral Choir and finally Vice Chancellor of the Diocese of Nueva Segovia. He was a young priest with a career future in the Church.

Then, almost inexplicably, the archbishop sent him to America.

My father arrived in California that summer of '62 with two other priests, his superiors, one who would be elevated, in coming decades, to monsignor, the other all the way to bishop. From LA, they drove up to San Francisco, then crossed two time zones into the heart of the Midwest. Story goes, they were stopping in American cities to raise money for parishes back home, working their way from coast to coast, all the way out to New York. After collecting funds, they were to return to the Philippines together.

Fig. 17

In the middle of their trip, a rectory in Techny, Illinois, just north of Chicago, took in the traveling trio for a long home-cooked lunch. After the Filipinos offered their American hosts a formal goodbye and walked off rectory grounds toward their rented car, my dad's older companions stopped, turned to my father and said, You're not coming with us to New York any more.

And it's not hard for me to imagine again the confusion on my father's face in that moment.

I don't understand, he said.

The priests told him just to wait here on the corner for a bus to go to Chicago while they went on to New York. They gave him no other directions and left him in a suburb somewhere north of the biggest city in the Midwest, standing in August heat, dressed throat-to-toe in black gabardine wool.

This was the man of the same face in the picture that I would find almost two decades later tucked in a photo album in our basement, a young, handsome priest, clean-cut, slicked back with pomade. My father watched the priests drive away and finally disappear. It probably didn't take long before he wasn't just asking why they left him but what would he do and where would he go. Then, two American priests who resided in the rectory but were dressed in laymen's clothes — they were white —asked what he was doing standing there. When my father told them he was waiting for the bus to Chicago, the Americans told him, no bus came through that part of town, let alone one that went to Chicago. They offered to drive him the hour and a half into the city. He climbed into their car wondering where he was going, how he would get back home, still trying to make sense of why he was left alone.

Imprinted in the mind of almost every Filipino of my father's generation are the names of relatives, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews. They know the names of those who live in the next town; they know the names of those who live on another continent. They keep pictures and letters pressed in a box or bible and take them out to share with relatives so they can be reminded from time to time how wide their clan has traveled.

At those goodbye fetes, instead of "So long," they say, "Don't forget us." The ones who live out the rest of their lives in the Philippines don't want to be forgotten, and so they themselves don't forget. They can summon from memory whole generations at the snap of a finger, offering litanies and genealogies and gossip and parables, so a family gathering can become a call and response of names and places in history. They know how this one is related, where that one worked before the War, how this one escaped, where that one lost her mind, and all the cities where this one has tried to make a home. They have memorized the whole story of their clan, and as the clan grows and moves, so, in their minds and on the tongue and in the air, does the clan's story grow and move.

My father, as he stood at the border of a city with a bag full of priest's clothes and twenty dollars in his pocket, recited in his mind the catalog of kin he'd heard recited time and time again, ingrained now in his memory, the names of those who were inextricably linked to his name.

In a public phonebook, my father found the number of an older cousin he had never met, Honesto, who left the Philippines as a young man, arriving in Chicago the same year Jack Dempsey knocked out Gene Tunney at Soldier's Field. According to the last thing my father heard, it had been at least a decade since Honesto wrote his family in the Philippines to update them on his whereabouts, and his whereabouts, it turns out, was still there in a public housing project of Chicago's West Side. And when my father showed up at Honesto's door, the old man welcomed this cousin, this stranger, my father, and gave him a bed for three nights as he looked furiously until he found a parish that would hire him.

The distinctions between the monumental and the ephemeral lie along a spectrum, as monuments are crumbling (some of them hauled down or smashed, too). And inside the various artifacts we consider ephemeral are vital forms of memory. They are both forms of forgetting. They are both forms of archive. The library is an archive. The record collection is an archive. The statue of St. Francis is an archive. And so is the body in dance an archive. The body in procession. So is the voice. And so are all the things encoded in the molecular structure of our bones, all the things we dare not say.

AMA (PATER NOSTER)

I have no children. I chose to have no children — among other reasons — for fear of becoming my father. Being childless, I will have become a not-father, which is ironically what my father was. He was not a father to me.

And so, in a state of childlessness, I have become my father. He is the not-father of me (and my brothers). I am the not-father of all my children — none.

I have become my father by way of having no children. I am my own child.

But I begin again, here, with the fact that I am childless and have become my father. The not-father begets a son. And the son aspires to not be his father.

To make things right, his aspiration is to not be a father.

And that is how I became my father: I believed I could correct my father. I couldn't correct my father in his own body, so I tried to correct him in my own.

I will be free when I let go of my father, when I let my father go.

I will be freed from the binary enclosure of father/not-father when I let my father go and my self that is my father, until my self is not a father, is not a father but my self.

INANG

When a mother dies, her child — her children — have to start all over again. In effect, a child who outlives his mother is born twice. And like the circumstances of their first birth, some things are determined for them and some things they must learn and choose. The intelligence of those choices is based on what they did or did not do in their first lives. Their experience of love will change radically, as it must, as mature mourning must make them change. And if they hope to go on living as if they had never suffered the loss of their mother, if they never grieve, their love will be stunted, not just their love for the memory of the mother, but for all of love in their lives, all contact and touch and questioning — all of that will be kept from fulfillment. They must surrender their first lives to their first lives, so their second lives can flourish.

MANGNGANUP

The kitchen table of my childhood home was barely big enough for my father, my two brothers and me to sit, and my mother to stand at the sink or stove. When she did sit, we sometimes called out “Ipis!” and in one swift move my mom would slide a slipper off her foot and bash the roach riding the yellow wall over her shoulder. My father says I always talked too much at dinner.

BATO

If I had two more arms I’d write twice as many lies. But there’s a governor in my heart whose chisel’s quicker than my pen. If I don’t start singing, his wishes could end up in stone.

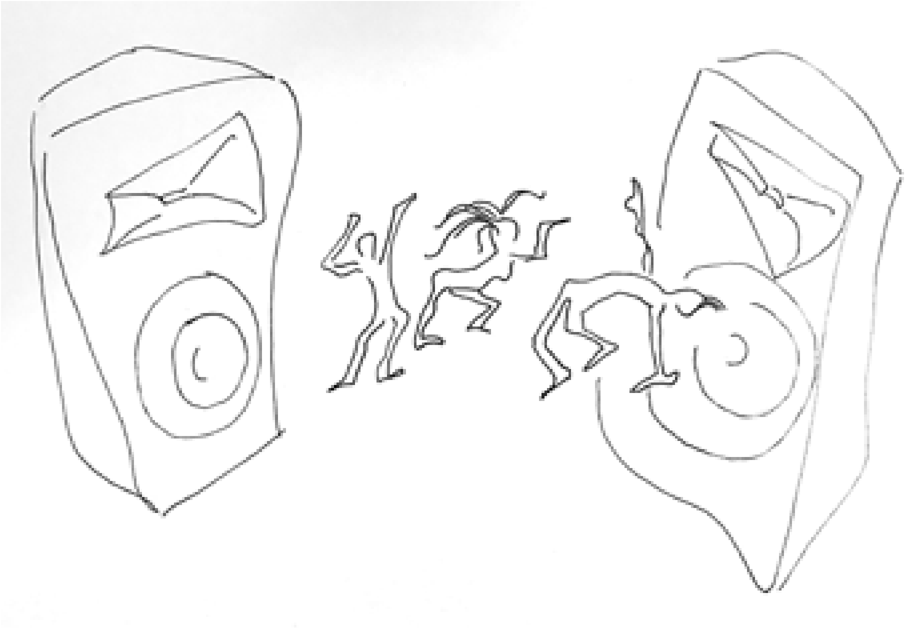


Fig. 18

Libro

When I consider how much ritual, singing, dance, chanting, gathering, music-making is stripped from Western storytelling, I realize, even the most elaborately structured book is a minimalist technology.

LIBLIBRO

In Ilokano liblibro means books — or tripe.

AGBASA

I am unreadable.

A name is a frame. An age is a frame. An epoch, a season, a map is a frame.

Does a frame make a word or a man more readable? Is a man a language? A sentence?

(Jesus: I am the Word.
Me: I am framed.)

*

What to do if you come across a man you don't know...

Use the internet.

Or context clues.

Either way, if you can't figure him out, look him up.

Suspicion: to look upward from below. Same root as suspect and suspicious.

What is my context? Do I have drugs or weapons in the vehicle? What are those tattoos? What gang am I in? They'll need to search me and my car.

When I ask, what is my context? I mean, what am I woven into?

America is a text. America is a textile.

It is fabricated.

I am a real man in America. I am a real man in a fabricated context.

In order to read me, you have to know how America was made.

MANGISURO

Does indoctrination happen by content or by form?

*

In Ilokano, the words for teach and learn — but for one letter — are virtually identical, coming from the same root: mangisuro, mangsuro.

*

We should be at the end of the era of extracting value from one another.

Mangan tayon

A couple European businessmen came to Balacad, the village where my grandparents settled after the War. The men were looking for business opportunities and wanted to sit down with locals to discuss possibilities. They spoke to my Uncle Charlie through a translator. When their meeting was finished and the businessmen were walking back to their ride, my uncle got all his English together to shout his farewell:

I'LL EAT YOU LATER!

Pakawan (or Clemency for the Thief)

Being Filipino in America means being so severely scrubbed of your history that virtually everything you do is an experiment in identity, an experiment in being itself. You're making the best of what you got within reach. Not just testing the outer, social world, but your inner world, too.

You're making shit up as you go along.

Every time you speak a word, it's not a word authentic to your history. English, for example, in its entirety. Or Spanish. Every utterance is actually a thief's confession. When one is so completely torn from a clearly legible narrative of one's past, the only authenticity is the blank space, the empty stage, the silent room, the unfilled form, the map before the map, the proto-blueprint of the nothingness that history left you with. I'm not sure I'm being clear. When you're that stripped of history, you can come into the world attentive, which is terrifying, but which is also to say you are alive to the fact that you might become anything. You are nothing but potential.

And goddamn, how tempting it is to squander that possibility with somebody else's shitty plan, some received notion of what it means to be, some prescribed map of success, some bourgeois aspiration of wealth, some brutal romance, some mockup of a capitalist wet dream, instead of just fucking being wonderfully, ecstatically, hilariously lost.

You can call what Filipinos do mimicry, I guess, or appropriation. But you have to already be something pretty substantial in order for you to copy somebody else; you have to have an identity to replace. If that adage about the vacuum has an ounce of truth in it, then nature abhors us.

Let me tell you, the "Filipino" as we think we understand it doesn't exist. It never did. The long erosion of our pre-European identity was perhaps just as violent as the massive, traumatic imposition of the identity of the "Filipino" in the first place. We are an emotional and even sentimental lot. And I believe we laugh and cry so hard, we are so full of feeling, because we have substituted this huge abyss of identity with so many contradictory things that a people with a more defined historical identity would not be able to embody as readily as the Filipino.

We seem passive bystanders to the multitude of qualities and traditions we absorb from the world… and then, there occurs for us a quietly wondrous phenomenon: in this rather whimsical, continuous osmosis, we keep encountering some part of our lost selves. We touch some practice that feels like its ours, like a planet joining a galaxy already in motion.

And The Big Story simply can't account for this. Furthermore, that lack of account is how we switch up the things we have stolen or how we make such a pilfered identity bigger, grander, even absurd. We're all a little "off." It's really the most grotesque, most human thing to be Filipino, great inventors of identity, counter-composers of a five-century-old lie, our version of which is assembled with the complexity of its own growing, fluid mystery and virtually none of the power of politics, a shapeshifting nothingness, a wonder of absence. Think about that. Humanity could learn a lot from the history of Filipinos in this regard.

We are not what we seem—often even to ourselves. Under the quasi-sheer garments of giggliness and sentimentality you might fine a well honed blade. And beneath the Charles Bronson-esque machismo, an oft-stifled sweetness. It's almost a miracle that we find love at all. Then again, who better to crave love, relish it, lose it and lose it over and over, and then find it again, only to give back to the world (with our bodies!) a version of the world itself that it has so stubbornly refused to see.

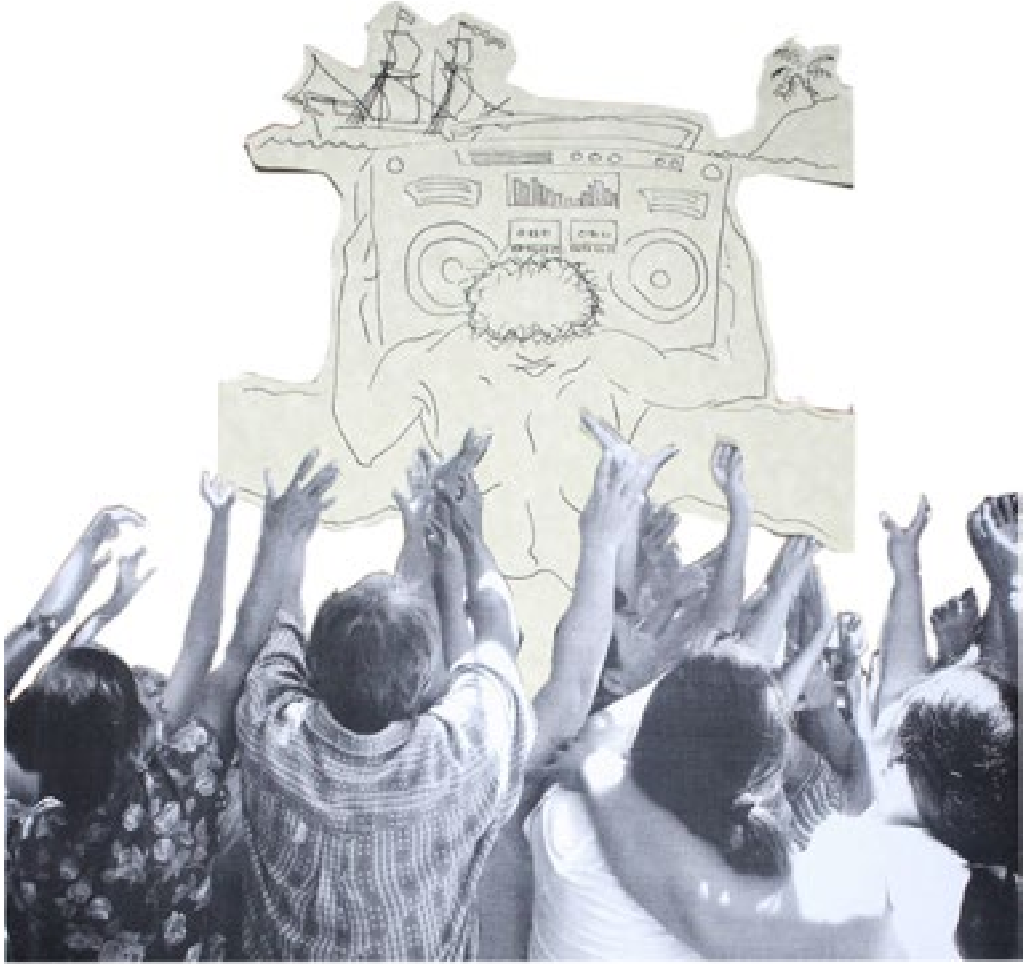


Fig. 19

Mangisuro

When I try something new in a class, which is often, I feel nervous, excited too. Sometimes I even feel afraid. Why do we not talk about what it feels like to teach, as if teaching were just a thing our brains did? I've always thought of teaching the way I thought about poems — how the maker has to confront what they don't know. The confrontation of the unknown often provokes fear. If we aren't a little nervous or even a little afraid of what and how we teach, are we really teaching? Perhaps a missing premise here: Teaching isn't star selection or anointment. Teaching isn't simply conveying information or professing or being an authority on this and that. It's not even really being a guide or a facilitator. Teaching is being in the presence of a bunch of people that you don't actually know very well and trying to figure out who you are in relation to them. A teacher is a stranger among strangers trying to figure out his own estrangement. As a teacher in a classroom, I am trying to teach myself. I am trying to confront things I don't know how to articulate. I am trying to make discoveries in front of the other people in the class. That can be unnerving and chaotic. It is a terrifying gift to witness someone who is lost try to find their way. The witness is part of the search.

El estudio

La verdad es que a mí me encanta estudiar. Me encanta estudiar. Y el estudiar para mí es como un labarinto en el que yo entro y empiezan a venir cosas que no puedo tocar. En el tratar de descifrar cómo tocar eso que no puedo, por allí vienen un montón de ideas y ritmos nuevos y cosas así. Ahora es muy fácil hacer eso porque en un momento que tu tienes una idea tu lo puedes grabar al mismo. Pero todo viene de por allí, del estudiar. Tu sabes? Yo tengo a un amigo que es un muy bueno baterista de hip hop y él se llama Jojo Mayer que Jojo dice que si tu suena bién cuando estás estudiando es porque no estás estudiando. Es tú estás simplemente tocando lo que tú sabes tocar. Y verdaderamente estudiar es tratar de lanzarse a algo que uno no conoce, no?

(The truth is that I love to study. I love to study. And studying for me is like a labyrinth I enter and what comes to me are things that I can't play. In trying to decipher how to play that which I can't, out of that comes a ton of ideas and new rhythms and things like that. Now, it's so easy because at the very moment an idea hits you, you can record it at the same time. But everything comes out of that — study. You know? I have a friend who is a very good hip hop drummer and his name is Jojo Mayer and Jojo says that if you sound good when you are studying, it's because you aren't studying. It's that you're simply playing what you know how to play. And truly studying is trying to fling yourself toward something one doesn't understand, no?)

—Horacio El Negro Hernandez in conversation with Yissy García
(You can watch it on YouTube!)

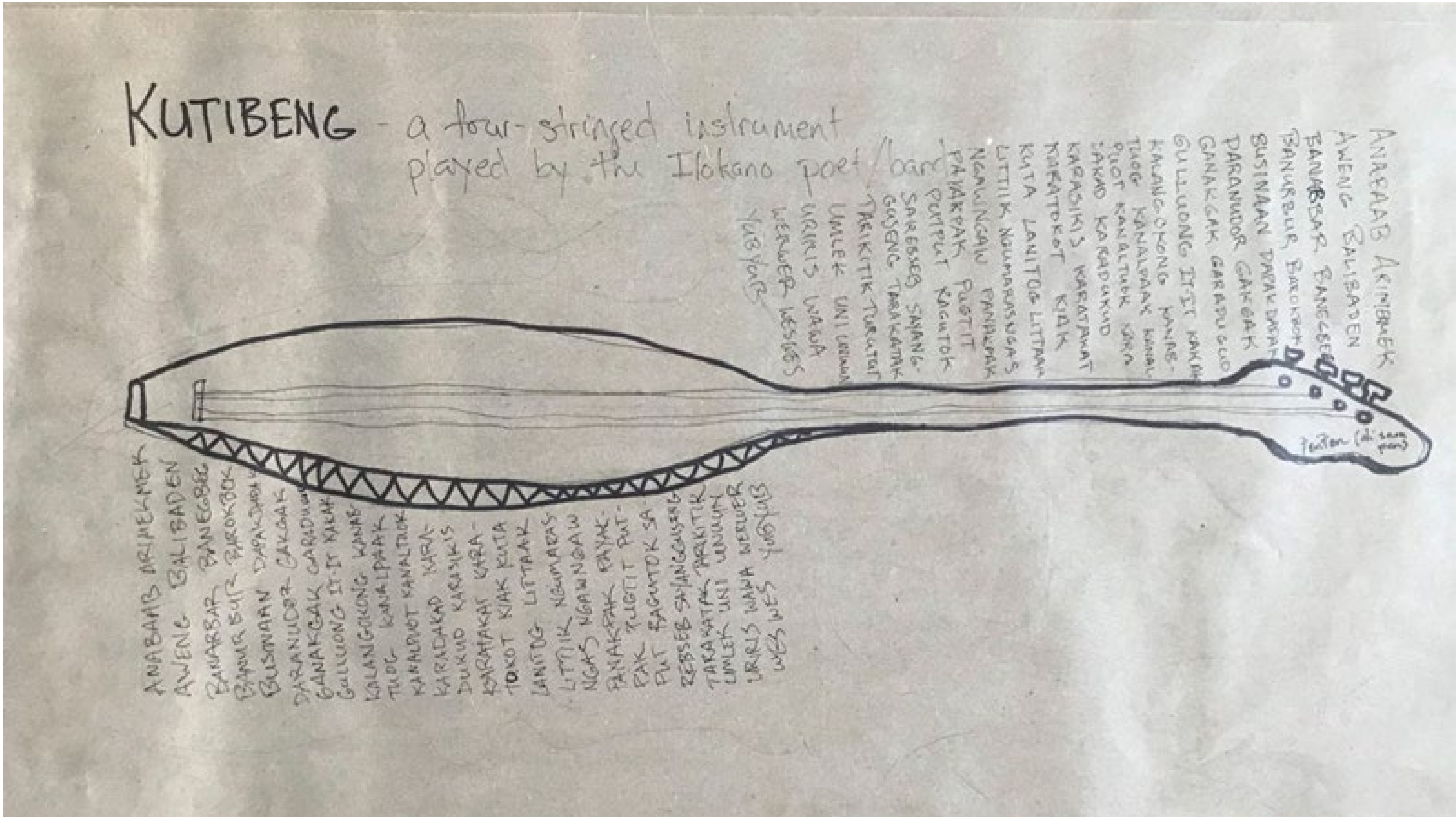

KUTIBENG - a four-stringed instrument played by the Ilokano poet/bard
ANARAAB ARIMBMEK
AWENG BALIBADEN
BANABBAR BANEGBEG
BANURBUR BAROKBOK
BUSINAAN DAPAKDAPAK
DARANUDOR GAKGAK
GANAKGAK GARADUGUD
GULLUONG IT-IT KAKAK
KALANGOKONG KANAB-
TUOG KANALPAAK KANAL-
PUOT KANALTUOK KARA-
SAKAD KARADUKUD
KARASIKIS KARATAKAT
KARATOKOT KIAK
KUTA LANITOG LITTAAK
LITTIIK NGUMARASNGAS
NGAWNGAW PANAKPAK
PAYAKPAK PUGTIT
PUTPUT RAGUTOK
SAREBSEB SAYANG-
GUSENG TARAKATAK
TARIKITIK TURUTOT
UMLEK UNI UNNUN
URIRIS WAWA
WERWER WESWES
YUBYUB
ANABAAB ARIMEKMEK
AWENG BALIBADEN
BANARBAR BANEGBEG
BANURBUR BAROKBOK
BUSINAAN DAPAKDAPAK
DARANUDOR GAKGAK
GANAKGAK GARADUGUD
GULLUONG IT-IT KAKAK
KALANGOKONG KANAB-
TUOG KANALPAAK
KANALPUOT KANALTUOK
KARADAKAD KARA-
DUKUD KARASIKIS
KARATAKAT KARA-
TOKOT KIAK KUTA
LANITOG LITTAAK
LITTIIK NGUMARAS-
NGAS NGAWNGAW
PANAKPAK PAYAK-
PAK PUGTIT PUT-
PUT RAGUTOK SA-
REBSEB SAYANGGUSENG
TARAKATAK TARIKITIK
UMLEK UNI UNNUN
URIRIS WAWA WERWER
WESWES YUBYUB
Penton (di sam pam)

Fig. 20

AGLIMBONG

Doesn’t certainty make the meaning of things exhaustible?

LEMMENG

If white literature can signify whiteness and white supremacy implicitly — that is, without ever naming itself — if it can convey its own anxieties about its own power and its loss of that power, if it can reinforce structures of brutality without laying it out like a case of brand new 115-grain hollow points, then what can Filipino literature do implicitly, in the dark, undercover, between the jokes and puns, soaked in the stews and sabao, what threat, what celebration, what heartbreak and weeping, what deadly arc of a blade in a dance, what — in the end — argument and transformation of the self? And what secret?

TABAS

To read beyond one’s style is both a temperament and a skill. To read beyond one’s style is a style itself.

TABAS

To severely restrict oneself to a given style is also a style. That style is an anti-style. It is the death of a style. It is a mortuary of style.

Fig. 21

Ngurungor

The butcher, like the analyst, takes things apart.

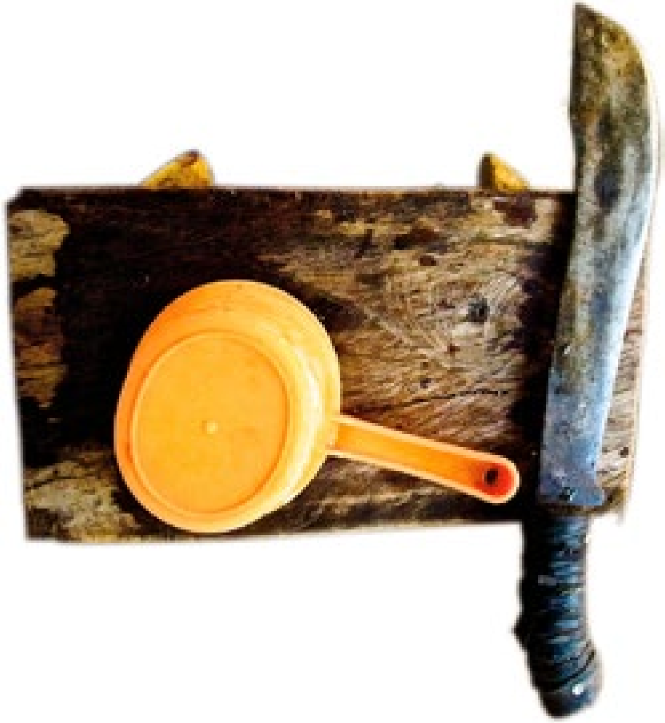


Fig. 22

Buneng

Some things I'm learning as I start to cut. Collage is so much like DJing and making music — the kinds of care in the tight spots, finding the relationships, the places where one thing meets the next, the illusion of seamlessness, the intention of the cut, the suture, the healing, the little song I make up in my head while I'm cutting, the absolute surrender to the utterly local without giving up on the flow of the whole.

And like two pieces of music, sometimes the material is disagreeable: the knife won't go where you thought it would; the slice isn't clean; I can ruin hours of work with one slip; I have to forget how dangerous the blade is. It's teaching me patience which means it is teaching me about time, how to be so inside of it, I'm outside. I once heard the leader of a rumba group drumming in the park yell at the salidor player, "You got to lose yourself to find yourself, man!"

This art does not let me forget: I am an agent of ruin, destruction even, and there are only a few art forms that do this. I'm learning, in order to collage, I have to cut away. I have to choose to lose (and often it's not even my choice) and I'm using a knife to do it. But I know the history of the knife. Machete, cutlass, bolo, and in my parents' language *buneng*. To chop down grass for a roof, to slaughter an animal for feast, to wield in the face of another soldier.

I'm talking to the knife. I'm talking to the paper. I'm talking to the dancers and the king. Cutting them away from their context makes them more alive. Some of them are hard to remove from their context. I'm thinking of relationships in ways that are both familiar as a writer and a musician and in other ways that feel like total expansion. What I really mean is that the accidents are new. I'm prone in a brand new way. I'm staring down into these photos and drawings and I'm looking into heaven at the same time. Prone to heaven. Prone to hell.

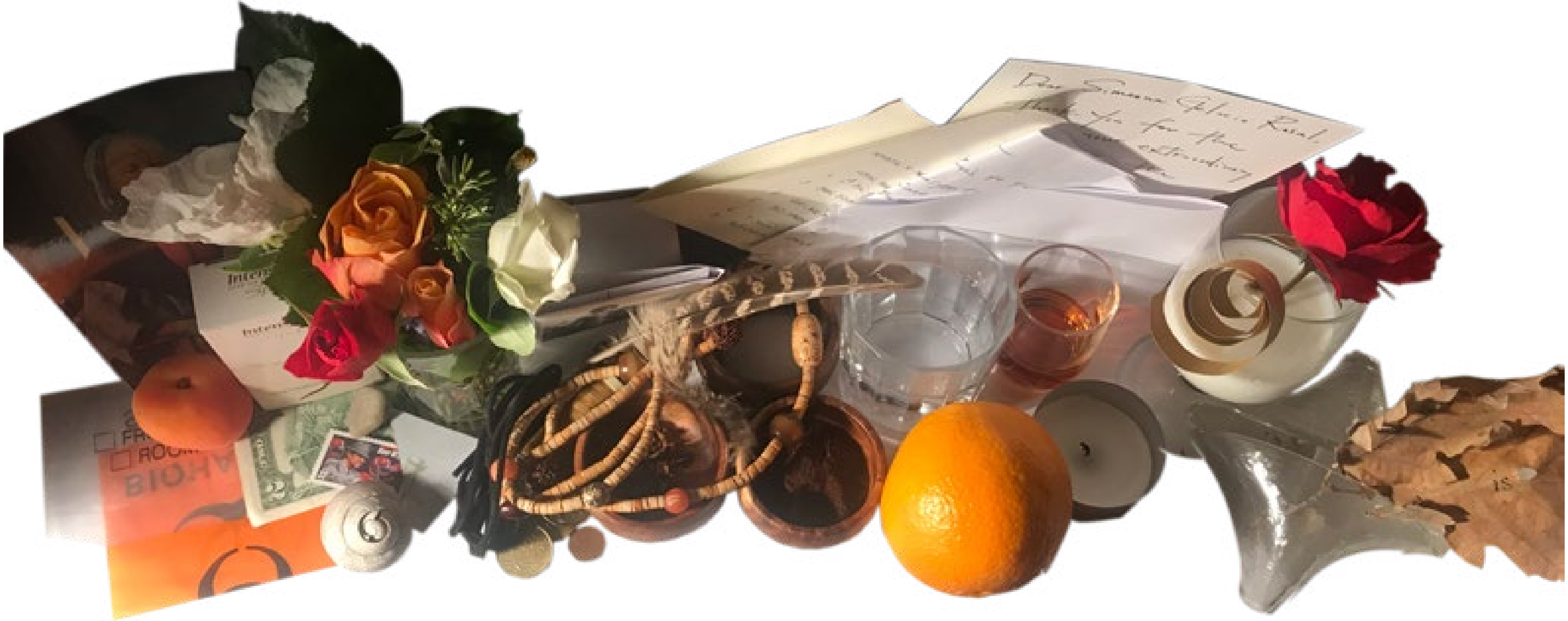


Fig. 23

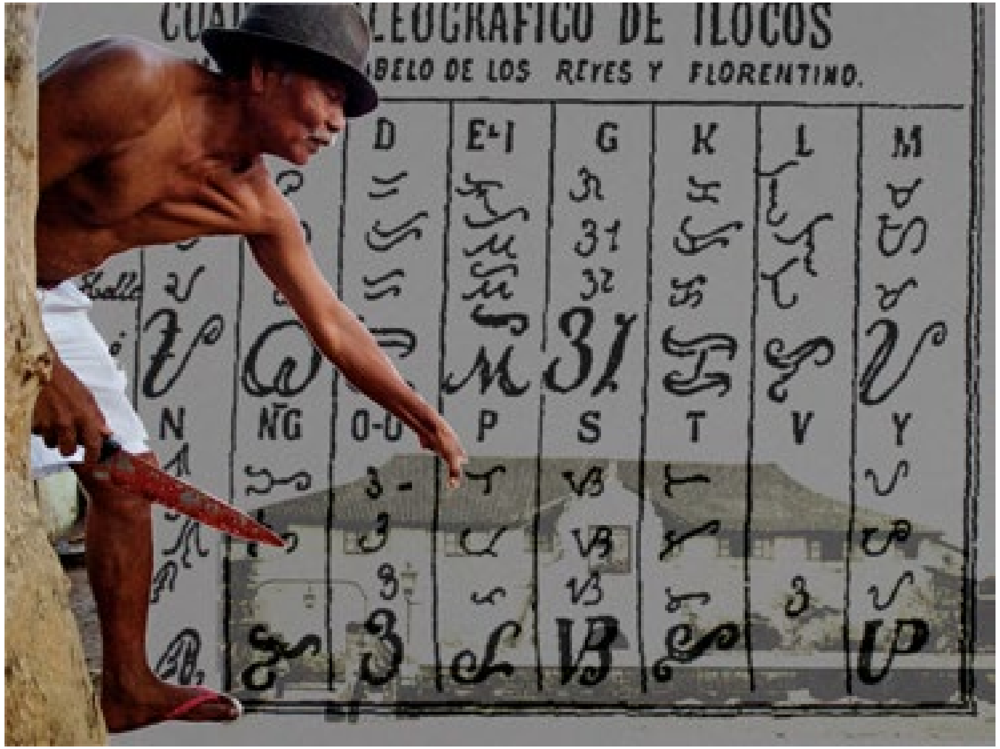


Fig. 24

MAKAWILI

The universe dissents from itself. And if there is a math to formulate all the possibilities of dissent, this calculation — to me — is mystifying. There are artists who try to see a single instance of dissent with great detail and precision, and others who see some constellation of contradictory dissensions, and still others who try to imagine the whole history, present, future of dissent from the edge of time to the ephemeral moment. In each case, I anticipate encountering some image or idea, some thought or feeling, that I dislike or that I fear or that I don't understand. And I try to say to myself in that moment, Are you another possibility? My god, I say, you are possible. That is terrifying.

Libro

Books are an approximation of our relationship to language and each other. They are merely the seen object in the endless unseen matrix of our histories.

Saludsud

The art of the lyric is the art of composing the overheard — as if you were listening to a conversation whose context is mysterious and whose references seem to make much more sense to the interlocutors than to you. You make meaning anyway. Your questions are the meaning.

DAREPDEP

If one of the hard things we're trying to do is get underneath the surfaces of things, and if we get down deep enough underneath those surfaces to take a good look at what's there, isn't one of the things we're asking: *can we find love*, isn't another *can we find justice*?

Isn't justice itself a trying to get underneath the surfaces of things. Isn't love itself a trying to get underneath the surfaces of things. My whole life I've had to confront situations where people thought I was something based on what I looked like. And I know that I was / am still so many things that others can't see. Isn't that all of our work? To make visible what we can't see immediately? To ourselves. To each other. Or — to see how our incompleteness is often at odds with how others see our incompleteness. All the complexity, isn't that our work?

To have an undiagnosed disability is to be invisible to yourself. For decades, I was invisible to myself. So the parts that I could see, I hated. And you know, my mom died before I even had a chance to figure some things out, before I graduated from college, before I stopped acting a fool in the streets.

(I once dove off a boat in a lagoon and swam to the mouth of an underground river.)

Looking back, I think there's a chance my mom saw me before I saw myself. She saw my incompleteness. I saw hers, though I believed she would heal. She would be whole. What a gift it would have been for my living mom to see her son see himself the way that she saw him—which is with love. Imagine how many students we have, how many potential colleagues we have, who can transform the way we see them and see ourselves—and see ourselves in relationship to one another. That's what this is all about.

We can count bricks all we want. We can document things. We can make standards and declare outcomes. We can do all the difficult complex work of trying to articulate and measure and understand, but at the bottom of all this is SOULFULNESS and SOUL. The vision of the underneath. A getting down. What we have here is the potential of a living thing. Not some fixed portrait. Not some rendition of numbers, but a living breathing, fluid thing.

UTANG

Not one cent or centavo. Not one iota of woe. Not a millisecond of prayer or gram of veneration. I absolve you, whoever helped raise your house or sang at your wedding, whoever covered for you when the cops came looking, no matter the time you climbed upon that stranger's roof or accepted that bit of fish and bread, whatever was given you, whatever you lost, I say now, you will never be asked to pay it back, not in labor or worship or self flagellation, you will have to burn no fire at the edge of the sea, not even the lick of a candle for the kingdom, fallen or not. I swear now that no one should list your name among their grievances or pain. From this moment on your hands are your hands, your heart is your heart, your eyes and the dark they may struggle in, yours now, and even now as the earth reclaims every last flick of your body, that is enough — without fiat, doctrine, or command — that is enough for any ledger in any time.

BIYAG

Did I expect the ghosts to just tell me everything? Why shouldn't they have something to hide? Something to fear? Something to gain? What's it like? Do they think there's a better version of their lives? Shit, better versions of their deaths? Why not? If they wander around our sleeping rooms and kitchens, if they hang from the ceiling or perch on our little tables, if they wait under the couch to run a mischievous finger along a living ankle bone, why should they not want a better story? A truer one? Quality of life, we say. Quality of death — that should be a thing.

MANGIAWID

Our mothers bear us in their bodies. We bear this mother to the earth.

APO

Devotees of religions, theologians, Filipino aunties and uncles, gurus and guros will each have an opinion about whether or not you are God, a form of God, a degradation, a subject, a perversion, an absence of God, etc. Despite the voluminous evidence in every conceivable direction, none of us can be completely sure of our divinity. This, too, is God.

DATDATLAG

They say that language is like the land. You use what is available, when it is available, if it is available, where it is…

And if you have to travel to a faraway place, if you have to leave the land that you and your parents and grandparents and their grandparents have known for so many centuries, you may not find the plants you know in the land where you arrive a stranger…

so you have to make what you need out of what you do know, what you do find.

Improvisation is making use of what's in front of you based on knowledge from before you were born and the knowledge from after you're gone.

NAGAN

There are two __________ __________ on my mother's baptismal certificate — where her grandparents' names should be. Even if I could know their names, how could I ever know the names of her grandparents' grandparents? And their parents, and theirs…?

When the Spanish came, they took our names away.

If I go far back enough in time my name is not European. It could be the name of water or a tree or a bird.

Filipinos have been given names, yes. We also have made up names, so much that it's a joke that we have so many names. There are names we give each other. Filipinos give each other names that are a play on existing names. Charito for Rosario; Tintin for Cristina; Puyang for Florence; Gimmo for Guillermo; Boy for everything. We inherit names. We reject names. We make them up.

Not from nothing, however.

We make names from other names — as if filling an empty __________.

We make a name our own.

Not as a way to expand our wealth and not mainly to hurt others but because there is a place in our history where they say there are no names.

But there are thousands. Tens of thousands of names.

And so when we, today, hear a name we test if it is the empty __________ of our story.

Nothing fits. But we try.

We make it up as if the made-up name were our own.

We appropriate the names.

And so the appropriation is less a theft and more a ritual of grief.

It's a laughter with which we hide a weeping.

You can put a name into a __________ — not to pretend that was how it always was but in order to know the difference between what comes and goes and what might have always been yours, what has changed shape in the air, the way sound changes shape — in the air, like a shout or a scream or a wailing or a lullaby or a birdsong or a name…

Sometimes, I take a name, a sound, a gesture — and I put it in my body to put in the world because I was born with a missing name, a missing story. Part of my disavowal before I even saw light.

And every time I've tried to fill that __________ the world has said No, that's mine. And that one, too. And that one, too.

If The Chroniclers should ever recover my name and how the land made it, I won't have that absence to fill. Until then I'll keep at it. This nothing. This __________. This abyss. I'll put my mouth to it and sing.

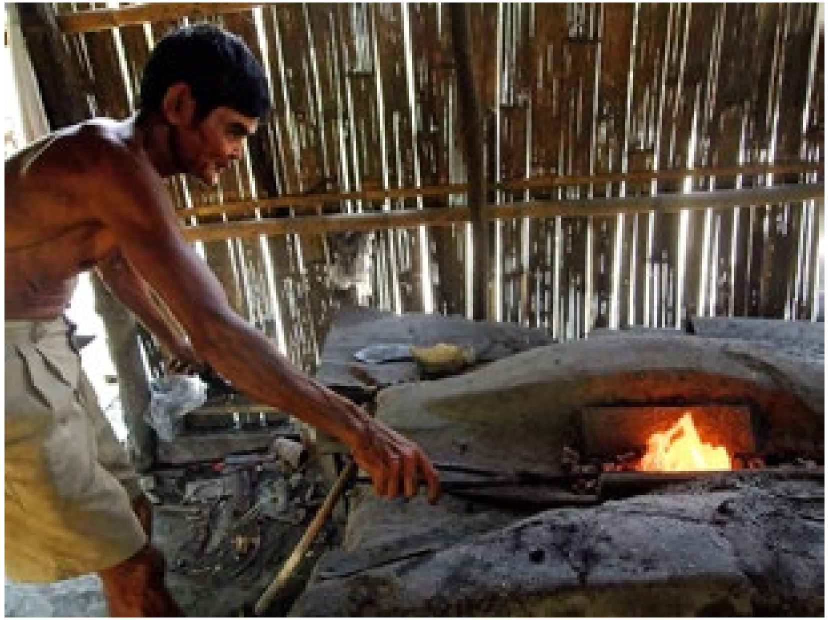


Fig. 25

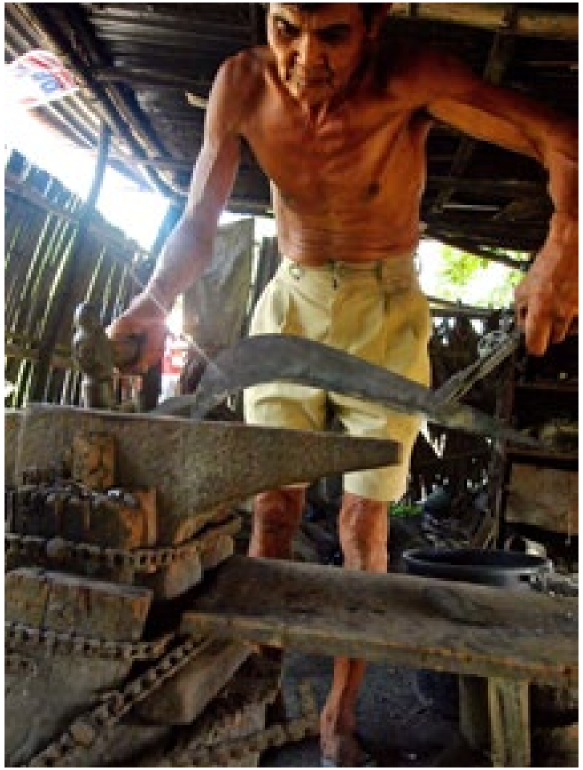
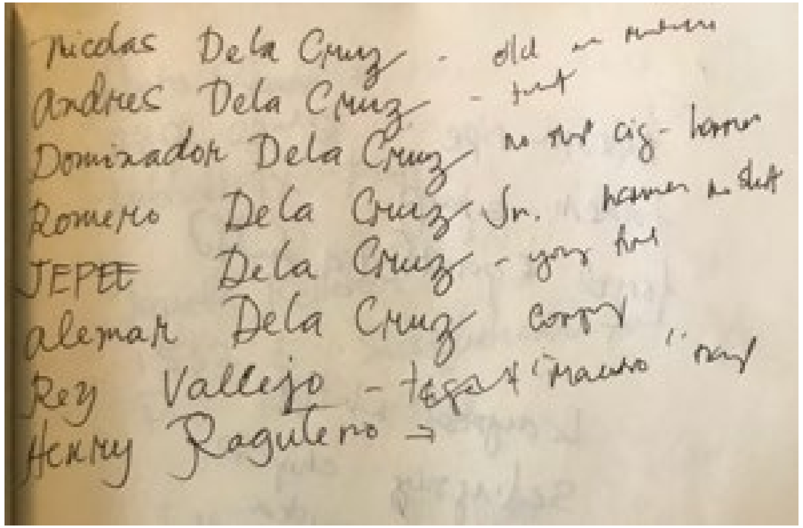


Fig. 26



nicolas Dela Cruz - old [illegible]
andres Dela Cruz - [illegible]
Dominador Dela Cruz [illegible] cig- [illegible]
Romero Dela Cruz Jr. hammer [illegible]
JEPET Dela Cruz - young [illegible]
alemar Dela Cruz [illegible]
Rey Vallejo - [illegible] 'macho' [illegible]
Henry Raguteno →

Fig. 27

Fig. 28

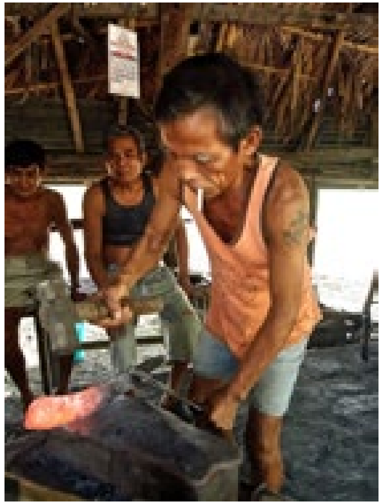
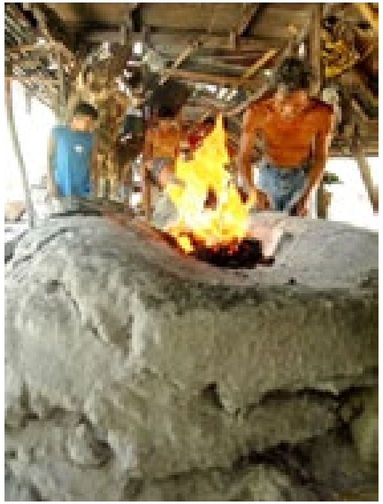


Fig. 29



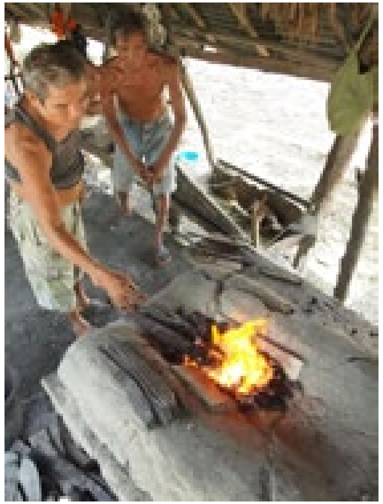


Fig. 30

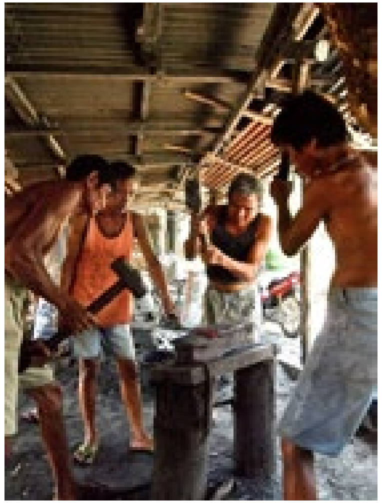


Fig. 31

LWALO

I am under the sea
            and under the earth
I am under the sky
I am in the earth of the earth
            the eye of the eye
            of the earth
the heart of its heart
the mind of its heart
the listening of its listening
I am closing my eyes
            to hear
I am listening to the gone
I am listening to the going
            even when the going
            aren't speaking
            or singing
I am listening to a foot
            slide inside a boot
            slide out
I am listening to a small clasp
            undone
I am listening to the sticks
            suspended from the beam
            tapping like eight feet
I am under the dirt
            for the short hoe and hack
I am under the wood plate
I am under the dirt floors of
            their footfall
I am listening to the birds listen
            to the men
            and listening to the birds listen

            to the women
            and listening to the birds listening
            to the dead masters
            and listening to the worms listening
            to the birds listening to the men
The worms are listening to the men
            The worms are listening to the men
            through the birds
I am under the sky of the birds
I am standing under the sky
I am standing under the earth
I am standing under the sky
            of the earth
I am the ear of the earth
            under the earth
I am facing east
I am on my haunches
(Are we all we have? We have everything?)
I am on my haunches facing east
I am guarding the harvest
I am letting the children run past me
I am letting the men run past me
I am letting the boars
            with bloody tusks
            run past me
I am not moving under the earth
I am stillness under the earth
I am waiting to be moved
            under the earth
I am waiting to be moved

Madlaw

Because a breaker is mostly making things up in front of an audience, often trying things with his body that he hasn't necessarily tried before (a sequence of moves improvised on the spot), he's prone to screwing up. Sometimes he thinks going into a particular floor move from a toprock is going to be dope, but it might be harder than he expects and he could trip or his foot could end up somewhere he didn't intend for it to go. Thing is, there are people watching so he has to turn that accident into something — not as a way of hiding the accident, but as a way of letting the accident in. Every good breaker makes a contract with the unexpected: that it will inevitably come, and that he will do his best to say yes to it.

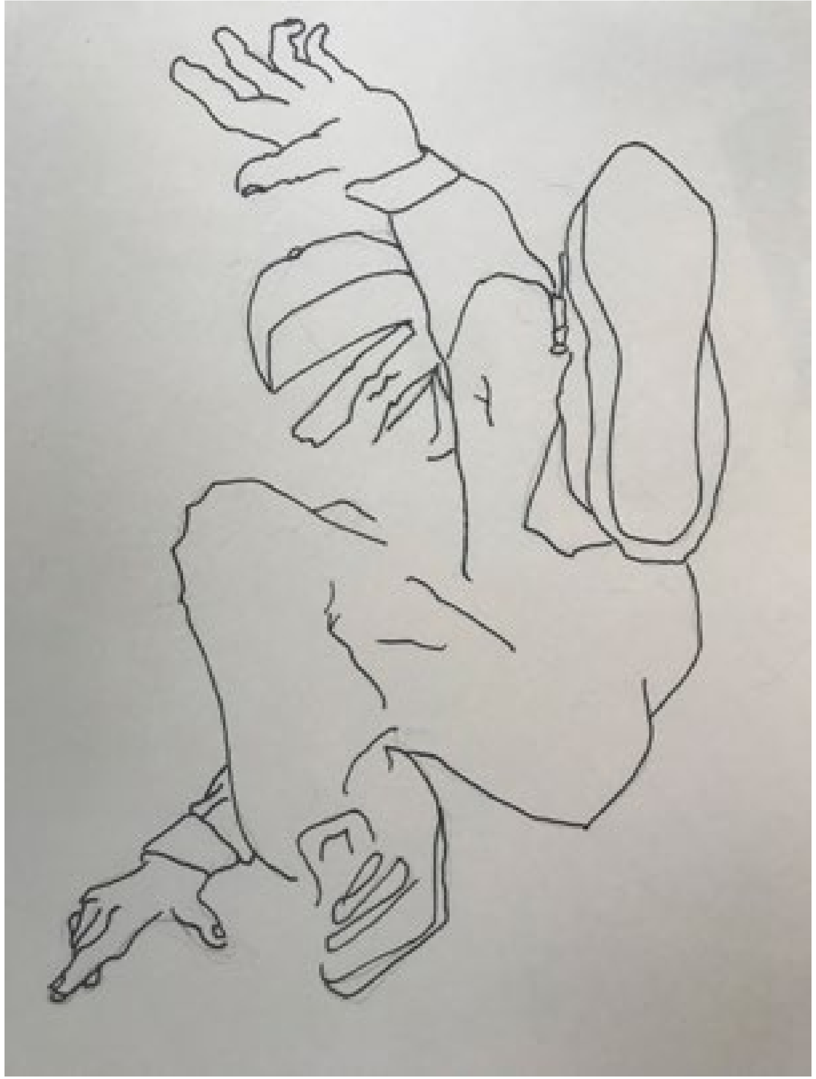


Fig. 32

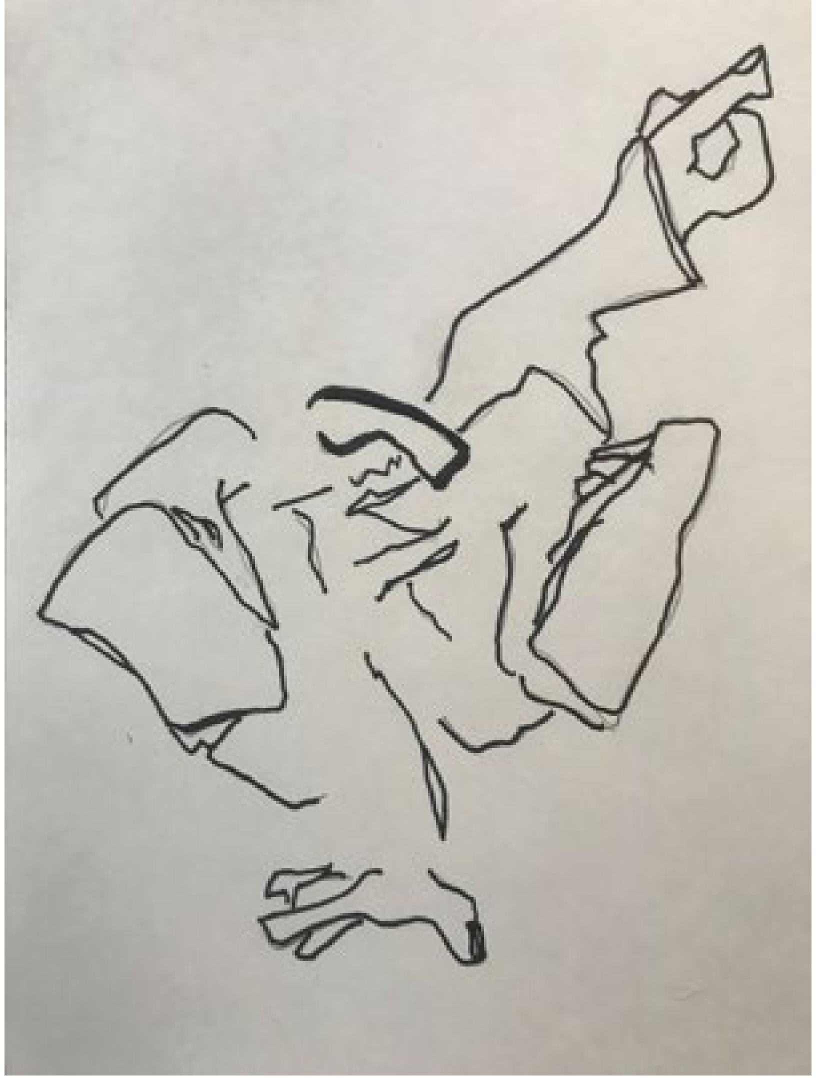


Fig. 33

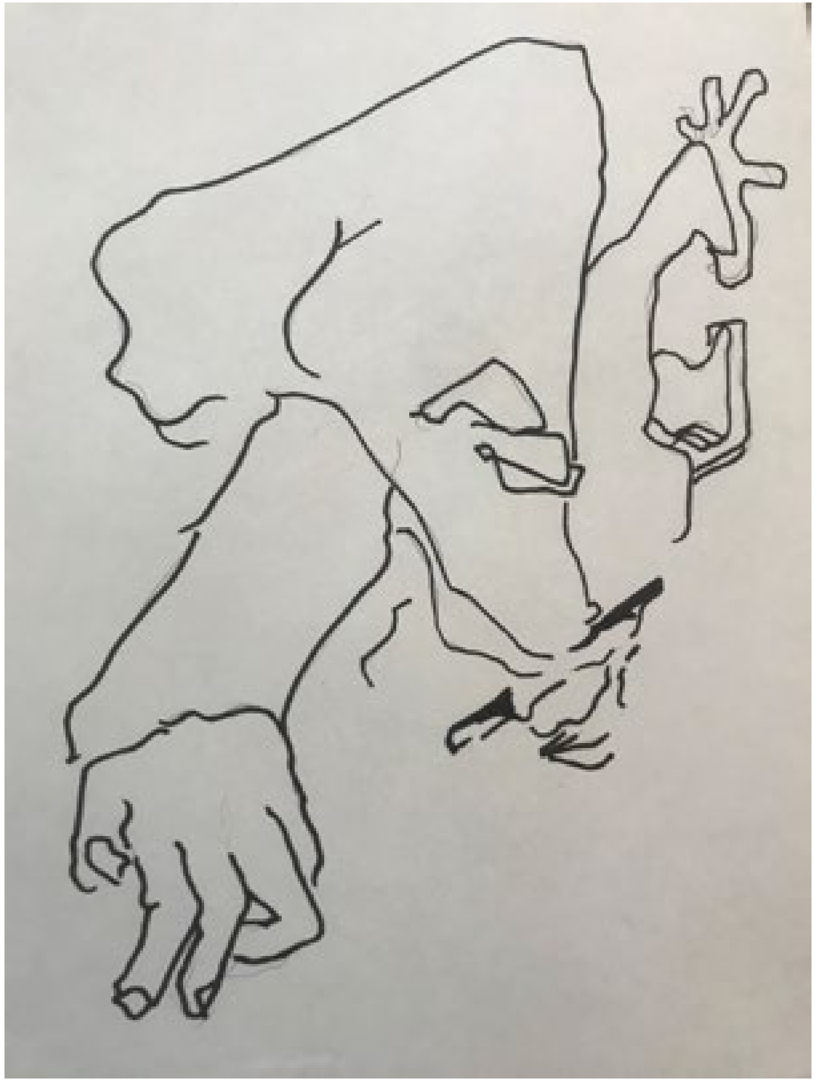


Fig. 34

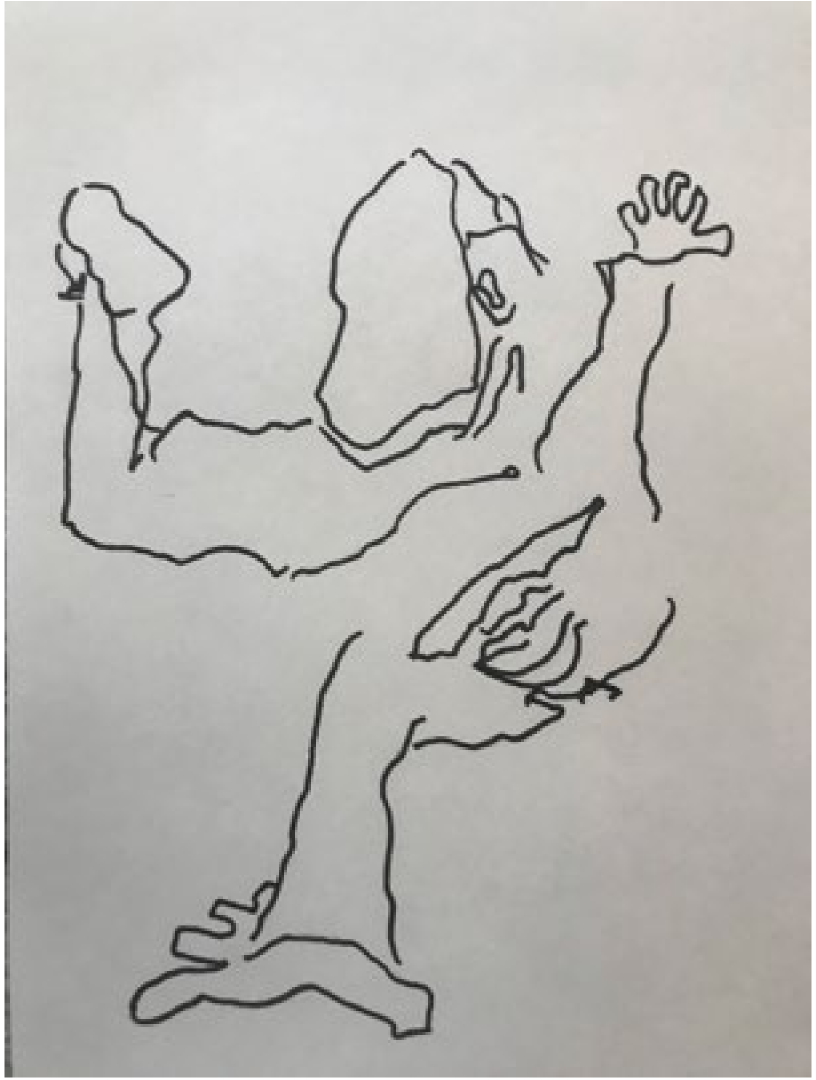


Fig. 35

Salip

You have to show and prove in the cipher, which is to say you have to display your skill and prove your preparation. But even this doesn't get at what the cipher is about. The showing and proving is also a learning. It requires you to not just carry what you have devoted your time and energy to, which is history and dreaming, but your ability to acknowledge the audience, be able to feel who they are in that moment (which is also a carrying of their own histories and dreaming inside of you, a revelation of them, strangers, to you), and the show and the proof are not just a matter of expressing but of your expression in relation to their attention. It is their attention to your attention. It is a mutual attention.

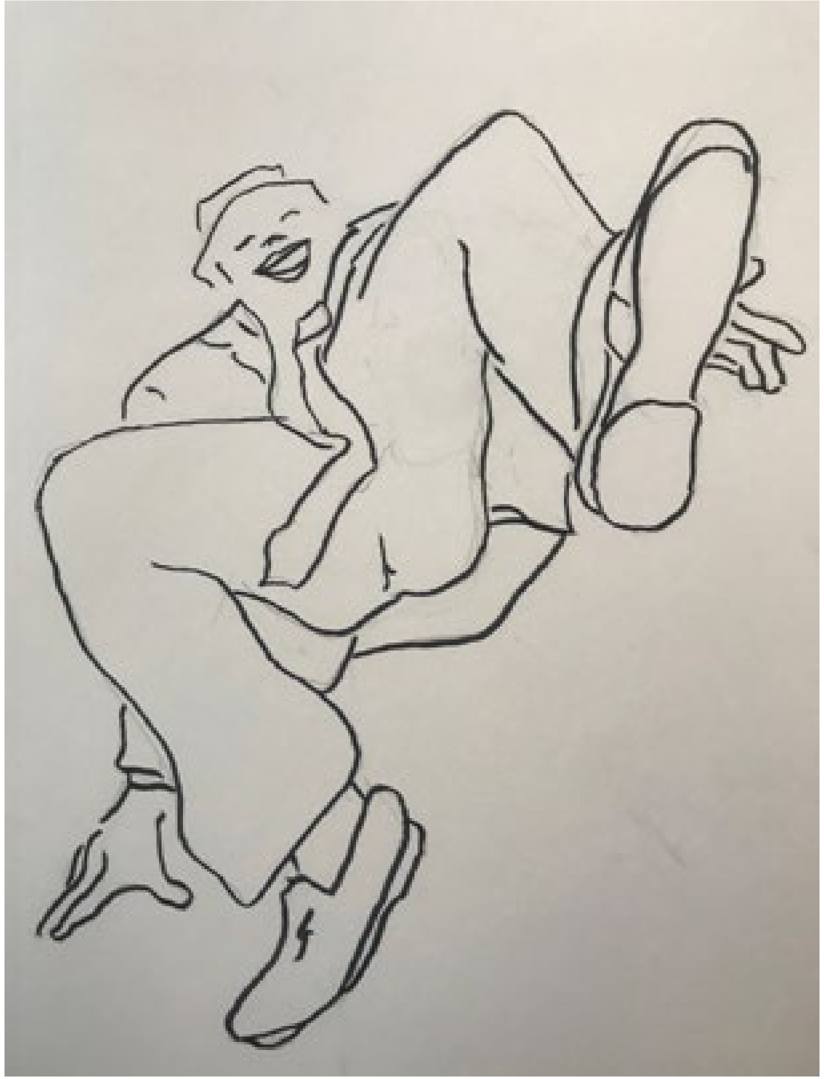


Fig. 36

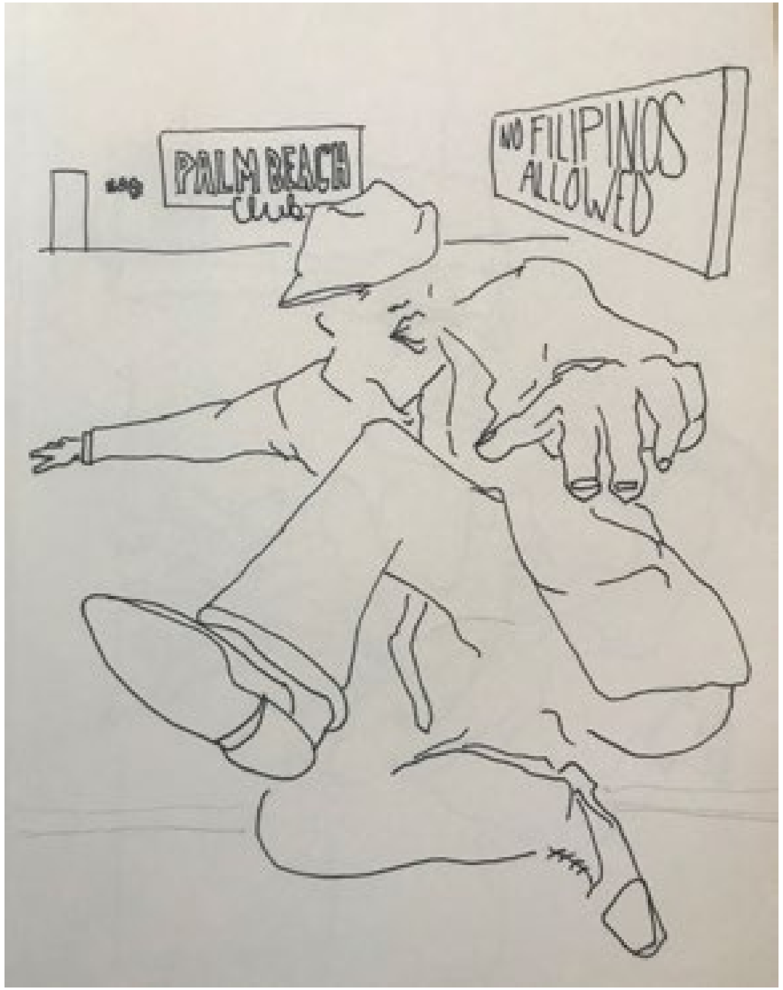

PALM BEACH
Club
NO FILIPINOS ALLOWED

Fig. 37

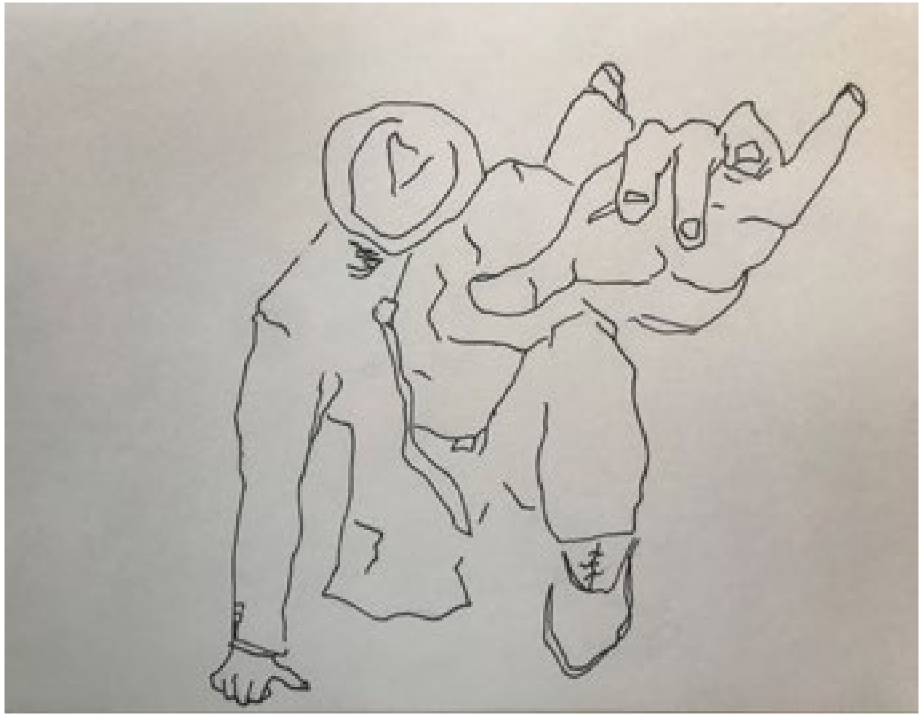


Fig. 38

Mangisuro

School is like life in that it's mostly a game. And you can play to win or you can play to find out who you are. Either way you have to figure out who is full of shit and who isn't. And then you have to be one of the ones who is not full of shit.

MANGISURO

Over the course of my career I became both slowly and suddenly aware of two things. That as a professor of color, I would be in front of all-white workshops, a virtual reversal of my experience in much of my college education. And secondly, as a consequence of that, I would have to learn, in the wake of painful and deeply complicated public tragedies and awful discourse, how to talk to white writing students about race. How could I speak to them about their writing without letting their own assumptions and blind spots go unquestioned? And how could I do that without correcting them, by which I mean enacting an ideology of correctional systems and institutions? Between those two extremes, there was and is a language to be found and/or invented.

MANGATOREN

It may be that a correctional impulse is antithetical to a creative one. It's almost impossible to write in a mode of constant correction. Another way to say it: rectification is often at odds with revelation.

WINGIWING

Like a lot of folks, I've been thinking about dissent — in governance, in public interactions, in private life, and personal interactions. And there is yet another kind of dissent, a dissent from the self, which (etymologically speaking) is a knowing or feeling away… in this case, from the self. Isn't this particular mode of dissent a quality of the lyric first person? When language, sound, image, music, song breaks us from some previously fixed identity or static understanding of the world? Doesn't this personal experience of dissent, interior argument, inner struggle, often correspond to the dynamic of dissent in more social contexts? Discomfort, refusal, anger, passion, confusion, awe, etc. and perhaps curiosity, inquiry, questioning. Perhaps one of the characteristics of the first-person lyric is a recognition of two conflicting perceptions: first, what we used to know and believe, second, some phenomenon in the sensory world or in our imagination that contradicts that first knowledge/belief. The lyric is the juxtaposition of these phenomena. The lyric is the distance (sometimes a chasm) between them. That is where we are changed.

ON TECHNOLOGY

The digital — as its etymology indicates — is defined by touch, as in digit, as in that of the hand. As in the body. As in flesh, blood, and bone, and our own electricity. Data is not desire.

TRABAHO

To be the one to make the ropes they use to hang the man

and

to be the man they'll hang.

SALAYSAY

I don't care as much about what happens in a story as I do about the story's song. Does the story sing?

MANO PO

If I saw kids approaching an elder, taking the elder's hand, bending at the waist… I dipped behind the closest door so I didn't have to do the same. I'd do anything but put my forehead to my elder's knuckles.

But I'm remembering now. And I'm listening again. I'm hearing it different. Those grown folks would say, "Mano po your tatang" or "Mano po Lola now." Or "Bless." Or "Go bless." I think I might finally understand. The young bless the elders. In age, you are blessed by youth. You are both the child's head and the elder's hand.

LUNG-AW

Art doesn't change you. Attention changes you. Art is one version of attention. Art without soulful attention is public relations. Pornography.

LEDDAANG

Ok, man. Be sad. That is part of the healing. It's love changing out its eyes.

BALABALA

I've lost my country. Or my country has lost me. Or they have made me disappear.

You are dead to me. That's what they might say. It means I was once alive to them. And now I am dead.

But I think they have forgotten, sometimes the living visit the dead. Even without meaning to. Sometimes the dead and the living meet in a space between. We remember the encounter. We even foresee the meeting. Sometimes in dreaming.

I've been dreaming of the living lately. So the living have been visiting me. They come dressed up in black suits looking all sharp — clean, as we say. In my dreams, I'm always showing up to a party that I wasn't invited to. We greet one another, the living and me. We dap each other up. Like old times. They've come to celebrate something, someone.

They've come to mourn me.

When it's time to go, I promise not to kiss them on the lips. There's no sign that they'll think of me when I step into my car and go my own way home. No one is crying. They talk amongst themselves about family business. One citizen of the living says she has no time to sew. When I come close, she tells me, it's been so long she wasn't sure I'd recognize her.

I'm alive. And not alive. And at the same time dead to the dead — and still not living.

I once read that my ancestors believed we are made of three spirits. And sometimes when you walk out of the woods, one of your hauntings is in danger of staying behind among the trees. Where my family is from, you have to turn back and call your own name. And the wild part of your spirit will return from the wild like a stranger from another country. And then you can keep moving through the world with all three of your souls so you're never alone.

MAYMAYSA

Who am I without the dead. Who am I without everything I've lost. I'm nothing without them. Every hero is alone. Not every solitude is heroic. My friends are gone. My mother is dead. My father has lost his mind. Monster is the incarnation of being alone.

GAYYEM

Spent years asking myself *Have I lost my friends?* Ghosted is an unkind word for real ghosts.

AYAT

Power is conditional. Love is not.

PADLESAN

As far as I know my mother didn't have time to get ready for death. Her sister, my Tita Uding, on the other hand, was meticulous. She made a list. She knew which dress. She asked for coins in case there was a bus in Heaven and she needed to get around. She didn't just name her belongings to be bequeathed and to whom. She wrapped presents and hid them throughout her house. Months after she died, my cousins were finding small, carefully and beautiful wrapped gifts for them and their children. They folded her hands in her coffin and she didn't stop giving.

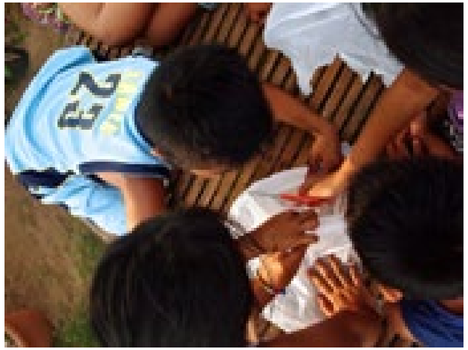
TAMBOR

The drum is for calling your enemies to see you. As drummers, we know that even when we are at odds with ourselves, the drum calls. So the drum is for calling yourself into yourself. Or your self into the world. So that you can be lost. So that you can be found.

ANITO

The ancestors are never impoverished. They have many useful things — images, stories, music, sounds, chants, dances, rituals, expressions, rhythms, silences, or smaller gestures of annoyance, appetite. They hand all of this down. They never run out. They trade them. They leave them out in their yard untended. They expect us to take what's there — sometimes. Even if they aren't our ancestors, we can take them. They are never impoverished. They can give up many things and never starve. But they are like living humans. They can be capricious, unpredictable. They can be furious at us for taking a thing. They can be magnanimous, too. They can punish us when we aren't looking. They can not give a single shit for what we pilfer. You have to reflect on what they want. What they want changes. I make a point to leave something for them if I take something else. I make a point of thanking them. I don't want to simply use what I take. If I steal, I make something of the thing I take. And I have to try and make it sing in their direction. Sometimes I make fun of my ancestors — their strangeness and strict ways. Sometimes they curse me with a bad belly or they make me lie in bed with a terrible fever or strike me on the head with a door. Sometimes they say Good one! But I try to remember where the sun was when I took what I took. I hope the song doesn't suck. I sing it back to where I came from.

Fig. 39



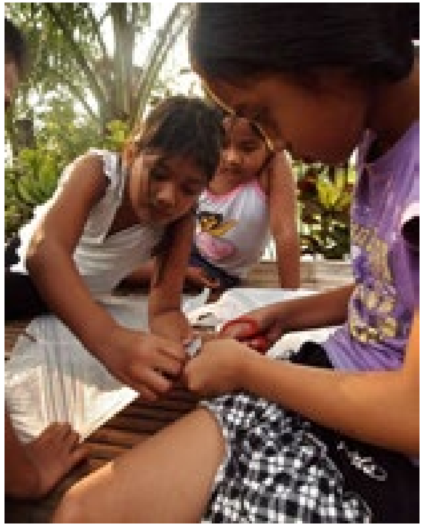
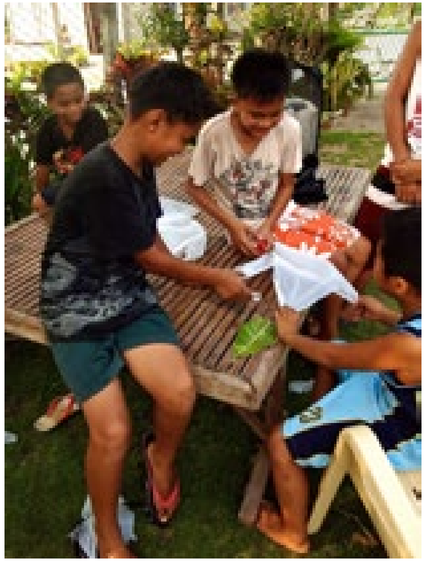


Fig. 41

Fig. 40



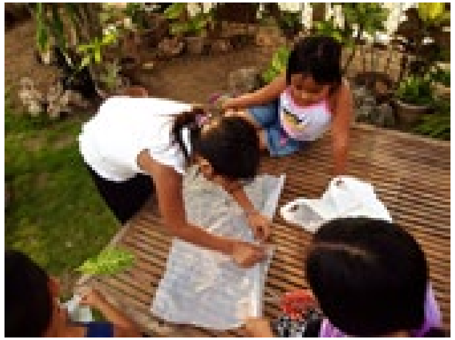


Fig. 42

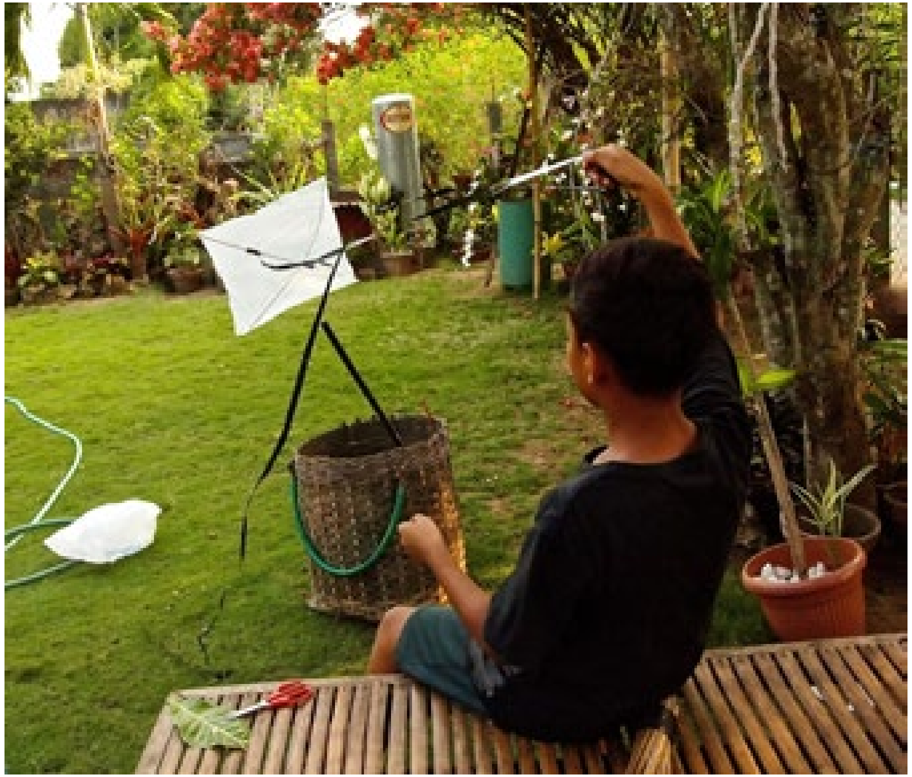


Fig. 43

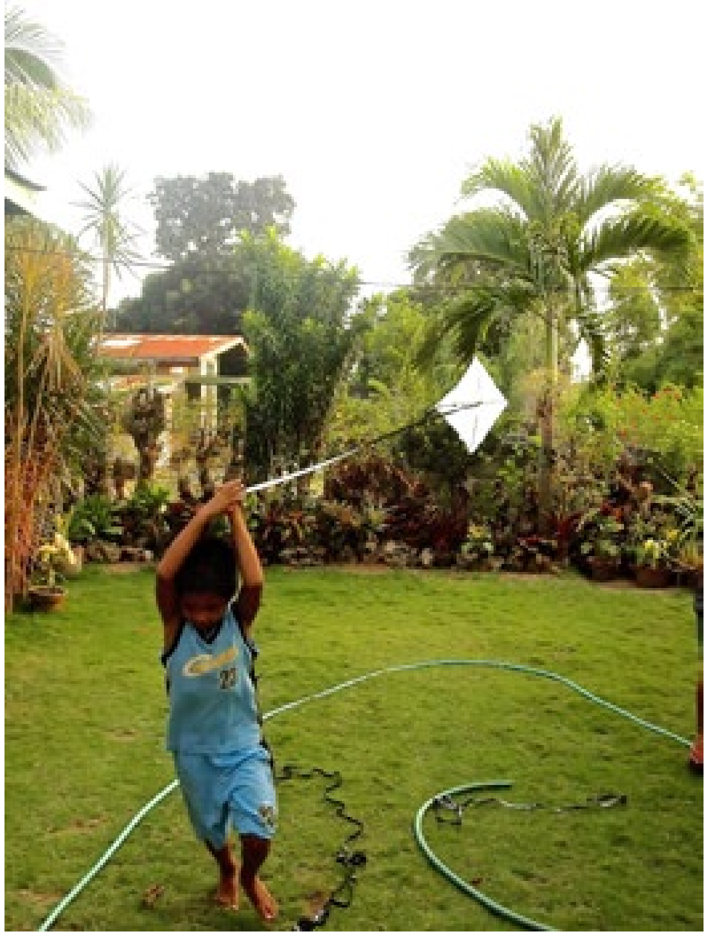


Fig. 44

Utak

It’s a common belief that all thinkers think with their thought. The West teaches us, a good idea is a product of the activity of the brain. But some great thinkers think with their bodies. My godchildren are dancing, for example.

LABAS

I'm sitting on the steps of a stoop. And two animals, like horses — no, like burros — are in slow procession. They are not donkeys. They are like llamas. They are walking in slow procession toward the short flight of stairs I'm sitting on. Oblong boxes are fitted over their heads from their neck to their muzzles. I'm wondering how they see. There are small slits in the cardboard for light.

AGLABBET

The dead are always listening. Listening itself is a kind of haunting. It's not the bump in the night. It's the quiet. That's when the dead are paying attention. And when we lend our attention, too, another time and space can enter the room, and you, me, and the dead are all listening together.

Aguray

On Big Island, south of the plantations where my grandfather cut sugar cane as a sakada in the 1920s, south of Pahoa where Pele spared my uncle's house by two hundred yards, the rocks bore through my tsinelas. A billion frogs turned to stone. Harsh beaks. This beach, windward side. A half mile up the shoreline, a man with a net gathered to his side stands on a jetty. He's leaning over the edge. In my city, snow falls at that angle. I'm stopping every 100 feet to kick the pebbles gnarling my foot. The man is looking into the water. 150,000 years ago these rocks were fire. 150,000 years ago they were moving. The man is as still as those rocks. His hair slicked back. The closer I get, the slower I approach. I stop once, three times to see what he's seeing. I'm too far and not patient enough to really see. He rears back a little, twists, and casts his net, which billows as if it were taking a quick deep breath, glistening lung. He looks once and jumps in after. I can see the weight of the water. I don't know what he's caught, if anything. He climbs back up to the rocks. I'm closer now. He tells me not as many fish as there were 20 years ago. He catches for himself and gives some to the elders. He offers me one. And I say, No, thank you. Some things I know from experience: Standing in a room waiting for your mother to die is nothing like looking into the ocean for fish to gather. You have to cast your net somewhere. There's a time when the water's empty and other times you pull everything a net can hold out of the ocean — and its mostly saltwater dripping from the cordage and its knot. If you're lucky there are six fish, four to give away. You might not even know what to call them if you see them again. You know you might never see them again.

Gayyem

One way to be in the world is to have friends. One way to have friends is to acknowledge our differences. We can say all friendships navigate differences. There is likely a place where my friends find sanctuary for their differences from me. One way to understand my friends is to begin to understand those sanctuaries. Sometimes they invite me into those sanctuaries. And I'm grateful. Sometimes their sanctuaries remain concealed from me forever. It is a daunting thing to honor that concealment, to nonetheless try to imagine the sanctity of what is hidden, to know that I will likely fail to imagine it perfectly or even well. And yet, to know that such a sanctuary exists for someone dear (within someone dear!) to trust that unseen, holy space is a source of love.

PURAW

People of Asian descent are sometimes given status of “honorary white” — sometimes explicitly, sometimes (more dangerously) implicitly. This status gives a non-white person white privilege and access in a segregated society. But the language is a lie. The conferred status is not honorary at all. It is conditional. The person of Asian descent is given privilege and access (which often amounts to nothing more than, We won’t kill or abuse you as bad) on condition of behaving correctly, not crossing particular lines. Honorary White is a status of power. It is not freedom. Power is not freedom. Honorary White is a surrender of one’s freedom for power in return. It is a status conferred at the convenience of whiteness, which is a grave illness. It is no honor. It is a condition.

SALAYSAY

According to the mandates of identity I am supposed to tell my own story. No one can tell my story. No one else. I am to tell my story until I get to someone else’s story — a story that my story intersects with — and then, I suppose, I’m supposed to stop. I’m supposed to tell my story until the end. My story stops where somebody else’s begins. Or our stories stop each other. Are we the end of each other’s story? Where does my story end? I can see a horizon from here. Is that me at the limit? If I look long enough at the horizon do I become the limit of my seeing? Am I as far as the eye can see? If I stare a long time at the edge of the water meeting the sky can I become the space between the sea and sky? I am the line between the sea and the sky. Does saying it make the seeing true? If I see where the world stops if I become the thing that I see can I become the end of the world? Or is this just the beginning?

PALGAK

The difference between prognostication and prophecy is the difference between the actuarial and the poetic.

AMO

I was born a subject to English. I started to write and made English my subject. I have no aspiration toward mastery. To be a master is not my aspiration.

LA FÉ DE ENRIQUE

Verso:
Me pedías que cantara en tu idioma
Pues esta es mi despedida final
Tu Cristo andó sobre el agua
¿Fue algo milagroso o criminal?

Yo crucé el mar en cadenas
que quemaron mis tobillos y muñecas
Ahora mis manos son llamas
que iluminan una cara de azucena

Coro:
Ya no tengo fé en las coronas
Ya no tengo fé en un rey
Sólo tengo fé en la tierra
Y en las orillas yo tengo fé

Verso:
¿Dónde duerme la paloma sin su sombra
como puede cantar sin su voz?
¿para dónde va con alas recortadas
como una promesa de tu dios?

Coro:
Ya no tengo fé en las coronas
Ya no tengo fé en un rey
Sólo tengo fé en las estrellas
Y en las orillas. Yo tengo fé

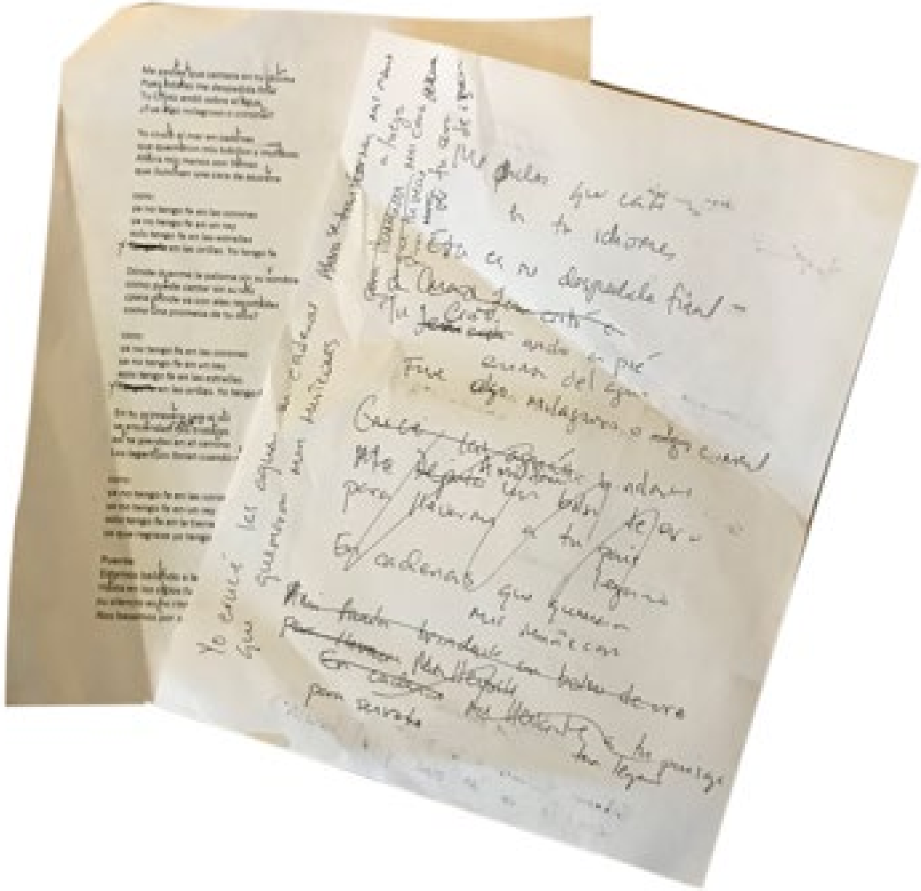


Fig. 45

Verso:
Sale el sol en tu primavera
Se encienden mis tristezas
así te pierdes en el camino
Los lagartijos lloran cuando rezas

Coro:
Ya no tengo fé en las coronas
Ya no tengo fé en un rey
Sólo tengo fé en la tierra
Ya que regresé yo tengo fé

Puente:
Estamos bailando a las orillas
Hasta en los siglos futuros
Tu silencio es mi amante
Nos besamos por ser triunfantes

Coro:
Ya no tengo fé en las coronas
Ya no tengo fé en un rey
Solo tengo fé en la tierra
Ya que regresé yo tengo fé

Tengo fé en el mar
Tengo fé en las orillas
Tengo fé en las olas
Tengo fé en el bailar

Bailamos Bailamos a la orilla
Tengo fé en las olas y el bailar

(*por Mary Rose Go y Patrick Rosal*)

AYAM

The thing is if you're playing, then you don't know what the outcome of the game is going to be. Sometimes you don't even know what the rules are. Sometimes you start with somebody else's rules and the longer you play the more you notice that the rules start to change, responding to you, evading you. That's what makes the playing dangerous. You could end up with new rules. You could end up being someone else.

LANGIT

There is no Heaven or Hell in the strict sense of a place of reward or punishment. There is an afterlife. By each encounter with the land, the water, the nearby air, the air of the stratosphere, the people, this one and that one, whose names we know and don't know, casually and intimately and formally and informally.

We are making the afterlife we will move into. We are making the afterlife we move through.

And if there is a Hell, it is the destruction of one's own afterlife and the ruin of the afterlives of others and of our natural world. And if there is a heaven, it is the countless crossroads of molecules, ideas, kisses, sounds, food, feeling, memory, story, song. If there is justice beyond birth and death, it is the possibility that no one and nothing will stop anyone from the afterlife that person makes. It isn't a function of time. It is a function of being. And the countless invisible connections and disconnections of being. These are the breaks.

DESPEDIDA

I've been to so many borders and ports. And what I notice — even the reunited ones who only have met once or twice in a lifetime or briefly played together decades ago as children, they are full of welcome. Kiss. Kiss. I love to lose count of how many times someone offers to relieve the one arriving of their burden. And going is only slightly different. The embrace. The kiss. The handing off of luggage or crate or bag at the very last minute, no matter how long or short the journey.

My love and I are embarking on a trip together. We're watching an older woman stand behind the ropes, as a man — who wears a slightly crumpled baseball cap and whose skin is dark like my grandfather's, who having kissed his wife (no tears) is shuffling his feet, taking his time toward the security check — now passes through the guards and detectors. Those ten yards could be a hundred miles on a clear day on a flat plain. The man does what millions do, what my wife has done, what I do: he looks back. And what he sees is his wife still standing there, looking, watching him go, watching him walk away. After he's gathered his bags from the machine and left his cap cockeyed and turned toward his gate, his wife lingers a long while, though he's out of sight.

This is another way to say goodbye, to stand at the limits, at the threshold and watch love go, even long after it's too far to see, as if there might be another last, quick glimpse. The woman finally turns away to go home or work or to look at the sea or watch a TV show in a language she half guesses at.

I imagine there are people in the world who don't know the feeling of having said goodbye to someone who has kept you company for a while. For the rest of us, there's a memory of turning back toward your life for the first time alone. It's like having to wear the gift of a shirt that you never wanted or wished for in the first place.

Suddenly you have to confront the part of you that the departed has helped you hide. In that way, you aren't alone at all, for now there's a part of you that you must reacquaint yourself with, perhaps a part of you that you have never met or knew existed. Alongside. Revealed by departure. By solitude. And you spend the next few hours or days or years, asking what you should call this unexpected guest.

Upon the arrival of this stranger, you can kiss, as in the style of some Europeans, as if you were holding both cheeks of a horse (though in such a case, it would be a shameless spectacle to hang onto the neck of a beloved beast for too long!) We kiss for the greeting and we kiss for the farewell. It's as if our ancestors didn't want anyone to know the difference between coming and going away.

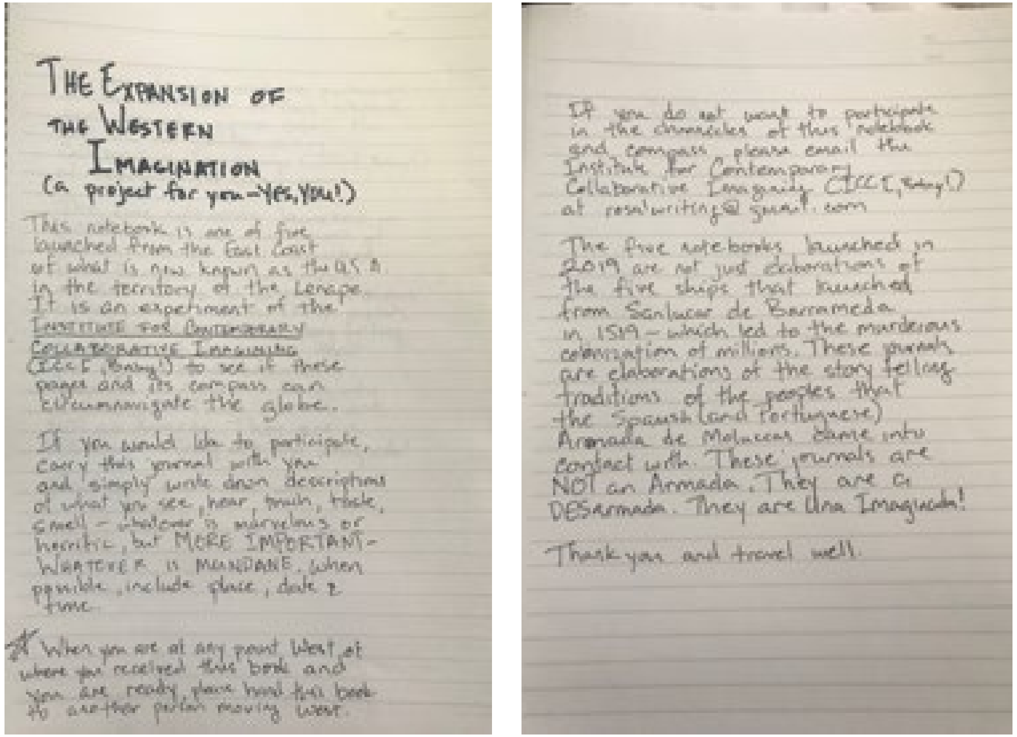
SALAYSAY

Sometimes a story tracks you down, travels the breach of a continent, crosses an ocean, crosses decades, and the story finds you holding a glass of fancy liquor in a town you never chose to go to and you're being merely sociable, asking questions of the strangers who have come to the same town. And then the story, having trekked as far and as long as it has, taps you on the shoulder and slips out the back door. (Sometimes it slaps you on the neck or spits in your eye before it escapes!) But it never sticks around long enough to tell you everything about itself or even show you all its fingers and toes or if it's hiding a long armored tail. The story of a story is how it leaves you with next to nothing.

My mother wasn't known for her storytelling. The couple things I remember aren't stories at all. She said, when she went to school, sometimes it would rain very, very hard and she had to walk a long way and whenever it was pouring like that a horse would appear on the side of the road. A white horse. And it would follow her as she walked to school in the rain.

That was the whole story. A girl, a destination, a tropical storm — and a horse. And she delivered the facts of the story to me dispassionately. And then she stood up, walked out the door, and checked on her garden.

The horse of my mother's childhood wanted nothing. In the version of my mother's childhood passed along to me, my mother wanted nothing. And by telling me a story in which neither the horse nor the girl nor the storm wanted anything, my mother left me with what was missing from the story — desire. I wanted the impossible. I wanted the whole story. I got the mystery instead.



THE EXPANSION OF
THE WESTERN
IMAGINATION
(a project for you—YES, YOU!)

This notebook is one of five
launched from the East Coast
of what is now known as the U.S. &
in the territory of the Lenape.
It is an experiment of the
INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY
COLLABORATIVE IMAGINING
(ICCI, Baby!) to see if these
pages and its compass can
circumnavigate the globe.

If you would like to participate,
carry this journal with you
and simply write down descriptions
of what you see, hear, touch, taste,
smell – whatever is marvelous or
horrific, but MORE IMPORTANT –
WHATEVER IS MUNDANE. When
possible, include place, date &
time.

* When you are at any point West of
where you received this book and
you are ready, please hand this book
to another person moving West.

If you do not want to participate
in the chronicles of this notebook
and compass please email the
Institute for Contemporary
Collaborative Imagining (ICCI, Baby!)
at rosalwriting@gmail.com

The five notebooks launched in
2019 are not just elaborations of
the five ships that launched
from Sanlucar de Barrameda
in 1519 – which led to the murderous
colonization of millions. These journals
are elaborations of the story telling
traditions of the peoples that
the Spanish (and Portuguese)
Armada de Moluccas came into
contact with. These journals are
NOT an Armada. They are a
DESarmada. They are Una Imaginada!

Thank you and travel well.

Fig. 46

The Expansion of the Western Imagination

This book-length essay goes out into the world five years after Magellan was defeated and killed by Lapu Lapu and his people at Mactan — April 27, 1521.

Magellan and his five ships left Spain in August 1519 with intentions of being the first person to circumnavigate the globe. In 2019, I was in Spain and performed some work at La Residencia in Madrid to commemorate the people of the islands that would be colonized for more than three centuries and to acknowledge the many, many Filipinos who reside in Spain, a great number of whom are domestic workers. In this diaspora, this migration, this return, this burden, this labor, I know that Spanish is already changing. The laborers themselves, in their secrets, in their witness, in their social lives, in their solitude, are already transforming the sound and function of Spanish. I wanted to honor that in my performance.

That same year, I initiated my own expedition of sorts called The Expansion of the Western Imagination. Instead of launching five armed ships, I wanted to launch five compasses, accompanied by mostly empty journals. I would give them to people traveling west who would carry them as far as they went or wanted. And when they stopped or were to turn back around, they were to hand off the compass and the journal to someone else headed west. All the while, the travelers received instructions to record whatever they saw or witnessed on their migration. I wanted to see if the compasses and journals could make it all the way around the world, handed off from one person to another, folks dear to one another or perhaps strangers. I've launched three and the pandemic prevented me from launching the last two thus far. Who knows where they are now! I sure don't! And that's a good part of the wonder.

A STUDY OF BEAUTY

To have rejected strategy; to sit, instead, with one's bafflement; to see such bafflement as a preface to madness — and awe; to touch some simplicity, to attend to that simplicity; to relentlessly pursue its continuity with the infinite; to catch the occasional glimpse & be changed. Not sparkling embellishments or pristine blades. Not the effete disguised in denim. Not the FOR SALE sign hanging from the Gallery of Misery. Not the policies of lawncare, but the bulbous deformation of one green gourd borne on a dying vine. Not the gloss of museum marble, but the young man weeping under the vaulted cobwebs. Not deputies of the spreadsheet, but a road disappeared under new snow. Not scripted tours or curated wonders, but the crack that runs the length of the last drinking glass in the cabinet. Not surveillance, but surrender. Not worship, but devotion. Blessing and blasphemy, both. Not the sanitized tables of slaughter, but the fleck of tendon that pops the butcher in the eye.

BANARBAR

And the bells?

I've heard there is a sin for excessive sadness and another for excessive love. The gods punished me by putting thousands of bells in my ear and they never stop ringing. Now, even when it's absolutely quiet, all I can hear is music.

MUTUAL REGARD:

A LOVE LETTER FOR BLACK-FILIPINO KINSHIPS

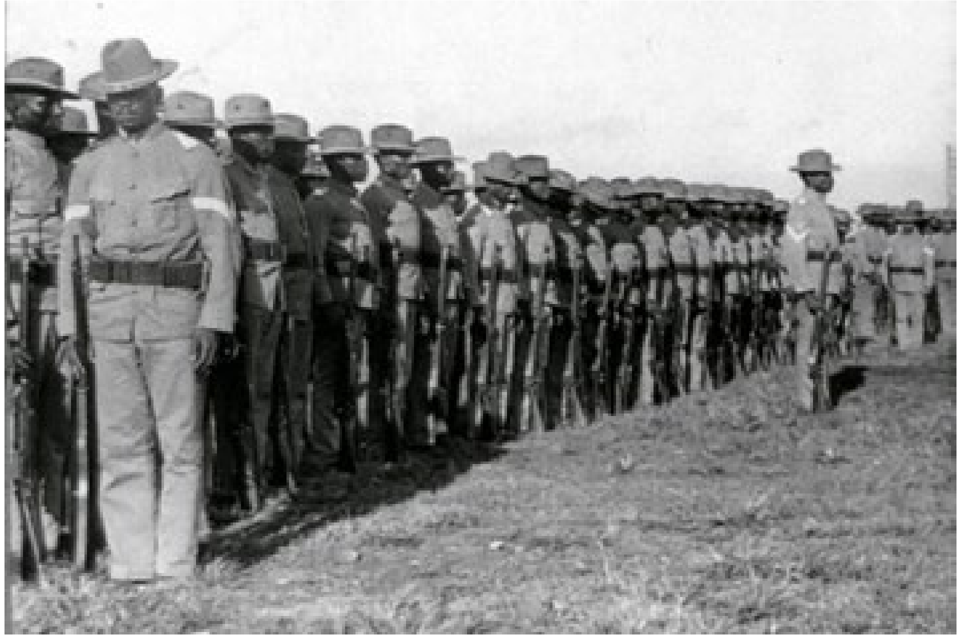


Fig. 47

They are a dark people — some are distinctively black—and our soldiers have fallen into the habit of calling them "niggers" (negroes), but there is probably less African blood on these islands than in almost any other part of the world. Many of the people resemble the negro in appearance, but that is as far as the similarity goes. For all the practical purposes of civilization, the mirthful, easy-going African is superior to these treacherous and blood-thirsty hybrid Malays. They have been pirates from the earliest eras, and their vengeful disposition is written indelibly on their sullen faces. No civilized nation has anything to gain by associating with them or endeavoring to govern them. Spain tried the experiment for four centuries, and smiled broadly when she sold the hot tamale to us for twenty millions of dollars. The lamented General Lawton knew them well; a green mound in Arlington Cemetery attests his intimate acquaintance with these people, and he declared that the only good Filipinos were the dead ones. But are we ready to go into the business of national extermination? That is a qustion for the people of America to answer for themselves. It is not our place to advise. We have undertaken the more agreeable task of showing them the kind of people they have to deal with, in order that they may see their way clearly before proceeding with the slaughter.

—*Our Islands and Their People*, ed. William S. Bryan,
St Louis: N.D. Thompson Publishing, 1899

Tell my friends that I am just the same as a Filipino.
— Ed Brown, 24th Infantry, Buffalo Soldier
(from Willard B. Gatewood's *Smoked Yankees*)

I bought a framed print of the Buffalo Soldiers—segregated regiments of African American soldiers originally formed in 1866—many years ago now. The public domain photo features a perpendicular formation of men in field service apparel, the fat chevrons of the platoon leaders pointing downward on their arms. Their campaign hats give the illusion of a straight line. One of the leaders is framed far left. He faces the camera. The expression of each soldier is serious but calm — power, discipline, unity. The deviations in the formation are inconsequential, until you take a closer look and notice a couple of the men's heads are slightly bowed, breaking the uniformity of the row. Their figures cut a sloping horizon against the top of the frame. Actually, now that I look at it, almost half the photo is sky. A caption, inked in hand, reads: "The 24th U.S. Infantry at drill, Camp Walker, Philippine Islands." It was taken in 1902.

I've carried the photo with me through three cities and half a dozen apartments. It sits in a room in our house for artmaking and workouts as well as meals and the frequent spontaneous dance party. I look at the picture every day. I'm reminded not just of the 24th Infantry pictured, but also of the 25th Infantry and the 9th and 10th Cavalries, which served the U.S. military in the wars against Native Americans, the Spanish American War, and the Philippine American War.

*

If you listen to the vast majority of American school lessons, you would never guess that the Philippines was one of the central subjects of American business and politics during the first decades of the twentieth century; in economic terms, sugar—a global commodity that could and would be produced by the islands and Filipino labor—then was comparable to the predominance of oil now. The national debate around imperialism included a heated feud among legislators, the press, and public about war crimes, when American forces were accused of waterboarding Filipinos. (After over a hundred years, this is still an issue—in 2018 during the US war with Iraq, ProPublica reported that the CIA was still using this torture, this time in Thailand.)

The conflict was so difficult and prolonged, it forced the U.S. to rethink military practices and weapons. Filipinos—who fought with a hodgepodge of 19th century Spanish muzzleloaders, improvised German Mausers, as well as sticks and knives—were such tenacious warriors the American military started to rethink its .38 caliber sidearms, prompting the invention of the Colt .45. One could argue that the conflict even contributed to the rise of the popularity of American football. After the violence in the islands started to wane, the gridiron was where young men could prove their "martial spirit" and so began to channel much of their battlefield fervor to the football field (Tommy R Thompson, "John D Brady, the Philippine-American War, and the Martial Spirit in Late 19th Century America," Nebraska History 84 (2003): 142-153).

Many people still believe the American invasion of the Philippines in 1898 was part of the Spanish American War. However, the Filipinos had essentially defanged the Spanish well before the Americans even arrived. That naval skirmish in Manila Bay between Admiral Dewey and the ineffectual Spanish fleet—often regarded as a decisive U.S. victory over the Spanish depicting Americans as saviors—was no more than a scripted, innocuous scene (See Luis Francia's *History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos*).

The U.S. paid Spain $20 million for the islands at the Treaty of Paris, told the world it had a moral obligation to redeem the uncivilized Filipinos (despite steady and significant Westernization since the 16th century), and then conveyed tens of thousands of troops to take the islands over. The conflict would claim the lives of 20,000 Filipino combatants, by some accounts, but 100,000 to 200,000 Filipinos lives were lost as a result of hunger, disease, and a general lack of care. Historians would call it an insurrection of Filipinos, but by definition a people can't insurrect against a foreign power.

This was a war of a sovereign republic against an invading nation—the United States of America. America wanted the land and resources. They wanted Filipino labor. And they sent Black soldiers to do the dirtiest work for the least reward.

*

When I first ordered the photo of the 24th Infantry, I wanted desperately to make heroes of these Black soldiers, fighters on many fronts, taking up arms on behalf of America as well as fighting to prove their own worth. What could be more heroic than that?

In reality, these Black soldiers were deployed in the islands to fulfill an American imperialist project. They took an oath to fight—and kill—Filipinos who stood in the way of that project. For the Negro soldier, their valiant performance in battle was meant to prove their rightful claim in a country where they were viciously disenfranchised, tortured, and killed based on the color of their skin. It took me a little while to fully understand I'd been making heroes of soldiers whose assignment was to subjugate Filipinos by military violence. African Americans explicitly assented to and participated in the murder of my (very recent) ancestors and their countrymen.

My great uncles were sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until dead" by one of many dubious military tribunals (Hearings Before the Committee on the Philippines of the U.S. Senate, Part 2, pp 1155-1157). They were accused of wanton murder—Prudencio, Mamerto, and Nicasio Llanes. The Senate document cites them as members of the santadahan, Filipino guerillas assembled for the purpose of expelling America and its forces. They were my grandmother's first cousins; reading

the case summary and sentence was the first time I had ever seen any of our family's history appear in the U.S. official record.

I don't think it's an extravagant claim to say that they were murdered for their dissent. American governance accompanied the soldiers, artillery, and guns to the islands. Throughout the war, America would take on a range of convenient roles: victim and savior, judge and jury. With an all-white, military court whose larger purpose was the acquisition of a group of Pacific Islands, one has to intellectually and spiritually challenge the validity of such a "legal system." If the U.S. had any notions of establishing an American democracy in the tropics, it would be accomplished with a Springfield pointed between the Filipino's eyes.

"The whites have begun to establish their diabolical race hatred in all its home rancor in Manila, even endeavoring to propagate the phobia among the Spaniards and Filipinos so as to be sure of the foundation of their supremacy when the civil rule that must necessarily follow the present military regime, is established," wrote Sgt. Major John W. Galloway of the 24th Infantry to the Richmond Planet (12/30/1899; p 252 Gatewood).

The Black press did not have foreign correspondents, but they published the letters of Negro soldiers reporting on their experiences in the islands. Numerous missives indicate that the Black soldier swiftly recognized how the color line was being duplicated in the archipelago—this time to include Filipinos. One Black soldier, William Simms, wrote home in 1901: "I was struck by a question a little [Filipino] boy ask me, which ran about this way: 'Why does the American negro come … to fight us when we are much a friend to him and have not done anything to him. He is all the same as me and me all the same as you. Why don't you fight those people in America who burn Negroes, that make a beast of you…?'" (p. 237, Gatewood)

The Filipino—evidenced by the nearly quarter million dead as a result of the U.S. invasion—was expendable. In the aftermath of the Battle of Balanggiga, one of the worst losses for the U.S., General Jacob H. Smith ordered the slaughter of every Filipino "over the age of ten." He wanted to turn the land into "a howling wilderness." American soldiers plundered churches and homes. They burnt down villages. Many Filipinos were forced into "zones of protection," which were internment camps intended to prevent guerilla recruitment. Thousands of Filipinos perished from hunger and disease like dysentery.

It was the Black soldier who wrestled mightily with the idea of expendability of their foe, for it mirrored their own status in Jim Crow regions of the U.S.

Sgt. Patrick Mason, Co. I, 24th Infantry wrote, "I feel sorry for these people and all that have come under the control of the United States. I don't believe they will be justly dealt by. The first thing in the morning is the 'Nigger' and the last thing at night is the 'Nigger'. You have no idea the way these people are treated by the Americans here." (Gatewood p. 257)

White soldiers were directed by their superiors to stop using the slur to refer to the islanders because their Black counterparts were starting to identify with the Filipinos. According to historian Willard B. Gatewood, the word nonetheless reverberated among white soldiers throughout the conflict, a brazen refrain that followed the Black soldiers from the U.S. mainland across an ocean. The Jim Crow line would be inscribed in a land half-way around the globe. In words and deeds, the white military made it clear that Black soldiers should expect the same inhuman status they were forced into in the American South. And in the islands, they would be joined by the Filipinos.

Sgt. Major Galloway, who would eventually be disciplined for suspected collaboration with the Filipinos, succinctly predicted the fate of the islanders: "The future of the Filipino, I fear, is that of the Negro in the South." (Gatewood, p. 253)

For some members of the Black military, this was more than enough motivation to defect. The most famous among them was a man named David Fagen.

*

Lately, David Fagen's name has been circulating on the internet, especially widely in Filipino American social media networks. What you will find out is that Fagen lived in Tampa, where he enlisted in the 24th Infantry on June 4, 1898. He shipped off to Manila, and soon ran into conflict with his superiors. Fagen defected to the

Filipino side on November 17, 1899, when he slipped away on a horse provided by the Filipinos, with whom he must have already had contact. (For a brilliant account of Fagen's life, read Rene Ontal's "Fagen and Other Ghosts" in *Vestiges of War*, edited by Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis Francia.)

Fagen would fight alongside the guerilla resistance and eventually rise to the rank of Captain, leading Filipinos into battle against the Americans numerous times over a period of two years. His most famous feat was the capture of a supply barge, enabling the Filipinos to take a valued haul in guns and ammo.

Colonel Frederick Funston became obsessed with Fagen's capture, offering a bounty for his head. One American came to hunt the Black officer down, but never found him. Fagen's saga was chronicled all over America's newspapers at the time and he became so renowned a bike thief took on his name.

U.S. military records contend that a Filipino showed up at an American encampment asking to collect bounty for the killing of the deserted Black soldier. He handed the Americans a sack with a slightly decomposed head that he said was Fagen's. According the official U.S. account, the former infantryman was positively identified. This was enough for the America to officially declare Fagen dead, though various alternative theories about his escape and survival have been offered.

Fagen is the principal figure cited in social media in urging Filipinos to support the Black Lives Matter movement, a kind of Filipino debt to African Americans. But the idea of debt and allyship as transaction gives me pause. We become part of the problem when we reduce a Black man to a small subset of actions. A story that claims Filipinos owe African Americans requires a heroic, salvation narrative. It also undermines a story of two peoples' subversion of systemic racism by mutual recognition. We owe it to ourselves and African American history to imagine a more complete David Fagen.

For example, stop for a moment to think about Fagen's first weeks among Filipinos. What language did he speak to his new comrades and what language did they speak to him? It's very possible he spoke with them in Spanish, as many soldiers—Black and white— had some facility with Spanish words and phrases. But isn't it highly likely, after so much close contact with the Filipinos, that they taught Fagen some Tagalog, possibly Ilokano? And isn't it likely that he taught the Filipinos some (or a lot of) English? If he did, then surely it was a version of Southern Black English.

If you've ever traveled or studied a foreign language, then you know this awkwardness, this richness, this traveling away from one's self. You know the painful fumbles and you know the exhilaration of connection. Do we imagine these soldiers never had to grieve one of their fallen? To comfort one another? To gather like that? To think together? To quarrel? To pray? Do we dare imagine they did not eat and drink and laugh together? Was there no time for the Filipinos to point to a bright bird circling or a spectacular reptile sunning on a rock? Was there no urge to notice the very land they were fighting for? No compulsion to share the gorgeousness of the local?

In my mind, Fagen's story doesn't reveal a man whose questions are solely about the acquisition of power and fame. He strikes me as a figure who passionately wanted to be his own uncompromised self, who understood that all the estimations America had made of him—no matter how widely broadcast or brutally enforced—were rank failures. He strikes me as one who not only saw the brutal injustice against Filipinos, but how it resonated with the life of the Negro in America. Is it not feasible that Fagen was continually teaching and embodying qualities of Blackness that Filipinos—over three hundred years of Spanish colonization—had been conditioned to be ashamed of? Isn't it equally feasible that the Fiilpinos—who had sustained an effective armed resistance to expel a European oppressor—embodied qualities Fagen only dreamed of or could not see under the watch of whiteness?

Fagen not only must have relished being accepted by the Filipinos, his acceptance of them also must have been the source of incredible challenges and countless instances of affection. (I'm hearing Cesaire's moving lines, "J'accept… J'accept… entiérement, sans réserve…") His formal role among Filipinos was that of soldier and finally officer. But it is the informal, the spontaneous, the seemingly miniscule gesture—down to our breathing—that gives shape to our lives.

If there is a debt owed to Fagen, especially one that persists into the twenty-first century, it must be accounted for in light of the days, hours, and minutes these men

lived and fought among one another—not just the heroic, but the mundane, which especially in a time of crisis and violence is the very substance of beauty.

I say, Fagen was beloved. And I say he loved the Filipino back.

*

During the first year of the American occupation of the archipelago, the new technologies of silent film gave rise to hundreds of moving pictures for public consumption in America and Europe. One of them, titled "Filipinos Retreat from the Trenches" was produced in June of 1899, just a couple weeks before David Fagen and the 24th and 25th Infantries departed California for the Pacific.

The movie camera shows us Filipino soldiers shooting from a standing position in a deep trench. Dressed in all white—or what looks like white in the film's monochrome, the men are turned mostly away. We can't see the details of their dark faces. They are pointing their Mausers at something off screen.

To me, they are beautiful, the line and muscle of each torso defined by sashes fitted at the waists of their uniforms. They're dressed so fine, for a second I think they should be heading out for a long night of body rock at the club. But this is 1899. Though the bullets are invisible, smoke zips from their muzzles then billows into loaf-sized clouds, a larger fog now, a host of indistinguishable ghosts, reversing into the trench where the lean barrels rise then drop between firing.

The soldier in the foreground partially hides the fighter next to him. He seems to relax as he reaches into his back pocket for another cartridge, a rural casualness. Even when they're firing their weapons, they shift their easy weight with little tension in their hips. The gun kicks, knocking back the front foot of the soldier standing closest to us.

Look now how the second closest man to the camera gets one shot off before he falls to his back knee, then drops. And his two comrades in the background crumple face down as another pair breaks to escape. The Filipino soldier closest to us bounds out of the picture. The smoke has gloomed the far half of the trench, and I can make out two or three other heads turning to flee.

I grew up in Edison, New Jersey, a town named after the man who produced this film. And that man, Thomas Alva Edison, was an imperialist.

As an adolescent, I used to ride my bike past his labs, a landmark now, where he developed the light bulb. For decades, I had no clue about his association with Filipino history—that is, my history. Among the gadgets to come out of those labs was a sound machine called the phonograph, tech ancestor to the turntable, which my friends and I joyfully pried open, disassembled, and re-made as a DJ crew, rocking hundreds of 80s and 90s dance floors—an important site of friendship, sexual discovery, love, and rivalry for our generation. (Note: See Christine Balance's book Tropical Renditions) That is to say, we reinvented Edison's invention. We broke the rules of the machine by breaking the machine itself and putting it back together better than it was received. And then we danced to the tool of our remaking.

Not thirteen seconds into Edison's movie, along the left edge, a flag appears. Even from the old film stock restored in 1996 and digitized, we can quickly make out the stars and stripes. A soldier in dark uniform entering from the left and gripping the flagpole is white. A squadron of Americans, also white, follows him into the shot. For a second, it looks like the standard bearer might plant the pole into the back of one of the dead. The American fighters, having taken the trench, open fire in the direction of the retreated Filipinos now off screen. And the flag man steps over the neck of his enemy.

Edison moved his labs up a ways to West Orange, New Jersey. And there in the hills of Essex County, in 1899, he directed this battle between Americans and Filipinos.

The Library of Congress credits The New Jersey National Guard as the actors. I think to myself, that explains the white American soldiers who charge and win the trench. But where did Edison find Filipinos to play the vanquished enemy? Well, he didn't. Edison had the white guardsmen play the American soldiers. He had Black men play the Filipinos.

I watch the film over and over. When the Black actors run, Filipinos run. When the Black men shoot at the oncoming charge of white soldiers, Filipinos are shooting too. When the bodies fall, they are Filipino and they are Black at the same time.

The final image of the film is a mounted sergeant or officer, slowing his horse which is losing its footing on the slope so that the animal is about to slide into the ditch. One of the Filipinos, lying down as if he's already been shot, suddenly stands up, afraid of being trampled under hoof—not as an act but in fear for his actual safety and real life. The Black actor recovers his role, staggers a few steps, and dies again in a safe distance from the beast. The horseman fires his sidearm toward the heavens. In the foreground lie four corpses. There are no more living Filipinos in the frame. The film ends.

The minute-long clip means to be an allegory of the fight between good and evil, between the civilized and the savage in the Philippine Islands. But the movie unwittingly reveals the cardinal fancy of white supremacy.

When Edison's white soldiers move, they are moving the front line. This line has already traveled with them halfway around the world. It is their most prized cargo. The line stands for American Imperialism. The line stands for Jim Crow. The line stands for both at the same time. Plessy v. Ferguson effectively declared war on Black folks. By violence, by the gun, and by the noose, that ten-thousand-mile line was meant to be enforced. The line, as W.E.B. Dubois famously put it, is the problem of the twentieth century, "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."

Sometimes the American dream of the line is that the enemy can't cross it. So America moves the line with a flag. They move the line with guns. Whiteness dreams of moving the line until there is no space on the other side. They dream of moving the line until there are no people on the other side. As the line moves, the functional area of whiteness grows. It is Edenic actually. Whiteness dreams of a world without the line. The future of the Black world is the future of the line. The future of the line is its obsolescence. Its obsolescence depends on the extinction of the people on the other side.

Before the end of the movie, the flag exits the frame. The guns keep following. The white soldiers who bear the line of battle and the line of American imperialism and the line of Jim Crow chase down the soldiers—who are Black, who are Filipino, who have run to avoid dying at the line. This side of the world is now white. And there is no other side of the world.

Forget that Filipinos fought guerilla style; forget they didn't follow the convention of the line. To the Filipino there were no lines. There was only the land. And the land—hills, rivers, flora—was their collaborator. In a time before Europeans, in a time before white people in the islands, in a time before the idea of whiteness, the land and trees were holy, the fruits of those trees holy, the water holy, and the wind and breath itself holy. Filipinos listened to the land. They shouted their names into forests. (My family still does this.) They grieved with the land. They asked permission from the land. They took care of the land as the land took care of them. During the war with the Americans, the Filipinos read the land and saw no lines. But Americans inscribed a line into the land. The line was an illusion. There was only the land. The Filipinos weren't crossing a line. They were living.

To understand the scale of the fantasy so clearly designed in Edison's movie, one must see it as the predecessor for Birth of a Nation, D.W. Griffith's epic lie which would be produced a decade and a half later and become a rallying document for white supremacy and the Klan.

But one must also think about African American film history, how Edison's production featuring Black actors was released little more than a year after the recently recovered 19th century film short Something Good—A Negro Kiss, which featured early Black entertainers, Saint Suttle and Gertie Brown, kissing and exchanging affections. Furthermore, Edison's film came 15 years before the work of the great Black auteur Oscar Micheaux. All of this follows a historical pattern in which Filipinos and African Americans, who were hyperpresent to one another at the turn of the century, soon became hyperabsent. We've been missing from each other now for a long time.

I want to remake the Edison film. I want to visit those hills of West Orange. Maybe somewhere along I-280, there's a green and brown mound and a ditch where Edison's cameraman dropped his tripod. And maybe Edison is still there shouting at the Black men and white men to get into position. Maybe there, where they loaded their guns. Blanks.

Let's do it again. Let's call the descendants of the Black men who played the Filipinos in the film. Let's invite them to the site of the production. Let's kick Edison off the set. Let's talk about what three or four generations of America looks like. Let's gather. It's time to retell the twentieth century.

*

I'm writing this in the middle of outrage and mourning. I'm writing this to try and figure out how I came to my own anger and my own sorrow about Black folks harassed, assaulted, and murdered without accountability from white people and the police that defend them. I'm writing this from a space of Asian America, a space that is meant to be vast and inclusive, but one that I have often felt excluded from. I'm writing this from a space of sadness and isolation, from a premonition that we are being pulled apart from one another, an uncomfortable hunch that we are weakening.

This history of oppression—which is really a history of Black-Filipino resistance, Black-Filipino improvisation, Black-Filipino intimacy, and Black-Filipino mutual regard—has all but disappeared from our national consciousness. I would argue, this disappearance is a fundamental part of our shared pain.

The American imperialist era in the Philippines aligns squarely with the years between Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and the beginning of the Great Migration (c. 1920). Keith Green, my colleague who is a scholar of African American captivity, told me that for a long time this period was referred to as The Nadir. The era was considered a kind of void in the story of Black people in the U.S. and so had gone mostly unexamined.

The launch of this plan for white dominance set off a unique relationship between African Americans and Filipinos. (See Nerissa Balce's "Filipino Bodies, Lynching, and the Language of Empire" in Pos*itively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, edited by Antonio Tiongson et. al.), Not only did each of our peoples resist this horrific blueprint, we constructed resistance in tandem. This cooperation was the genesis of mutual regard, in which these two peoples of color beheld each other without the mitigation of whiteness. In the midst of systemic violence, abuse, and manipulation, our shared story offers an alternative historical model where whiteness, white governance, white institutions do not mediate how we interact.

I believe our Black-Filipino history, which is to say, our many affinities and exchanges, were erased because this mutual acknowledgment was a threat to the dream of white mastery. At the turn of the century, we were hyperpresent with one another; and within a decade we were apparently hyperinvisible to one another. In short, American government, education, and industry collectively shaped a story that erased Black-Filipino connections for virtually the whole twentieth century.

But they couldn't douse the fire of collaborative resistance completely.

Dubois' invocation of Asia and the Pacific Islands in the struggle against the oppressive color line wasn't mere rhetoric. In 1906, he was horrified by the slaughter of some thousand Filipinos in the Southern region of the islands. A famous photo of that massacre at Bud Dajo showed American soldiers standing over a ditch full of Filipino corpses. Incidentally, the picture is a grotesque and eerie antecedent to the photos of Abu Ghraib. Dubois thought the picture of American atrocity should be enlarged, duplicated, and distributed to Black folks throughout the U.S. to expose the brutality of American conquest.

Dubois also exchanged letters with Black educators in the archipelago, sensing an opportunity for more African American teachers in the Philippines. In fact, one of the first Black Americans to teach in the islands was a young man named Carter G. Woodson, who would spend his formative years in the tropics, then return to America and chronicle his observations of racist pedagogy in the U.S. in a seminal book called The Miseducation of the Negro. As you probably know, his passionate

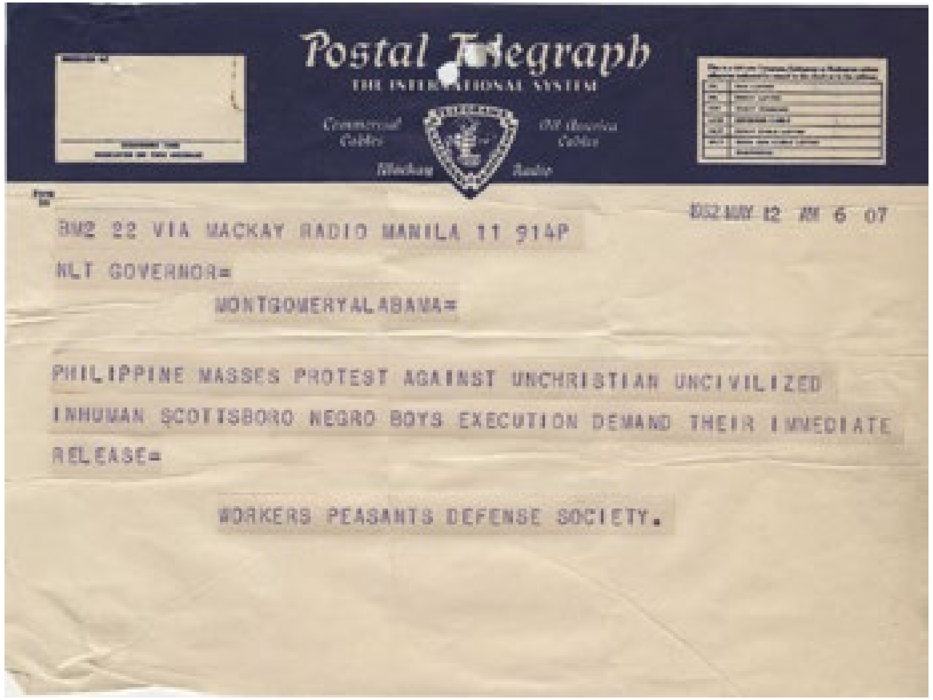
critique of the white education system in the U.S. mainland—which he documented in the Philippines, too—led to the establishment of Black History Month.

One of the most significant Black Filipino exchange in the decades between the World Wars is also the most often overlooked. During my research, I stumbled across a telegram from The Workers' Peasants Defense Society of the Philippines to the governor of Alabama dated May 12, 1932: "PHILIPPINE MASSES PROTEST AGAINST UNCHRISTIAN UNCIVILIZED INHUMAN SCOTTSBORO BOYS EXECUTION DEMAND THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE." The Scottsboro Boys were nine African Americans, from 12 to 19 years old, falsely accused of raping two white women on a train. All served prison time. They were eventually pardoned—posthumously, in 2013.

It's true that the Scottsboro case drew international attention with the boys receiving vocal support from the Communist party around the world. Nonetheless, the Workers' Peasants Defense Society is worth noting because this demand was sent barely a year after Filipino laborer Fermin Tobera was shot and killed in his sleep in Watsonville, California.

Filipino laborers were the objects of scorn for stealing the jobs of white Americans. But the more severe offense that caused race riots up and down the West Coast was that Filipinos—affectionately known to each other as manongs— danced with white women.

A labor organizer from Yakima, in a presentation to the Congressional Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, summarizes white anxiety around the presence of Filipinos on the U.S. mainland: "Let it be remembered that most of these Filipinos are musicians, and that the character of their music is of the sentimental and appealing (to passions sort), and that the Filipinos dress flashily, spend their money lavishly on the girls, and Chief Mann [of Toppenish, Washington] said: 'They are just as dangerous when allowed free social contact with women as that of the negro when given the same liberty.'"



Postal Telegraph

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Commercial Cables

All America Cables

Mackay Radio

1932 MAY 12 AM 6 07

BM2 22 VIA MACKAY RADIO MANILA 11 914P

NLT GOVERNOR=

MONTGOMERYALABAMA=

PHILIPPINE MASSES PROTEST AGAINST UNCHRISTIAN UNCIVILIZED INHUMAN SCOTTSBORO NEGRO BOYS EXECUTION DEMAND THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE=

WORKERS PEASANTS DEFENSE SOCIETY.

Fig. 48

The same labor organizer continues: “One of the prominent men in Toppenish, with whom I talked yesterday, said: ‘If I had my way, I would declare an open season on all Filipinos and there would be no bag limit.”

Those hearings were prompted in large part by the riots in Watsonville, which resulted in numerous assaults on Filipinos by white posses, in addition to the lynching of Fermin Tobera. The violence erupted after white Watsonville residents were horrified by a picture in the local newspaper of a manong, Perfecto Bandalan, with his white bride-to-be Esther Schmick. The outrage and fear of the sexual threat of Filipinos escalated to such a degree that the U.S. decided to deal with the “Filipino problem” by first offering to repatriate the brown-skinned laborers and then ultimately granting the islands their independence.

The U.S. was not a magnanimous steward of the lowly Filipino. There was no American moral awakening that led to Philippine independence. Americans abused, murdered, and finally ejected the very people they brought to their own mainland to do the jobs they wouldn’t do. White Americans were terrified of the miscegenation of Filipino men and white women. Though the fused line of imperialism and Jim Crow no longer materialized on the battlefield, the vile racialization of Filipinos continued well into their migration to the mainland.

Quotas imposed by the Tydings McDuffie Act in 1934 essentially prohibited the immigration of Filipinos. Eventually, under different circumstances, Filipinos and Black folks would be reintroduced because of the Pacific theater in World War II. And in 1963, two years before Filipinos would finally be permitted to immigrate to the U.S. again, James Baldwin would publish *A Fire Next Time*, his shining document of love and anger. Baldwin’s book has become canonical in racial discourse, but few readers seem to notice the epigraph that follows his loving letter to his nephew and precedes the iconic, raucous, prayerful meditation on Black faith, family, and survival. The epigraph is from a poem titled “White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling.

This poem has a specific history. It was written in reference to the ostensible responsibility of white men to lift Filipinos out of their savagery.

Is it possible that a writer as thoughtful as James Baldwin did not know the time and historical circumstances of the white poet's work? It seems unlikely to be a casual gesture. It seems more likely that Baldwin recognized the specific, joined legacy between Jim Crow and imperialist white supremacy in the Philippines.

Two years ago, I gave an informal lunch presentation organized by our students. I offered them bits and pieces of the many artifacts and documents from Filipino American history that I'd uncovered over the years. I thought aloud about the racialization of Filipinos from Alaska to Southern California and the terrifying resemblance of that racialization to other ethnic minorities, not the least of which were African Americans.

After the talk, I went back to my apartment and I got a text from Shawn Jones, a Black poet in the program who was at the gathering: "So recently, my cousin sent me this picture of my great grandfather. It is the only picture we have of him."

I looked at the black and white photo of a man with a high forehead and square chin. He was slim. His skin was light brown. His shoulders were slightly forward and I could almost see the beginning of a smile. He was handsome.

She continued, "My cousin said his mother was Filipino."

Shawn—a grandmother herself—had no idea of her Filipino ancestry. She didn't have a historical context to even understand that was possible. My talk was the first she had heard of the Philippine American War and the involvement of African American soldiers. She was a descendant of our shared history.

How many more African American families can trace their story to the Buffalo Soldiers of the Philippines? In the public eye, in my lifetime, I think of Nate Robinson, whom I loved during his tenure with the Knicks. And as a writer, how can I not acknowledge Jayne Cortez, whose life in the Black Arts Movement included poetry but also the music of the Black Avant Garde?

White supremacy rewards us—as it did in the Philippines—for making all-or-nothing foes of one another. White supremacy counts on us being busied with addressing the white center, making it damn near impossible for us to witness each others' histories and lives. But mutual regard makes us incredibly strong. What would it mean to remember together even as we can and must remember apart? Remembering in communion expands our inner lives, the richness of our solitude. It is a practice of shared joy, shared sorrow, shared outrage, shared feeling.

*

When there is racial conflict in the U.S. it is almost always framed in literally black and white terms. Asian Americans are forced into a strange and awful deliberation. America has so deeply conditioned the immigrant and his descendants with fear, he quietly wants to know how to make himself safe. He will side with whoever is most powerful.

In my mind, instead of picking a side, we should be moved toward a profound moral and historical questioning.

Asian guilt is a fear that you'll be found out as one of the bad guys. Asian guilt is internalized white guilt. Ironically, it is another kind of assimilation. A commitment to justice for Black lives is not predicated on a confession of one's wrongs to Black people. A commitment to justice is predicated on a conscience. Self indictment is not a conscience. Blame is not a conscience. Neither is debt evidence of a conscience. Reflection, inquiry, a reimagining of the self, especially in relation to other folks—that is the beginning of love. And love is at the center of all justice.

Furthermore, Asian guilt is built on a monolithic Asian identity and doesn't take into account specific historical Filipino-Black intersections. No other Asian country was ever fully subject to the U.S. fantasy of Jim Crow like the Philippines. And still, our mutual regard is not limited to our suffering: our modes of mourning and celebrating and gathering, our improvisations with the land and local material, our disobedience in and against a master language are highly legible to one another. Our creolizations, our trickersterisms, our interrogation of the world with the body, if we take care to look, are mutually intelligible.

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Kinship as story—as question, as seeing—I didn't invent it. It is in our epistolary literature and newspapers. It is in our photos and film history. It is greater than solidarity. And it is radically different from the popularized narrative of debt. Mutual regard is a social dimension of resistance. It is a spiritual dimension of justice itself.

As a writer, I feel a strong identification with the Black soldiers who wrote home to chronicle—and even reimagine—their own lives while they were in the Pacific. They recorded the Philippines and Filipinos not as entirely separate, but as related, connected, even the "same." What they found were intimacies—and kinships, too. In my work as an artist, I record my life, and I record Black life, because it is—and has always been right in front of me. Black life is in the history that made me. It is in the history that made my parents and grandparents and great grandparents. We—Filipinos and Black folks—are in each others' trauma, but we are also in each others' dreams, wishes, deep memory, and imagination.

This is the twenty-first century. The enmity is here. The intimacies and kinships are so powerfully here. Regardless.

NOTES ON IMAGES

Figure 1
I started drawing the charcoal figures in the Callao Caves of Peñablanca in Cagayan, a region in Northern Luzon that neighbors my mom's province, just as a way to study and imagine. This is a scanned version of a pen and ink drawing I did of one of the figures.

Figure 2
I'd been drawing B-Boy figures for years and one morning before dawn last year I was thinking of a dear friend who had lost her mother recently. And I don't know, drawing lets me be inside something else even if a feeling — like a grief — is kind of all around me. It made me think how much drawing is like writing or music — following the line.

Figure 3
This is a cut-out of a downloaded public domain photo of halo-halo brained Alfonso II and a Filipino rocking out on his Fender kutibeng and Vox amp in pencil and ink. Quite the duo.

Figure 4
D. Isabelo de los Reyes y Florentino published a couple volumes about the Ilocos region (where my folks are from) and its people. Gina Apostol hipped me to his work and it was kind of interesting to read his more-than-a-century-old work, a fellow Ilocano writing in Spanish, who was trying to address some of the anthropological misconceptions about people from the region. In this passage from *Historia de Ilocos, Vol. 1* he's talking about the seasons and how Ilocanos draw relationships between blooms, fruits, and the moon cycle. He talks about how even today Ilocanos ignore the Gregorian calendar in favor of this definition of seasons. I also love how vague time is for Ilocanos. I should send this to my colleagues when I'm late for a meeting. Amazing what you can find for free on the internet.

Figure 5
I started doing these bigger drawings on butcher paper with my students in an improvisation class in Fall 2019 that met for six hours on Saturdays. We fed each other food and just hung out, talking about art and language and poetry. And then we did a lot of these drawings together, finally inviting the community to join us in a massive drawing on butcher paper about water. Maybe I'll make another book and talk about that. Anyway, these drawings were all kind of visual improvisations about the Philippines and Spain and dancing. I like the spaceship and I never drew a Filipino church before. And check out the Callao figure came back to dance in the vestibule!

Figure 6
This is a collage of a downloaded scan of score notes that John Coltrane made for "A Love Supreme." (Check it out: he originally heard congas in the instrumentation.) The men in the picture are a band during the Philippine American War. The description from the second volume of *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* (1899) says: "This band came from the interior, professing extraordinary friendship for the Americans. But they professed too much and thereby aroused the suspicions of authorities, who banished them from the camp. It was afterward learned that they had been sent by Aguinaldo as spies." Walter Howard Loving doesn't appear in this book (well, I guess he does now), but he was a Black soldier who led the Philippine Constabulary Band and who composed many times for and about the islands, including "Beloved Philippines," which Mary Rose and I brought back into performance a couple years ago at Cave Canem in Brooklyn and then we did one where people joined us publicly in the singing at Madison Square Park in Manhattan.

Figure 7
This headline was published in the New York Times on February 15, 1901. America thought that they found the Garden of Eden, which is to say that America believed it was returning paradise to its rightful stewards. I thought this was a joke but nah they really believed that. I wanted to learn how to draw a balite tree. So there's that.

Figure 8
The poet Bruce Smith's variegated contributions to the altar I made in Italy.

Figures 9 and 10
Dana Prescott and Missy Mazzoli's contributions to the altar in Italy. Glass heart with oak leaf and a hiker climbing Mount Nothing.

Figures 11-14
Sweet notes and things from Emily Skaja, Kim Ghattas, Dorit Weisman, and Sonia Louise Davis. My mom was prolly laughing so hard at all this. I bet she loved it.

Figure 15
Pen and pencil drawing of an angel. Looks like a superhero. I wish I could draw good enough to make a comic book. My brothers can!

Figure 16
I think Ivan Forde gave me this feather for the altar. Is that right, Ivan?

Figure 17
Ubah Cristina Ali left this beautiful collage in the stairwell of the castle (I know, a castle, right?) that we were staying in.

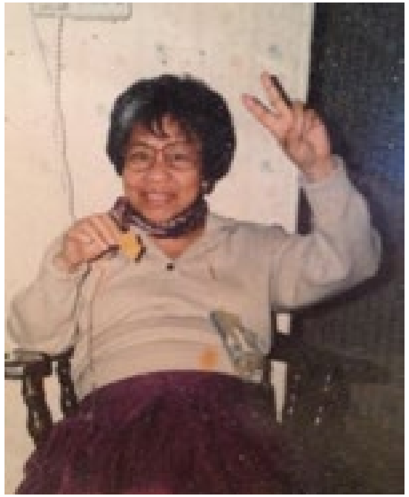
Figure 18
Scan of a pen and pencil drawing of three dancers and massive speakers. I don't have hair but I think I'm the guy with his head inside the woofer.

Figure 19
That's a printed scan of a pen and ink drawing I did of a shirtless island guy carrying a box (we didn't call them boomboxes; we just said, "Bring your box!" and then we went outside and danced). There's a galleon ship behind him. And the people are cut out from a scanned photo that I took in the Philippines during a party in my mom's barangay (barangay is like a barrio).

Figure 20
This is a pencil, pen, and marker drawing of a kutibeng with a Fender headstock. I actually don't know what a kutibeng looks like, but it was a four-stringed instrument used by the bards of the Ilocos region. Around it are words for various sounds in Ilocano. My parents' language is considered one of the gruffer sounding languages of the Philippines; it's also very onamotopoeic… onomatopoaeic… onomatopoeic (I don't know how to spell that word).

Figure 21
Ryan Eckes' contribution to the altar in Italy. The roses were in bloom. My mom loved those flowers. And we're Rosals, after all.

Figure 22
Chopping block with buneng (bolo knife) and tabo (a bucket to wash your butt… or a chopping block). I took this photo in Balacad, my mom's barangay, in the backyard of our family house. And then I learned how to do this masking thing in Photoshop and I don't know how to stop myself. Actually, I got tired that's why the photos toward the end of the book aren't cut out like this or like the cover photo.



This is my mom, Simeona Gelacio Rosal

Figure 23
That's the altar in Italy! All the stuff together with stuff that I gathered and some stuff that I brought with me from home because I knew I'd make an altar while I was staying out there.

Figure 24
That's my Uncle Charlie with real blood from a goat he was slaughtering for a little party we were having. And that's the Ilocano alphabet from a page in the de los Reyes book. Also, that's Fort Santiago in Manila that the Spanish built.

Figures 25–31
These are the smiths of San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. They made me two knives, a big bolo knife and a shorter blade for slicing and chopping. (When I went to the airport they saw the bolo knife in my check-in luggage and were going to confiscate it. When they opened the bag they only saw the smaller one and the guy was like, "This is it? I thought it was bigger." And then I convinced him to let me keep it, and he never saw the other bigger knife.) It was a real gift to watch these men do this thing they've been doing for generations and to receive their knives —so great. One of them wrote all their names in my journal. That felt like another gift.

Figures 32–35
I've been drawing these B-Boys in pen and sharpie for like eleven years now. And a bunch of them have turned out pretty good! I had to be judicious. This is a decent little collection for this book. They can do things that I could never do with my body when I was dancing.

Figures 36–38
I went out to Watsonville in 2018 and again in 2019. I'd been studying the history out there: the picture of Perfecto Bandalan with a white women and the riots which led to the murder of Fermin Tobera that followed the publication of that photo. So I started to imagine them dancing with white women or just dancing and how good of dancers they must have been. And I was thinking about them as a B-Boy crew. These are a couple of my attempts. (My wife says that "good of dancers" is an awkward phrase but when I'm speaking Jersey, it seems to have a melodious quality)

Figures 39–44
These are some of my nieces and nephews in Barangay 41, Santo Tomás, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. A day or two before I left, one of the kids came up to me in my uncle's yard and they were like, "Tito, ammom ti agaramid ti ullaw?" And I was like, "Ullaw?" What is that? They tried to explain but I couldn't get it. So they scattered. One brings a walis tinging (a broom made of thin sticks, which are the spines of a palm tree leaf). Another kid grabs a plastic bag. And another comes down the dirt road with what looks like VHS tape pulled out of the cassette. And they all gathered around and started making this thing. And it was a kite! It was amazing! I show this to improvisation students when we get together. I don't know if they're actually impressed. But I am!

Figure 45
Mary Rose and I were hanging out one evening. I was at my keyboard and she said, "Write something like a bolero." So I dropped a couple tracks with bass, guitar, and programmed percussion. She started

singing on it and our eyes lit up. We started writing these lyrics together which turned out to be a song for Enrique, who was Magellan's slave taken from Indonesia. He served Magellan on the voyage to the Pacific and was a translator between the Europeans and the Filipinos. Enrique escaped there. Many historians consider him(!) to be the first to circumnavigate the globe. So yeah, we recorded this song. As of the writing of these notes, we're hoping to release it April 2021 around the same time as this book.

Figure 46
Picture of the notes for the notebooks I sent out to see if they could circumnavigate the globe. Hilarious and fun.

Figure 47
The 24th U.S. Infantry at drill, Camp Walker, Philippine Islands 1902; Stereo copyrighted by C.H. Graves (The Universal Photo Art Co.). - Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Figure 48
Workers-Peasants Defense Society (Manila, Philippines), "Telegram from Workers-Peasants Defense Society in Manila, Philippines, to Governor in Montgomery, Alabama.," Scottsboro Boys Trials, accessed July 1, 2020, http://scottsboroboysletters.as.ua.edu/items/show/596.

Note on the section titles: Probably about a third of these words I have actually used in conversation. Part of the fun of doing this book was looking up words I didn't know in Ernesto Constantino's Ilokano Dictionary, 1971, University of Hawaii Press (open access info: [ISBNs: 9780824879020 (PDF) 9780824879037 (EPUB) This version created: 20 May, 2019]. More evidence of my exile in every language. It's how I find my way home.

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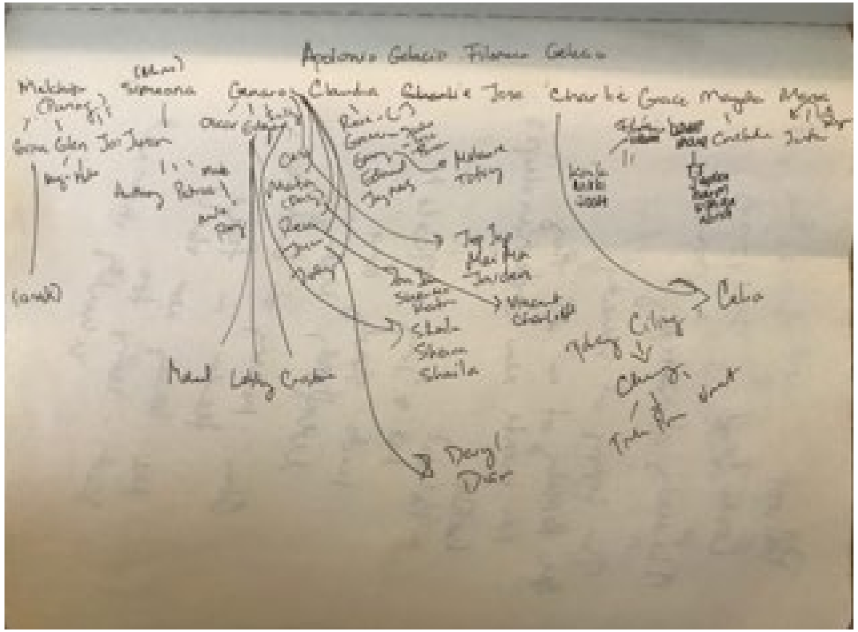
A SHORT, INCOMPLETE LIST OF COLLABORATORS

Mary Rose Go; Curtis Bauer; Aracelis Girmay; Ross Gay; Mark Rosal; Nick Rosal; John Murillo; Nicole Sealey; Ubah Cristina Ali; Kim Ghattas; Emily Skaja; Ryan Eckes; Missy Mazzoli; Dana Prescott; Sonia Louise Davis; Ivan Forde; Dorit Weisman; Natasha Soto; Marie Scarles; Cherita Harrell; Jessica Hagedorn; Ayinde Merriill; Steve Mallorca; Shawn Jones; Malik Abduh; Christine Balance; Jacob Camacho; Oliver de la Paz; Sarah Gambito; Joseph Legaspi; Aimee Nezhukumatathil; Jon Pineda; Janice Sapigao; Jason Bayani; Gina Apostol; Tyehimba Jess; Ron Villanueva; the Eskalera Crew... and many ghosts



Patrick Rosal is an amateur, a tinkerer, a dilettante. He is, above all, a student of music and dance and language and ritual and good food and drink and the land. *Atang* is his first self-published book. Matter of fact, he learned how to use these fancy programs just to make this. He used to make mixtapes and give them away. He's been known to do that with microscopes and guitars and other things, too, i.e. give them away. He lives in Rahway, NJ with his beloved, Mary Rose, and their two cats Vovo and Yuri.

A NOTE ON THE TYPEFACE

This book is set in Mrs. Eaves. I chose it because my copies of Jamaica Kincaid's books are set in Mrs. Eaves. And I happen to love Jamaica Kincaid's work.

Thanks again to my brother, Mark Rosal, who helped with a lot of the technical details of laying this book out and preparing it for printing.