

## THE TEARS OF THE HIP-HOPTIVIST

or

(Social Practice in the Philippines)

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores social practice art in the Philippines. Focusing on the work of Manila-based practitioner Clara Balaguer from the Office of Culture and Design (OCD), the article examines less the work and more the barriers to practice. Examining the two key obstacles, that of the market and the Movement, the article aims to underscore the still uneven topography of the global art milieu.

### THE ROCK AND THE HARD PLACE

#### RAFAEL SCHACTER

While exploring the possibilities and problematics of social practice in the paper – the key tension between ethics and aesthetics, something highlighted by our eponymous hip-hoptivists – what in fact remains central is the complexity of locality and the inherent impediments to social practice in the Philippines. Following the collaborative and dialogical foundations of social practice itself, the paper includes Balaguer's comments, thoughts and responses as [marginalia<sup>a</sup>](#).

<sup>a</sup>  
[Footnotes by Schacter are](#)

[identified with numbers in superscript. Marginalia by Balaguer, in subscript.](#)

#### KEYWORDS

AQ18

[From my understanding, it is rare that the subject of an anthropological investigation be allowed the opportunity to assist in their representation. To grant co-authorship and find ways to work together, at whatever level, in the generation of a critical portrait seems a crucial practice to explore.](#)

Social Practice; Hip-Hoptivism; Ethics; Aesthetics; Philippines; Manila; Contemporary Art; Office of Culture and Design

Clara turned to me with a resigned, despondent look on her face. 'This is what people here think I do', she

said. 'They think this is my practice. They think this is *social* practice'. We were sat at the back of an outdoor auditorium in Quezon City, Manila, on a hot, humid, summer night, having just witnessed a peculiar, quite unexpected end to what had previously been a raucous, energetic, hip-hop breakdance party. For most of the evening the event had been

enjoyably chaotic, music blaring, the crowd spinning, there being no discernible structure, no discernible leaders; the evening appeared to have been simply about letting off steam, about fun, release. Yet when the music finally came to what seemed to me a quite abrupt conclusion, a phalanx of foreigners (previously interspersed haphazardly among the crowd) had then proceeded to climb onto an adjacent stage (where a DJ had previously been performing) and huddle together in a strangely serious manner. As if by some strange compulsion, this motley crew then proceeded, one by one, to pour their hearts and souls out to the crowd now tightly congregated below them (the local participants turned into a passive public), narrating their experiences in Manila over that previous week, describing their feelings, their emotions, their struggles, before solemnly handing the microphone to their eagerly awaiting neighbor

**AQ1** (Figures 1–17).

The ‘party’ that myself and Clara had stumbled upon had turned out to be very different to that at first thought, to have been, in fact, the culmination of a week-long project



*Fig. 1*



Fig. 2

Fig. 3

initiated by an Australian NGO. Working in concert with a team of international hip-hop artists,<sup>1</sup> the group had been collaborating with local youth from a nearby slum area in an attempt to engage and ‘empower’<sup>b</sup> them through the medium of hip hop, to elevate their voices and improve their leadership skills via the verbal, visual, physical and musical possibilities that a Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE)<sup>2</sup> can provide. At that moment, however, education seemed to have been thrown fully out of the window. It felt more like a cross between a late-period MJ concert

1 A neologism integrating ‘hip hop’ and ‘activist’. While hip hop activism has been an important movement in the last decades of the twentieth century and is today becoming linked to the wider Black Lives Matter movement (via individuals such as the artist Talib Kweli), the term as used here is slightly light-hearted.

2 For more on the huge potential of HHBE, see Love (2015).

<sup>b</sup>Here maybe I would put empower in quotations. As who are we to say that they have no power already? You can argue that living in relative squalor irrevocably implies a dis-power, a disadvantage. But maybe it’s also a form of condescension to assume that they have no power and that it is up to the Other to give them strength. So often, it occurs that these incursions empower the visitor more than the visited.



(*Heal the World* was in my head the whole way home) and a televangelical spiritual reunion. It was the star preaching to her fans mixed in with the sad bits from *The X Factor* (cue the strings). Tears, at this stage of the evening, were thus obligatory. Tears and an intense, (melo)dramatic deluge, an orgy of emotion.

The performance of one particular member of this international contingent, however, a young Norwegian hip-hop artist, was my personal breaking point, the crescendo of her emotional cascade cutting to my core: ‘You guys have no shoes, but you have smiles!’ she proclaimed.

*We in the West have everything, but we never smile. We have everything we want but it doesn’t make us happy. You guys have nothing, but your power is your smiles! YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME SO MUCH! PLEASE, KEEP SMILING!*

As she choked through her final words, I wept for different reasons: not because I had acquired a personal experience that I could treasure forever, not because my 'life journey' would now be irrevocably changed because of *theirs*, but because the smile (the **famous Filipino Smile**™) so often seen as an emblem of power must surely signify something quite different – the only option

'Have come across a really interesting term from a New Zealand magazine called *The Distance Plan*. Resilience rhetoric. In a poster they designed, which included a collection of the latest buzzwords in environmentally-preoccupied art and development circles, they described resilience rhetoric thus:

'Matthew Allen writes about the widespread use of ... "resilience" in post-disaster scenarios in Australia. Adopted by the media, by government agencies, community groups and NGOs, it is often associated with national character: being "tough", "hardy", "battlers", "pragmatic", "plucky", etc. In the context of increasingly extreme and frequent natural disasters, the idea of resilience may be instrumentalised

by policy makers to offload responsibility for mitigating the causes and consequences of such disasters onto individuals within the affected communities themselves.'



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

left; the technique to keep trauma at bay; the means to AQ5 ward off collapse.

<sup>4</sup>It is also important to state that fun is an underrated effect and end in itself when doing community work in a country nursing a strong rural to urban migration crisis. Young people leave rural areas because, aside from there being not many jobs to choose from, they are simply bored to death. A rural social practice experiment can, at its most basic level, almost always aspire to breaking the monotony for both young and old, the ennui that accompanies a real lack of variety in contemporary culture programming, in the broadest sense of the term. Though I resist the spectacle of entertainment, the project as variety show without critical import, the spectacularity of any social practice performance within a far-flung or marginalized environment is not to be ignored. And can be harnessed for its positive effects.

'People think this is what I do', Clara kept repeating

on our drive home. 'People here think this is what I

do [...] They think social practice is education through

entertainment, schooling through singing and dancing,

the “Filipino specialties”. They think it’s social work

**through fun**<sup>d</sup>. It was the continual anxiety that ate at her, <sup>d</sup>

one of the daily fears she faced while trying to sustain a life as a social practice artist in the Philippines (in the forest, where you could never be truly certain if you were creating a sound). It was not, to be clear, that Clara was



Fig. 6

however (as if good intentions are ever enough). They all, almost certainly, had the most positive of desires (or, at the least, deserved the benefit of the doubt). They could have been lying on a beach, but instead were literally ‘slumming’ it. And, more to the point, there is of course a strong possibility that the program the NGO had initiated *could* have inspired some of the participants (people seemed to be having fun at the very least, and maybe fun is enough), that the project *could* have helped to boost the participants’ self-esteem, that it *could* have helped to enhance community cooperation. Rather it was the ethical laxity, the critical naivety that Clara felt so troubled by. ‘It’s the constant pushing up of people’s hopes, the constant “We’ll be back soon!” and the “We love you!” [...] Its the total lack of foresight’, she said,

*the fact that you just know you’re going to leave after you’ve offered so much, that you’re going to leave and most likely never come back. You can’t offer people the world. You can only offer partnership. Learning from each other. What else really is there? I mean perhaps my fear is this is what I was doing five or six years ago when I first started, when I didn’t really know what I was doing. Going into a community as if I was going to save them. Okay, maybe not that naive, but with a touch of that. Maybe it’s because I’ve learnt to be more pragmatic. But I think also I’ve learnt how to learn. All*

<sup>d</sup>After the experience of attending the 2016 Gwangju Biennale as a Biennale Fellow, which implied attending a conference for small to medium (and large) collectives and institutions from around

the (fringe of the art) world,  
I'm formulating this idea of the importance of earnestness. Fancier word might be authenticity,  
but I quite prefer the almost unfashionable nature of one  
who is earnest instead of 'over' everything, not easily impressed.

The biennale, curated by  
Binna Choi and directed by Maria Lind, raised the question 'What can art do?', earnest and innocent and, in a way,  
almost desperate for meaning. For  
our group discussion, Choi encouraged fellows to identify where our passions lay in doing the work. But passion,  
though related to earnestness, can have  
a certain imperial, phallic or destructive quality to it. One that earnestness lacks, though it may be destructive as well  
(the road  
to hell is indeed paved with good intentions). I much prefer the quality of being earnest, as it calls to mind a childlike  
generosity,  
a relinquishing of power and control, a generous posturing that has not yet been jaded by art's elitism.

In Fernando García-Dory's performance 'Lament of the Newt' – by general agreement  
of the fellows, one of the most moving and significant pieces commissioned for the biennale  
– the artist worked with urban farmers to create a protest 'variety show'. The community was trying to stop their  
farm from being dismantled for the purpose of industrial development, and

the artist worked with them  
to express the significance and history of the urban farm for their tight-knit group. What resulted was a naive romp  
through a  
tiny rice paddy slash vegetable garden slash neighbourhood park, replete with costumes  
and sing-and-dance numbers, outfitted with a happy ending  
that defied the artist or curator's libidinal (stereotypical?) need  
for pessimistic realism or 'critical rigor'. If you can imagine, the

strictly questioning **the intentions of our hip-hoptivists** ,

*the problems that you can cause and all the*

e

*thought you have to put into everything just to ensure you don't fuck up things more than  
they already were before you arrived.*

For Clara, then, the tears were another wake-up call, another opportunity for self-reflection:  
*I will not be thus. I will think before I act. I will engage, not instruct. I will act ethically. I will  
not emotionally extort.*

Perhaps I may have rushed in a little too quickly, perhaps I should take a few steps back. To  
begin with, then, who is this Clara that I speak of? And what is this 'social practice' that is  
being discussed? Furthermore, what is it that she – that it, as well as the eponymous tears  
of our title – hopes to illustrate, to unpack? Well, to start with, founder of the OCD or, to be  
more official, the Office

performance was kind of like *The Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer but without the genocide.

In a one-on-one conversation, the artist spoke of giving up control of certain decisions to community members, half-  
motivated by  
a language barrier and fully motivated by the knowledge that, in the end, the story had to be built by the community  
itself for it to fulfil any sort of cathartic purpose.

The projection of artwork  
as (community) catharsis in itself is a naive idea, an earnest sort of hope. So it was curious that among this highly

critical and demanding group of art practitioners, the piece that most seemed to resonate was the least jaded, the most popular in terms of aesthetics and production value, the most innocent and vernacular.

There brews, prevalent,  
among us, an exhaustion. We grow weary of irrelevance to the wider community, to the world underserved and removed from high art and cultural production. We want our work to break with instead of reinforce the neoliberal hegemony. We respond to innocence and earnestness more strongly than to passionate revolution, maybe? Perhaps we are also war-weary of the bloodiness of revolt. Perhaps, credulously, we long to repair rather than implode the systems, cities, villages and edifices of valuation we live within.

I am of the belief that, to truly produce an ethical framework for social practice, you must partake of this earnestness Kool Aid. You must, even against your better judgement and against your fear of creating work that is excessively 'rural' or optimistic, find the tender beauty in the unsophisticated. You must unfashionably believe, on some level, that a happy ending is worth portraying, worth fighting for, with intelligence, lucid like a razorblade.

## OCD WITH SOCIAL PRACTICE

of Culture and Design (acronymic double-entendre very purposeful), Clara Lobregat Balaguer (our Clara) is a Metro Manila native, born in 1980. Today based in Parañaque, a city in the southern part of the metropolis, Balaguer is a published poet and writer, a self-taught graphic designer and publisher. She is a voracious reader, gardener, thinker, an intrepid driver of projects and vehicles alike (the Manila

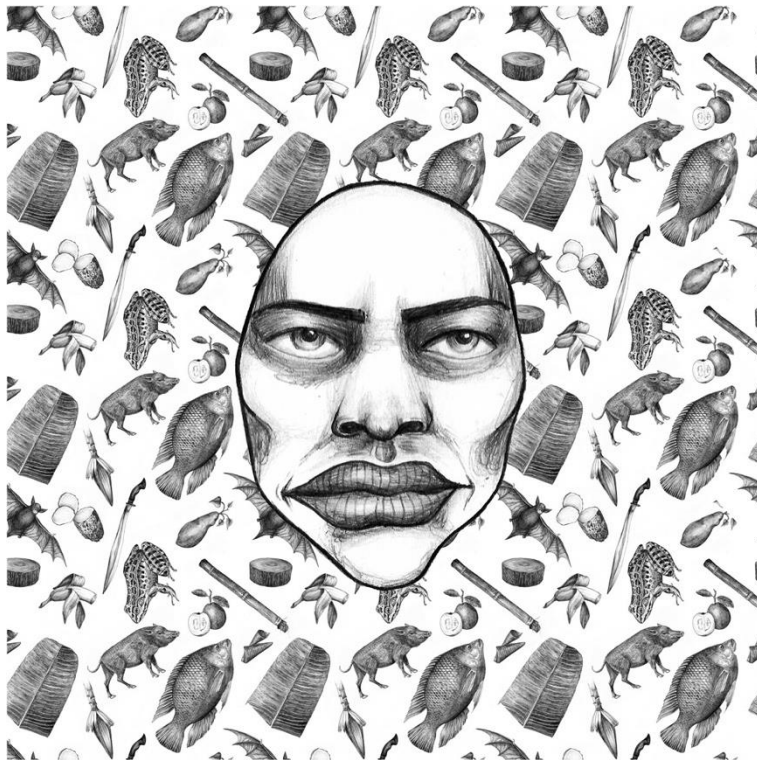


Fig. 7





road can be precarious). Significantly, Balaguer's trajectory towards the OCD emerged not through the traditional route of an art-school education but via a more circuitous path. Moving to Barcelona, Spain (the home of her father) for seven years in the early 2000s, Balaguer spent this time working within the advertising sector, honing her skills as a manager of projects (rather than a project manager), as a cultural worker invested in the potency of communicability. Yet this period abroad was also a time, quite crucially for Balaguer's practice, in which she began to deal with what she terms her 'halfie displacement',

with the complexities of the insider/outsider positionality she held in her own place of birth. Returning to Manila to care for her dying mother in 2009, and initiating the OCD partly as an ode to her abstract last wishes, what was first an outlet for Balaguer's own creative impulses (produced under the moniker Lobregat Balaguer) quickly morphed into a more collectively oriented platform: quite self-consciously (and self-confessedly) wanting

to contribute, to engage, to *give back*, the OCD thus emerged as a project space for socially implicated art, for design and writing from the 'Global South-East', for practices engaged in the specificity and complexity of the local milieu. Balaguer's relationship with the Philippines is thus an intricate one; having grown up with a great deal of privilege, in a social stratum that harbors a general antipathy to 'local' or quotidian culture, much of her practice is knowingly, openly drawn from a desire to deal with the paradoxes of this position. The firm embrace

of the vernacular thus emerges from a very clear space and has a very clear trajectory. And as can be seen

Fig. 8

## THE KINGS

This is the kitchen of Porac tribe leader Roman King, run by his wife, Warlita.



Warlita was born in the middle of a shootout between the Philippine government army and the National People's Army (NPA) communist rebel group. Hence, her name.

Fig. 9

even more clearly following the founding of *Hardworking Goodlooking* in 2011 with the designer Kristian Henson, a graphic studio (or graphic design 'hauz' as she terms it) that publishes the work undertaken by the OCD as well as that of other local collaborators, the crux of Balaguer's output can be seen as one that seeks to critically uphold local practices, to intellectually and aesthetically explore and situate the uniqueness of the Filipino everyday.<sup>3</sup>

But what of social practice itself? While a notoriously enigmatic concept, social practice (or collaborative

<sup>3</sup> Now the more official bio is over, 'Balaguer' will return to 'Clara'.



Fig. 10

art, dialogical art, littoral art, participatory art, socially engaged art, or any number of broadly analogous terms) is a field that has emerged as a more or less coherent artistic practice within approximately the last 10 years. It is an art that is both deeply collaborative and political, that is about encounter and exchange, entanglement and improvement. It is a practice concerned with the 'facilitation of dialogue amongst diverse communities' (Kester 2004, 1), an art attempting to ferment progressive social change through participative performances and interactive installations in the world outside the white cube. Rather than functioning via the avant-garde 'shock of the new', via the (partially) participative encounter between human agents and (inanimate) objects, social practice replaces 'the traditional art materials of marble, canvas, or pigment' with an attempt to reformulate the artistic medium to be that of 'sociopolitical relationships' (Kester 2004, 3). It **replaces**<sub>f</sub> object making with social gathering, conceptual contemplations with collaborative conversations. It **replaces**<sub>g</sub> making objects with making worlds, creating artefacts with creating change. In this manner then, social practice includes radically diverse forms of work – Rick Lowe's famous *Project Row Houses* in Houston,<sup>4</sup> Theaster Gates' *Dorchester Projects* in Chicago,<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn's peripatetic *Monuments*<sup>6</sup> and Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans*,

4 See <http://projectrowhouses.org/>.

5 See [http://theastergates.com/section/117693\\_Dorchester\\_Projects.html](http://theastergates.com/section/117693_Dorchester_Projects.html). 6 See [http://artreview.com/opinion/dispatches\\_from\\_new\\_york/](http://artreview.com/opinion/dispatches_from_new_york/).

<sup>f</sup>Or supplements! <sup>g</sup>Or reinforces!



Fig. 11

being just a taster of its variety.<sup>7</sup> Yet what links these seemingly divergent acts is not only what curator Nato Thompson (2012) calls ‘people working with culture in the realm of the social’ but a method of drawing people together (**rather than simply drawing them**),<sup>h</sup>

in order to reveal and develop new social potentialities, in order to develop embedded social experiences, new possibilities for change and exchange. It is an art whose ‘aesthetic’, as Tania Bruguera (2014) suggested, ‘is the ethics of social transformation’, an art that enables one ‘to create new forms of engagement between human beings ... a new way to get together and discuss problem solving in society’ (Bruguera 2013, 1). It is an art about commitment, criticality, complexity, cooperation, connection, communication.<sup>8</sup>

As such, social practice has played a key role within what has come to be termed the ‘ethnographic turn’ in the arts<sup>9</sup> and, like anthropology and other fieldwork- centred discourses, is an endeavour in which the ethical responsibilities of its initiators are quite clearly foregrounded. The implications of working with active human participants, imbricated in a complex field of social relations, has meant that artists have had to learn

<sup>7</sup> See <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/welcome.html>. <sup>8</sup> As numerous theorists have explored, it is a practice which has many

correspondences and historical antecedents in practices such as community art, happenings, relation art, and other similarly participative practices.

<sup>9</sup> See Desai (2002).

<sup>h</sup>:) very pretty

how to work not merely outside the boundary of the institution, but inside the boundary of their collaborators’ entangled lives. For Clara then, as someone (perhaps not an artist – **as she is still uncomfortable calling herself** – but an instigator) attempting to work within

AQ6 this frame, her aforementioned tears came with a number of quite problematic issues attached. It was not only, as previously mentioned, the lack of foresight and the exaggerated promises. It was also the focus on the

self rather than the other, on the changes that their experience had made on *them* (the hip-hoptivists), rather than on the community with whom they worked: ‘You’ve changed me forever’ they said almost one after another, ‘you’ve made me see the world in a different way’. The hip-hoptivists’ approach could thus be seen, in its worst presentation, to have been almost entirely led by what Hal Foster (1995, 303) famously called the ‘**primitivist fantasy**’ – the notion that ‘the other has access to primal psychic and social processes from which the white (petit) bourgeois subject is blocked’. It could have been seen to have been led by an ‘empathetic identification’ which in fact denies the ‘specificity and autonomy of others’ which comes to “‘make use” of them for our own emotional

or psychic needs’ (Kester 2004, 78). It was hence a role both paternalistic (we will teach you to be better people) and yet simultaneously parasitic (we will improve ourselves via the encounter with you). A role patronizing

in both senses of the term (simultaneously supportive and condescending); a role that, **AQ7** as Ernesto Pujol (2013)

Fig. 12

‘Though I’m uncomfortable with the word artist, I am using it with a tiny bit less trepidation these days. The art planet really is the only place wherein I

can frame the work within the critical, theoretical, aesthetic, even academic seriousness I seek. Its hyper-hybrid approach and

its clear pretension of creating something visual/visceral, of an aesthetic that is relational as well as purely visual, means that art is currently the only place where the work can be fully explained, experienced, understood and valued.

But I still balk at curator

LOL. I'm still in the middle of understanding how to 'curate' in rural contexts without it sounding or feeling douche. Too many people curating their libraries, sandwiches and playlists, I guess. The word 'artist' is much more relatable to a farmer or fisherman than the word 'curator'. That's where my vocabulary barometer is calibrated, ATM.

'Yes!

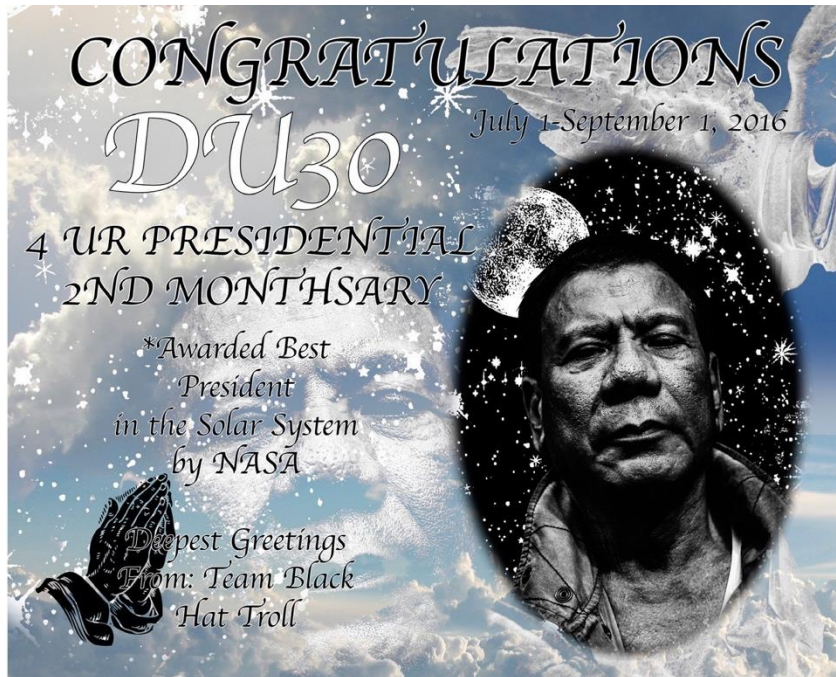


Fig. 13

has suggested, was about the 'the education of artists at the expense of the poor'; a role in which a 'young white artist [for example] used to virtual social media **but little human field contact**, learns about existence on the back of working class people of color'.

<sup>k</sup>EXACTLY. The human wisdom that fieldwork implies and forges is so necessary, also for those who are writing about social practice and not necessarily doing it. And by fieldwork I literally mean fields, the rural, even the peri-urban. Again going back to García-Dory, his work with Campo Adentro

– an abandoned Asturian village that he has purchased as part of a larger, long-term commitment to reviving the community – points to interesting ideas of how the definition of 'rural' differs in a developed and developing world context.

<sup>l</sup>Even when budgets do not allow for a wholistic long-term engagement, what I call repeat tacticality can be used as a tool for extending one's presence in the community. Doing eventual, shorter-term projects but returning to the same community to execute other experiments later on.

<sup>m</sup>The specific tribal group

I worked with preferred the spelling 'Ayta'. I know that, anthropologically, the de facto spelling is with an E and not a Y. But just thought might be good to have that in there, for information's sake.

In the practice that Clara engaged in, in the *place* that she engaged, ethics meant **long-term engagement**, ethics meant rigour. Ethics meant first investigation, exploration, then action. It meant deliberation over speed, thinking through each action rather than acting with indifference to the potential effects of one's gestures. Her extended and continuing engagement with an indigenous **Aeta<sub>m</sub>** community located in the province of Pampanga, a deeply marginalized and subjugated Filipino community,

is one example of this methodological foundation. At the point of writing a three-year deep, ongoing relationship (in which she had lived within the community for an initial period of three months as well as making repeated, often monthly visits since the project's initiation), this was an undertaking that had spawned numerous outputs: an eight-channel film in collaboration with the celebrated Spanish documentary filmmaker Carlos Casas;<sup>10</sup> a self-published and communally originated cookbook entitled

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.officeocd.com/projects/lupang-the-land-that/> for more.



*Tribal Kitchen*;<sup>11</sup> a **farm-to-table<sub>n</sub>** sustainable food

"Prefer village-to-table, as the leaf in question bought by Vask, a restaurant in Manila, is not farmed but rather foraged by Ayta villagers.

◦  
I remember here our long

conversations when you were in Manila about the ethics of mining information from tribal communities, an act that is always cannibalistic to some extent. You mentioned the idea of whether all knowledge was fair game. And I ask: is visibility given by another, a non-tribe member, always a good thing?

The tribal chieftain I worked with expressed a distrust of and exhaustion with researchers coming, for hundreds of years, to

initiative;<sup>12</sup> as well as a plethora of other small and

large communal practices. Moreover, it was something

that seemed, slowly, to be having positive effects,

from increased visibility to increased recognition, from

educational to financial advancements. **While the**

**process had been far from smooth, local politics**

**and changing affiliations meaning that, like any**

**ethnographic project, decisions and negotiations had**

**to be constantly made and re-made** , her engagement ◦

was serious, considered, mindful. It was *collaborative* (the cookbook, for example, being authored by the Aeta and published by herself); it was *dialogical* (the community themselves determining the outcome of the projects); it

11 See <http://officeocd.com/comingssoon/tribal-kitchen-the-aytas/> for more.

12 With Manila restaurant Vask, see <http://www.galleryvask.com/Home-Page/> for more.



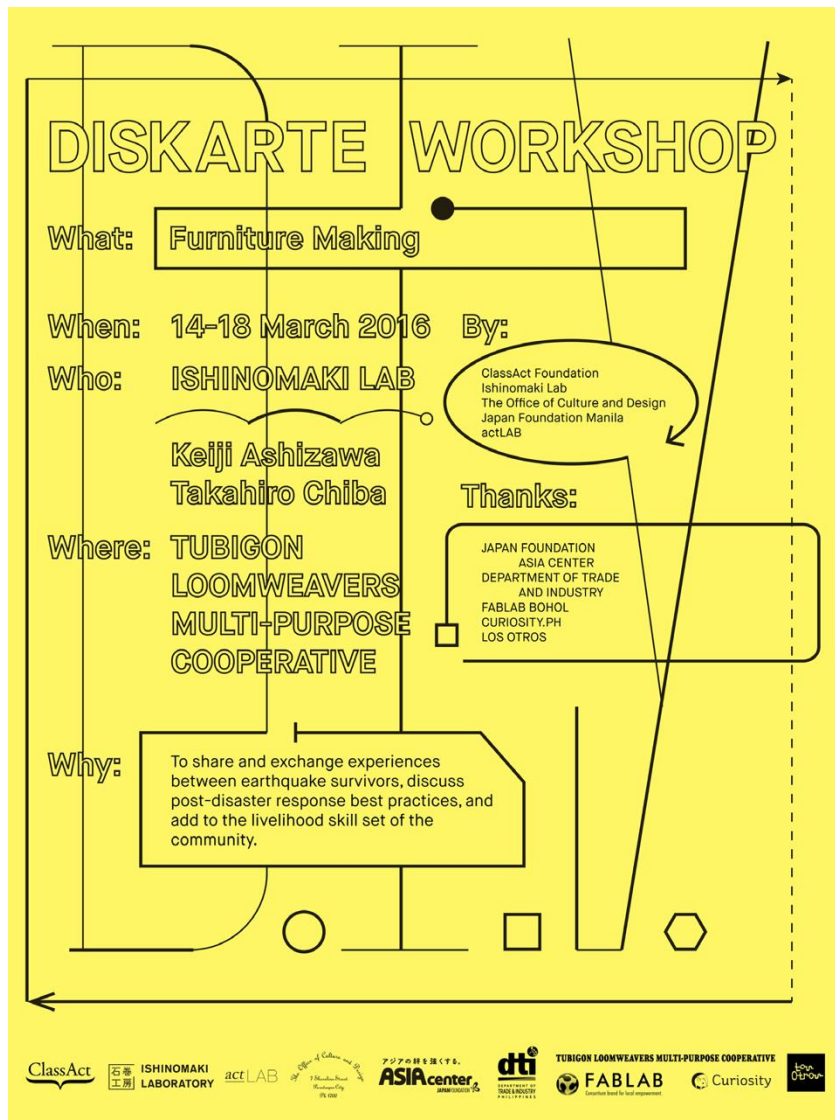


Fig. 15

was *critically engaged* (focusing on sustainable methods of support rather than the poverty porn so often expected in these circumstances). And it followed what she termed her ‘Critical Tenderness Cultural Checklist’ – a framework for action pairing a ‘rigorous curiosity’ and ‘respect for the vernacular’ with the need to ask ‘stupid questions because you want to learn’.<sup>13</sup>

13 This checklist / manifesto also includes reminders to “look up” at your surroundings ... [and] study your own references and landscape’, to ‘embrace criticism by offering it first and pre-emptively unto your own practice or self’, as well as the conviction ‘to build upon old knowledge by contributing new ideas, or getting over the fear of making mistakes’. It also requests that we ‘express gratitude, like for example by acknowledging your sources. In footnotes, in line with the text, in person, via DM’. As such, I should note that this list has been taken from an interview with Tin Dabay in Pill Magazine: <http://pillmagazine.com/culture-shock-clara-balaguer/>.

take their customs and put them in books with their name (rather than the tribe’s) as author.

The concept of tribal intellectual property is a significant one, and this kind of intellectual property could work differently from regular intellectual property because of the long tradition of exploitation to which indigenous communities have always been subject.

Perhaps if we put forth the idea that, no matter how ‘generative’ one’s project may be, if it is based on tribal knowledge, a certain revolutionary tax must

be paid. And authorship (or co-authorship) should always be attributed to the tribe, as the source of knowledge.

In the cookbook we published about Ayta recipes, *Tribal Kitchen* – as in many of our publications under the imprint Hardworking Goodlooking – no author is explicitly identified, though all collaborators are mentioned in the colophon. But even with this and other such ethical decisions in place, I still include myself in the ranks of those who have exploited tribal communities. Even with all of the best intentions put forth, the anthropological or ethnographic act in itself is a consumption of an Other culture. It is a violent act, however painful it may be for the explorer-documenter to admit. I cannot fully say I am happy with *Lupang* (8-channel film) and *Tribal Kitchen* and its offshoots. Currently taking a break from this multi-morphous project because it was taking too much

of a toll on me, emotionally and financially, though the village-to-table route still functions without my intervention. I feel that until I have resolved key issues within the writing of the cookbook and the display of the film, I cannot republish *Tribal Kitchen* or re-exhibit *Lupang* in its entirety.

WIPP. Work in Painful Progress.



## ETHICS OR AESTHETICS?

Now, of course, while the ethical imperatives of collaboration, dialogue and critical engagement set up a baseline for Clara's practice, they do not, in themselves, tell us that much about the form or content of the work undertaken, describing neither the ephemeral participatory engagement nor its subsequent material outputs. The imperatives allude to the methods rather than the 'outcomes' of practice, the stipulations that create the possibilities rather than manifestations of these possibilities themselves. As such, and as critics such as Claire Bishop (2012, 13) have argued, the ethical focus of social practice does not explore whether the emerging projects were 'failed, unsuccessful, unresolved or boring'; they do not tell us if the projects were *aesthetically* exceptional, but only if they were *ethically* so. Moreover, as Bishop continues to suggest, within the critical assessment of social practice, it is often these ethical regulations, rather than any resultant aesthetic reverberations, that become the key framework within which these projects are latterly judged. Rather than artistic quality, it is ethical probity that is valued. Rather than depth of conception, it is breadth of collaboration that is extolled. As such, a 'good' social practice project can be seen as one

that 'appeases a superegoic injunction to ameliorate society' rather than one that aims to 'represent and question social contradiction' (Bishop 2012, 275); a **good project is one that contains good ethics, not aesthetics**.<sup>p</sup> Sidelineing the 'visual,

<sup>p</sup>  
Why not both? One does not

cancel out the other. I think both are in the same line of importance, yet I agree that a different canon of what is 'aesthetically' good might sometimes come in to play.

Relational art might be more about the social interactions than the artistic object-output, but I feel there is a difference in definition begging to be addressed here. What is social practice vs. what is relational art? Perhaps more than a difference in aesthetic judgements (this would serve maybe to distinguish social practice from NGO art?), it is also about a bottom-line contribution to the community. How do you better the quality

of life, line of livelihood, or self-worth perceptions of a community (social practice) rather than focusing only on mustering a beautiful, critical or poetic interpersonal exchange (relational art)?

Fig. 16



Fig. 17

conceptual and experiential accomplishments' of art in favour of a reductive 'judgment on the artists' relationship with their collaborators' (Bishop 2012, 22), Bishop thus argues that the aesthetic has come to be denigrated as an impediment, a barrier to the fulfilment of an ethical act within social practice. It has become a dirty word. From this perspective, social practice has thus turned into a very tenuous form of art, into social *work* rather than social *practice* for all (artistic) intents and (social) purposes.

Taking this line of reasoning one step further, however, it has not only been suggested that the supposed **devaluing**<sub>q</sub> of the aesthetic within social practice has led it to become, essentially, a non-art, but that its reformist, liberal, humanistic ethics have in fact made it into an *inferior* one (and always better to be 'non-' than to be inferior, to be outside

the hierarchy rather than diminished within it). As cultural activists BAVO (2008) explore, the ethical obsessions of much social practice has turned it into what they disparagingly term as a devitalized 'NGO Art' (BAVO 2008, 110).

<sup>9</sup>Reconfiguring! Reorienting the judgement of what is aesthetic! Not devaluing :( Just moving the goal posts, I guess, of what is considered valuable. And not just in terms of the spiritual concept of aesthetics or (dare I say) beauty, but also in terms of what is purely related to visual language as well.

<sup>10</sup>Why does radicality (necessarily) have to be violent, destructive?

It is a very oriental, very Filipino approach even, to choose the creation of harmony, which can be just as radical and political and subversive as surface-level aggravation.

This is an art that focuses on what artists 'can do immediately within the limitations of the feasible' rather than one 'exposing and combating more underlying structures' (BAVO 2008, 110), an art with no **radical**, imagination. This is a practice indebted to funding bodies or governmental subsidies (with nothing to sell but its supposed ameliorative value) – a practice that is hence, as BAVO claim, 'characterized by a denial of politics',

deliberately avoiding 'confrontations with authorities or

<sup>11</sup>What to do with dirty money if they don't let you criticize its dirtiness? This is relatable to all fields of artistic production but especially pressing for social practitioners.

Relating to my previous comment, I do agree that to choose harmony often involves a denial of political subcontext. Again, another contradiction. This work is fairly fraught with them.

<sup>12</sup>Not when you are creating consensus, for example, in pointing out toxic attitudes latent in the social value structure. The pressure to be 'agit' can be so cismale, so cisradical.

<sup>13</sup>The responsibility of proposing revolution: if you manage to destroy the system that subjugates a community, do you have a responsibility to come up with the alternative? I don't know.

I'm inclined to answer yes. Let's say: you make a film about how mining corporations are encroaching upon tribal land and then actually accomplish the feat of closing down a mine which may be giving jobs to tribesmembers. Since it was your film and activism that led to the change of status quo, are you beholden to the community for providing alternative sources of income and employment? These questions aren't asked often and loudly enough, in my experience. Partly because the answers might lie outside the jurisdiction of

the artist, who may or may not be equipped to deal with the aftermath. Who may or may not have the energy or financial backing to roll out a longer-term rehabilitation program. Or perhaps the 'artist' is more concerned with the fireworks in a gallery than the footprint in a community.

Maybe ethical amelioration is pointless in merely activist/ political art, but then there may be a difference between that kind of art and social practice, which (ideally, not always possible) is a commitment not just to toppling but to providing alternatives to social injustice. It's no longer enough to just call

investors, because this could compromise their ability to

obtain the **permits or funding**, they need to implement

their actions' (BAVO 2008, 111). This rehabilitative art

has hence become preoccupied with the consensual,

the **inoffensive**, with the creation of minor practices of t

refinement ('making the best of a bad situation' [Bavo 2007]) rather than the critical, revolutionary critique that BAVO believe is needed ('the deposition of the existing order' [Bavo 2007]). What our present state requires,

for BAVO and Bishop, is the exacerbation of 'unease, discomfort or frustration', the inflammation of 'fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity' so as to shake us from our slumber (Bishop 2012, 26). What is needed

is **that which transforms, not reforms; that which antagonizes rather than ameliorates**.

Ethics, in this scenario, must thus be thrown out with the bathwater.

Art must avow all 'established systems of value', all 'questions of morality'. It must search for the true outside, irrespective of our so-called ethics.<sup>14</sup>

While this (perhaps cynical) outlook has been itself critiqued by theorists such as Kester (in particular for presenting us with a 'Manichean reform/revolution dynamic' in which 'precisely in trying to improve existing conditions, the artist becomes [implicitly] complicit with the dominant social order' [Kester 2004, 224]), the harsh division between the pro- and anti-engaged, between the pro-

and anti-discursive, is today quite thoroughly entrenched. Once again then, and quite frustratingly, we seem to

have returned to the reductive schism, the binary debates of con/dissensus. Once again, discussions have ossified into a dualist choice between the social and antisocial, heteronomy and autonomy, accord and antagonism. Yet without denying the importance of these debates (and while enjoying their popcorn-worthiness), the role they play in the case of Clara and the hip-hoptivists is, I suggest, one of a backseat variety. The perpetual power-

**AQ8** play between ethics and aesthetics may be *conceptually* consequential but is here not site-specifically pertinent. Thus arguments concerning which methods of assessment are appropriate for social practice, the disputes over whether it is consensual or agonistic practices that we

14 Santiago Sierra is the artist most commonly cited here. Yet while he has produced a large oeuvre of practices, many of which are truly outstanding, the focus always remains on Sierra's most 'shocking' of works, in particular his famous tattoo images. Unfortunately, this then serves to reduce the complexity of his position. See [http:// www.santiago-sierra.com/index\\_1024.php](http://www.santiago-sierra.com/index_1024.php) for more.

most 'need' seem, in fact, slightly redundant. Rather, it is the critical complexities of the local, the continuing unevenness of the global art terrain that must be seen as more germane: it is not the structure *of* social practice but the structural possibilities of the practice itself that is the vital issue here, the paradox of social practice in the Philippines that I want to unpack.

Clara's mantra during our journey home – 'people here think this is what I do', she said over and over – can

be seen to provide us with the key lead: 'people here think', she said. People *here*. While Clara took exception to the actions of our particular hip-hoptivists (their very way of understanding and interacting with their locality), her declamation was not led by a fear

that her ethical choices would come to be misapprehended (**she was fine with her choices**), nor of her being placed within the primitivist or parasitic camp (she was at ease with her motivations). Rather, the existential angst that was reinforced was the double-edged sword of isolation and incomprehension. Clara's non-traditional route into the Manila art world meant that she resided (quite literally) on its peripheries: though known by the community and close with many of its practitioners, she was always, almost implicitly, set apart from it. While her work gained much international attention,<sup>15</sup> locally she was on the edge. She was not involved within the gallery or market circuit, nor had she emerged from a space of overt, orthodox activism. Her 'halfie' status thus seemed to seep from the personal to the practical: is she Filipino or Spanish? Is it art or design? Activism or entertainment? Social work or social practice? The deep malaise that the tears provoked was hence the further realization

that social practice in the Philippines was still such a fundamental unknown, that she was **swimming against the undertow, silently screaming in the forest**. It was the further realization that she – that it – was set so firmly between a rock and a hard place.

15 As *Hardworking Goodlooking*, Clara has shown at the New York Art Book Fair at MoMA PS1 annually since 2014 and more recently the LA Art Book Fair at LA MOCA. As OCD, she was recently invited to participate at the 11th Gwangju Biennale and has also exhibited at the Singapore Art Museum, Casa Asia Madrid, Galeria H2O, New York University, Hangar and La Capella. Clara has also lectured internationally at Harvard Graduate School of Design, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rhode Island School of Design, Hanyang University Seoul, Triple Canopy, MoMA PS1, and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. In the Philippines, she has exhibited and spoken at the Ayala Museum, Ateneo de Manila and University of the Philippines Diliman, but has

not exhibited her work or projects widely at all. There is hence quite a clear national/ international disparity in her outputs.

attention to and destroy what is unacceptable. A photojournalist can do that (sort of). This recalls the fallacious idea that making images of war and disseminating them will end war, something the digital information and mass communication age has proven untrue. Beyond making art for the consumption of the artistic community and its outliers, perhaps social practice should go way further into the process of formulating new modes of living, working, surviving and co-existing. This makes the work doubly difficult, costly, time- and labour-intensive, exhausting, overly ambitious and overwhelming.

I'm so not there yet. I'm more in the dying trying phase.

"Relatively. Maybe more OK with the amount of thought and intention put behind the choices than fully secure that the choices were right in themselves.

**AQ9**

**AQ10**

**#socialpracticepityparty #crymeaiver #crymeaiverforrealthough #realfeelz**

## **THE ROCK**

The rock, then (also known as the market), acts as a barrier to a social practice career in the Philippines, not explicitly preventing but implicitly impeding local artists from its bounds. The rock bludgeons all those who aren't either hobbyists or financially self-sufficient (read: extremely wealthy), enforcing artefactual production, compelling one to enter into its embrace. While the country has had a rich and **highly developed history of contemporary art practice**<sub>x</sub> – having founded the first art school in Southeast Asia in 1821, being present in global art circuits and competitions

since the earliest parts of the twentieth century, as well as developed a highly fertile hub of practice and theory at the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines (UP) since the mid-1960s<sup>16</sup> – the market has come, over the last

10 years, to dominate the local art ecology, providing the only true means to progress as a professional artist. While commercial galleries may have existed since the 1950s, and state patronage materializing under the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s, there was until recently no established collector base enabling artists to fully support themselves (unless, of course, one of a very lucky few).<sup>17</sup> With the upturn in the Philippine economy since the 1990s and the concomitant rise of a middle class, however, artists, as a professional rather than elite group, have finally been able to follow a more or less viable career path (still on the side of the ‘less’ than the ‘more’; but nevertheless). Moreover, following the post- 1989 emergence of global art as a cohesive category, the international market for contemporary Southeast Asian art has in itself been hugely transformed; interest from foreign curators and collectors, and an influx of foreign capital, has turned global and local eyes on to what was previously an isolated stage, the rise of contemporary biennales and triennales throughout the region in the 2000s attesting to this fact. Today, the art market in the Philippines is stronger than ever, **local galleries participating in major art fairs throughout Asia** (from Dubai to Singapore to Hong Kong), local auction houses emerging and prospering, and the country itself

16 Here is not the place for a fuller analysis of the history of art in the Philippines. For more, however, see Guillermo (1987, 2001) and Flores (2009, 2013).

17 The globally acclaimed artist Norberto ‘Peewee’ Roldan, for example, one of the Philippines’ most potent practitioners and community organizers, worked full-time within the local television industry up until the late 1990s. Only after that point was he able to fully sustain himself through his art. He had been, however, a prominent member of the art community since the early 1980s. See [https://www.guggenheim.org/map-artist/norberto-rolდან](https://www.guggenheim.org/map-artist/norberto-rolدان) for more on Roldan’s practice.

<sup>x</sup>Also activism and dissent through art, as seen during the Marcos dictatorship. But I think you talk about this later. Spoiler alert!

y

<sup>y</sup>Would mention Silverlens

Gallery by name here, as they did start the whole trend with tremendous muscle and will. Also the fact that it’s female-owned gives the gallery that much more props value. I may have certain issues with Silverlens and the art fair honeymoon it’s spawned, but credit where it’s due, always, and especially to women and girls in this patriarchal stronghold. They did professionalize the industry and bring much visibility to current artists. Without them (and the independent film industry) I would not be here. None of us would.

making a grand return to the international fold at the prestigious Venice Biennale in 2015.<sup>18</sup> Yet while the local success of the market as well as a continuing presence in Venice (both at the Architectural Biennale in 2016 and the forthcoming Art Biennale in 2017) may suggest a modicum of public funding for the arts alongside the escalating private investment, this is, in fact, not truly the case. The strength of the market is not matched by the public purse, the huge figures pumped into

Venice by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts massively outweighing funding for the rest of the contemporary

art community altogether. The balance between the commercial and the complex, a balance which was, paradoxically, more pronounced prior to the market's rise, is thus today thoroughly out of alignment. The market is king, pure and simple; it is solid as a rock.<sup>19</sup>

As such, for artists in the Philippines, the route to a sustainable existence is not via the funding applications and grants so common in the Global North, but rather via the art market and gallery system more generally. Even while independent artist-run spaces have flourished and proliferated,<sup>20</sup> even while the internet and low-cost flights have enabled connections and relationships to emerge outside of its jurisdiction, the market still has an intoxicating, overwhelming power. It is thus not merely that **social practice's very recognition as art is even more precarious in the Philippines than in the art centres of London, New York or São Paulo for example**.<sup>2</sup> It

<sup>2</sup>Sweet baby Jesus, thank you for this.

is that in a place where public funding in general is for the most part non-existent, where privatization is the norm and the welfare state a distant dream, anything so explicitly uneconomic, so explicitly long-term (let alone politically perilous), stands little chance of acquiring the resources to get off the ground. Any funding that does exist moves irrevocably toward purely instrumental, overt, *visible* activities (like the NGO hip-hoptivism as explored above). Any funding that is available shifts towards the spectacular and quantifiable rather than the peripheral

<sup>18</sup> Curated by Patrick Flores, the 2015 Philippine Pavilion was a huge success, both critically and politically. The forthcoming 2017 iteration, curated by Joselina 'Yeyey' Cruz, is due to be equally as compelling, and furthermore will be situated within the Arsenale grounds of the Biennale, a significant development.

<sup>19</sup> Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez's 'Art and the Market: Pining for a Breather?' (2009) is a superb description of the rock from an insider perspective.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, artist-run spaces such as Green Papaya (<http://www.greenpapayaartprojects.org/>) and 98b (<http://www.98-b.org/>) have had significant success in terms of community-building (locally and internationally) as well as in terms of creating critical evolutions and movements.

and indeterminable, rather than the minor narratives that social practice aims to **ferment**<sub>aa</sub>. As such, and with the prospect of sustainability so slim, engaging in social practice as an artist in the Philippines is a very bad move (if, that is, one desires a career rather than a hobby). Without the funding bodies that can provide for artists working outside of the realm of the market, social practice simply becomes a socially impractical option. Unless one navigates with extreme vigilance, working several jobs in order to sustain a practice that only depletes one's ever-depleting bank balance (such as, in Clara's case, through *Hardworking Goodlooking*, an initiative **entirely**<sub>ab</sub> sustaining her social practice work), unless one undertakes social practice simply as the aforementioned hobby (a desirable but often impracticable goal), it becomes an almost impossible artistic path, heaping precarity onto an already precarious artistic existence.



## THE HARD PLACE

<sup>aa</sup>I love this word choice. Shades of *bagoong* (fermented shrimp paste).

While the rock is a blunt tool, the hard place of the Movement presents us with a more nuanced situation. The Movement, or National Democracy Movement, is an alliance of left-wing organizations that emerged during the martial law era of the Marcos regime. Affiliated with the Communist Party of the Philippines, their political wing the National Democratic Front, and their military wing the New People's Army, the Movement has played, and still plays, an active role in Filipino society; although today relatively politically insignificant (since being sidelined in the People Power Revolution of 1986), it is both socially and existentially relevant. Knowing someone (often a family member, if not close friend) who had gone to

<sup>ab</sup>Only partially, if at all. Most of the funding comes from my doing white-label service production jobs for foreign documentarists or ad agencies. Sometimes grants, but those are few and far between. Also, charging for residency space and related production/ network generation for visiting residents is another important source of income. *Hardworking Goodlooking* publishing is a hole of financial loss but what has emerged is a graphic design studio practice that is beginning to report income with clients like Columbia GSAPP Books and the Spanish Embassy in Manila.

the mountains to fight, who had joined the party, who had embraced the life of an activist, was, within the politically volatile circumstances of the Philippines, not an uncommon thing – people then, as now, willing to participate regardless of the associated dangers. Naturally, the Movement also played a prominent role within

the wider arts scene. Recognizable in groups such as Kaisahan in the 1970s, Black Artists in Asia in the 1980s, Saling Pusa in the 1990s and Ugat Lahi in the 2000s (among many others), art and activism have been tightly linked within the region for many years – social realism, especially artistic activism, being a prominent aspect of the Filipino art milieu. A militant urge to engage and affect local circumstances, to participate and advocate, is hence an established course of artistic action within

### AQ11

the region. Yet as the theorist and curator Patrick Flores has suggested, the friction between these roles, between the roles of an artist and an activist, between prioritizing ethics or aesthetics, has always been something quite palpable within the art community: '[i]nvariably' as

Flores (2013) says in reference to the Kaisahan group, 'the issue of ideological instrumentalisation became increasingly salient, as artists sought to achieve a relative autonomy from political strategy in spite of their ideological sympathies – a tension difficult to overcome' (Flores 2013). How does one balance the needs of the **Movement**<sub>ac</sub> with the basic requirement of free expression so key to an artist's identity? How does one balance the needs of the self with that of the other?

<sup>ac</sup>Also, why does social justice (or practice) in Philippine art have to be linked exclusively to Marxism? The CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines) – with their leader, Joma Sison, exiled

in Utrecht – seems at times so far removed from the fact that the socialist experiment has failed contemporary society. I am heavily inclined to the left, but do not wish to align exclusively and single-mindedly to the far, far left. It adds a layer of complication that I don't personally feel I

want to subscribe to all the time. And because of this decision, I'm often labeled as 'not activist enough'. There are many forms of social experimentation outside of orthodox Marxism (or constantly being referential to Marxism), though of course its ideals, especially in relation to material and immaterial labor, are attractive and a source of inspiration. This is why, though

I do consider the work of my artistic alias, The OCD, a form of activism, I cannot label myself an activist in the Philippine sense, as that would open up the reductive can of worms of are-you-Marxist- enough-for-me-baby. Though I could argue that activism embraces a broader spectrum, here the interpretation is still very much dichotomized into leftist (communist) or not leftist (everything else).

Here, then, we have the emerging bind, the rigidity of the hard place. For artists who were deeply involved with the Movement, activism was not something one dabbled with but was, rather, their primary self-identifying feature. It was not a flirtation. It was an existence. One did not engage in activism through the positionality of an artist, but rather engaged in art through the identity of an activist. The artistic projects undertaken may have been socially engaged, may have taken place outside of the realm of the institution, yet they were quite clearly about promoting a specific political perspective rather than opening up to the possibilities of the unknown, unleashing the imagination. Ethics and aesthetics were here placed in a quite inflexible hierarchy. Art served an instrumental purpose – not of pecuniary or personal gain, but of political expediency. From the perspective of the Movement, then, the role of the artist was simply that of any party member: a role of allegiance, of acquiescence to the needs of the larger body. Even if making highly political, highly partisan work, one's responsibilities lay in literal rather than metaphorical fieldwork, in action on the ground rather than the abstracted realms of aesthetics. Regardless of their positive political intentions, artists were bourgeois, they were individualists; activists, on the other hand, were comrades, they were there to push revolutionary movement forward, to activate and actuate political change. While the workshops and dialogues these artists generated may have thus *looked* like

what we term social practice, they were, in truth, anything but. Circulation in the wider art world was, naturally, an irrelevance, circulation outside of the revolutionary movement an anathema. Advocacy, not dialogue, directed, rather than open-ended discussion required.

As such, while many of the artists who have emerged out of the Movement (having left it due to this unyielding dynamic) still produce highly impassioned, significant artworks,<sup>21</sup> these are now framed quite distinctly as *political* art. They may be engaged yet not explicitly collaborative, intent on fermenting social change yet not expressly dialogical. And having thus now rejected the restrictions of this battleground, the advocacy intentions of socially engaged art often remain too close to the modality of the Movement for these artists.

**AQ12** It was too close to activism (or perhaps 'activism-lite'), too close to where they had already been. It was too confusing a territory, liable to be claimed (by others) to be political

action rather than art, to be embroiled in the machinations of politics rather than embedding itself in the true realm of the political. The hard place in which Philippine artists find themselves is thus one that for many almost delimits social practice by default: social practice is activism, and activism is the preserve of the Movement. Social practice is politics, and politics will always be heteronomous.

Between the rock and the hard place, then, between the strength of the market and the prerogative of the Movement, the Devil and the **South China Sea**<sup>ad</sup><sup>22</sup> the emergence of social practice within the Philippines becomes increasingly delimited, squeezed to the point of near impossibility. The ground that lies fallow thus slips directly into the purview of the NGOs who play such a dominant role in the region, turning the space of social practice into *actual* NGO art (rather than work derogatorily declaimed as such).<sup>23</sup>

The propagation of

<sup>21</sup> I am thinking in particular of the Filipina artist Kiri Dalena. Her 'Erased Slogans' series is a particularly pertinent example of powerful politically engaged work.

<sup>22</sup> The nomenclature of the West Philippine / South China Sea is a matter of contention. As Clara says, a 2016 arbitration by the Permanent Court of Arbitration under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea found in favour of the Philippines on a number of complex territorial issues (see <https://pca-cpa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/175/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>). However, China has refused to accept the ruling.

<sup>23</sup> Moreover, and even more problematically, this is without mentioning the explicitly neo-colonial manifestations of this practice – not merely the local NGO art, but the social practice as cultural imperialism model: the fact that when more conventional social practice *does* emerge in locations like the Philippines, it is most often at the behest of artists from the Global North and, even more concerningly, comes funded

by foreign governments. It acts in the guise of soft power, a policy of paternalism, a benevolent hegemony. (See, for example Felipe Castelblanco's work in the Philippines, funded through the US State Department. This is not a critique of the project itself, but simply an insight into the potentially problematic nature of its inception considering the historical relationships between the two countries: <http://americanartsincubator.org/artists/felipe-castelblanco>).

<sup>ad</sup>It's actually now the West Philippine Sea, by UNCLOS arbitration.

instrumentally led 'art' practices in the Philippines, art practices such as seen in our introductory vignette, thus becomes all too common. This is art as means to an end, art as business model. This is art as short-term solution for long-term problem, art as **elastoplastic**<sub>ae</sub> tool. It is an art that further delimits the possibility of social practice: who would want to be tarred with that brush?

## CONCLUSION

<sup>ae</sup><3

The tears of our hip-hoptivists do not merely bring the debate between ethics and aesthetics to the fore. Nor do they merely enable us to explore the friction between these two polarities within contemporary art. Rather,

the tears – and Clara's anxious reaction to them – act as the further revelation of a basic truth: the further realization that social practice *was* NGO art in the Philippines, the further recognition that it was, for the most part, not a 'so-called' NGO art but an actual one. What social practice *was here* was thus radically different from what it was *there*. And what this paper thus means to underscore are some of the ethnographic actualities of life as an artist in the Philippines: the fact that the rock and the hard place essentially prevents one from

producing social practice art. Painting and installation, physical artefacts, things that could be touched, that could be seen (that could be sold), these were the types of art that made 'sense' here, these were the works

that must be produced. Social practice is thus not in short supply in the Philippines due to a lack of ethical principles or ethical concerns, to a lack of knowledge or delayed contemporaneity. It is in short supply because the *mechanisms that enable it to exist are themselves lacking*. One can be an activist, one can be part of the capital-'M' Movement, yet to do so one cannot be an artist. One can be an artist, part of the capital-'M' Market, yet be excluded from this genre due to the basic lack of institutional support. The power of late capitalism both

to enable the market and, paradoxically, to compel the positionality of the Movement, is hence here underscored further. The power of the two M's are thus strangely intertwined, the rock and the hard place squeezing one's possibilities.

The story of the hip-hoptivists thus reveals the still uneven topography of the global art milieu. Forty years after Terry Smith's groundbreaking article, 'The Provincialism Problem' (1974), the pervasive cultural

colonialism and radical disjunctures between the centre and periphery of the arts world are still, quite clearly,

in place. Social practice, the shiniest and most avant-garde of contemporary art practices, is one restricted

to those with the means to undertake it (a truism, but an important one), to those with access to the enabling frameworks it requires. While participants from the Global South are occasionally mentioned within its frame (Huit Facettes in Senegal being the mostly commonly cited), it must be understood, in truth, as a movement entrenched within the North – something that can be seen most clearly through the locations in which you can now *study* social practice within art departments, that can be seen most clearly through the locations from which funding calls emerge. The very right to be ethical hence becomes geographically skewed. In the Philippines, one can either be a community organizer

or a community artist. One can be an activist or an agitator. But to be a social practice artist, working within the realm of the contemporary art world, is an almost fundamental impossibility. Social practice thus becomes a genre which is not merely a matter of morals but a matter of means.

Clara's refrain now emerges more clearly. Here the NGOs and the Movement control the space of the community. Here the institutional lack and the strength of the market make the direction quite clear. To be a social practitioner, **one must be practically antisocial**<sub>af</sub>.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was initially written by Schacter following a period of seven months' fieldwork in Manila in 2016. It was then sent to his key interlocutor for the work, the social practice artist Clara Balaguer, for her comments and thoughts. Once returned, and following the

dialogical foundations of social practice itself, the pair decided that these comments should be included as marginalia in the final paper itself, rather than being incorporated into the text by Schacter. As such, and following discussions between the pair, Balaguer has been credited as co-

**AQ13** author of this piece.

This work was supported by British Academy [162736].

<sup>af</sup>Cry. So true. You have to be a madwoman. Not for the faint of heart or well adjusted to society. Thanks for amplifying and legitimizing a voice that wears thin through the murky waters. Back to the precarious grind. More soon.

## FUNDING

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Rafael Schacter is an anthropologist and curator from London, presently British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the Anthropology Department at University College London.

Rafael is currently exploring contemporary art practices in Manila, the Philippines. He has recently undertaken seven months of fieldwork in the region and is working on numerous written outputs as well as an exhibition scheduled for 2019 in London. Rafael has also been undertaking research on graffiti and street art for over 10 years. He has worked on numerous exhibitions, including co-curating *Street Art* at the Tate Modern in 2008 as well as curating *Venturing Beyond* at Somerset House in London and *Crossing Borders / Crossing Boundaries* at the Street Art Museum St Petersburg, both in 2016.

Rafael has authored numerous articles as well as two books, *The World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti* (2013) published by Yale University Press, and *Ornament and Order: Graffiti, Street Art and the Parergon* (2014) published by Ashgate. He is currently completing a manuscript for Lund Humphries entitled *Street to Studio*, slated for summer 2018.

*Figure 1. Behind the scenes of Lupang.*

During the shooting of *Lupang*, ranking tribesmen participated in film showings, forums and storytelling exercises to generate footage for the installation.

*Figure 2. Behind the scenes of Lupang.*

Julio Serrano and Allan Abuque, two of the younger Ayta leaders, doubling as sound technicians during a recipe demo.

*Figure 3. Behind the scenes of Lupang.*

Balaguer discussing the choreography for a scene with Carlito, the animal trainer and lead dancer featured

**AQ2**

in *Chapter 2 Hapunan (Lunch) Arpeggiato*, the second movement of *Lupang*. All costumes, music and dance numbers in the film were prepared independently by the tribe members for a special public performance at Zoocobia, the zoo (built on dubiously leased tribal land) where many of the villagers work.

*Figure 4. Flier design by Kristian Henson.*

Aside from its premiere at Singapore Art Museum as part of the Earth Observatory of Singapore's Visiting Artist Program, *Lupang* has only ever been shown in fragments.

The second and expanded edition of *Tribal Kitchen: The Aytas*, the cookbook that accompanies *Lupang*, was launched in 2014 at Printed Matter.

*Figure 6. Film still from Lupang, Channels 5–8, by Balaguer and Stefan Kruse Jørgensen.*

At a tourist rest stop, en route to a hiking tour over tribal land (run by non-tribal developers with permission from Ayta elders), a Korean tourist films a hunter-in-costume, who prefers to charge a fee for picture taking. This tourist did not pay him, though.

*Figure 7. Illustration by Ines Agathe Maud for Tribal Kitchen: The Aytas.*

3. **AQ3** Balaguer met this young French artist on Instagram while searching for #fish. The online relationship evolved

into Maud illustrating two HWGL publications and completing a five-week residency at the OCD in Manila.

*Figure 8. Print documentation for Tribal Kitchen: The Aytas, first and second editions.*

Left: Cute Bookstore has been RISO-printing a variety of independent publications, textbooks and corporate giveaways, more or less since 1968. They are located in the Recto area of old Manila, famous for its pickpockets, street markets, pawnshops, small-scale (counterfeit) printing, second-hand stores and gay cruising cinemas. Right: Copy Paste is located in the business district of Makati City, a bubble of affluence in the megacity that is Metro Manila. Our edition of 250 books was one of the largest orders they had ever received for a single

4. **AQ4** publication.

*Figure 9. Page from Tribal Kitchen: The Aytas, designed by Kristian Henson.*

The cookbook featured an artist statement on *Lupang*; recipes, remedies and jungle survival tips submitted by seven tribal chefs; quick ethnographies of three Ayta families, and their culinary habits; a guide to edible frogs; and a plant glossary.

*Figure 10. Photograph by Wawi Navarroza. Cover for Tribal Kitchen: The Aytas, second edition. Designed by Kristian Henson and illustrated by Ines Agathe Maud for HWGL.*

Balaguer sustains an evolving interest in *jejemon*, a vernacular texting language from the Philippines. Jejemon began as a way to abbreviate words for saving money on mobile phone messages and later evolved into lengthening and adorning words with unnecessary characters as a form of expression, as a way to manifest one's belonging to the lowbrow *jeje* culture. Illegibility as a form of radical self-determination relates strongly to HWGL's embrace of precarity and imperfection within the design and printing process (or performance).

*Figure 12. Flier designs by Kristian Henson, Jumbo Rañises and Balaguer.*

Left: The Filipino diaspora in the United States has always been a supportive audience and collaborator pool for OCD and HWGL. Right: Sign painter Jumbo Rañises did all the OCD signage when it occupied a storefront space in The Collective (Makati City) from 2010 to 2013. Usually, Balaguer would sketch out, crudely, instructions on a piece of paper and then Jumbo would be left to interpret with his own style.

*Figure 13. Sport Manly tarpaulin meme by Balaguer, designed by Dante Carlos.*

Part of an ongoing research project, publication and performative workshop on toxic masculinity and how it manifests in Filipino romance novels, family structures and politics.

*Figure 14. Photograph by Czar Kristoff and Balaguer.*

Table, designed during the Diskarte workshop, intended to hold a spinning wheel for raffia production. Based on the cultural value of *diskarte* (the Filipino strategy of improvisation or making the best of what you have), the table was designed following the measurements of the weavers' chairs, so as to make spooling more comfortable. Inspired by the research of Pamela Cajilig (Curiosity.ph).

*Figure 15. Flier design by Kristian Henson.*

This workshop was led by architect Keiji Ashizawa and sushi chef-turned-builder Takahiro Chiba of Ishinomaki Lab, a furniture company born after the 2011 tsunami destroyed the town of Ishinomaki, Japan. The skills and theory exchange was put together for a group of carpenters/fishermen from the town of Tubigon, Bohol, which suffered a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in 2013.

Figure 16. Photographs by Czar Kristoff.

The furniture produced in the Diskarte workshop was donated to the Tubigon Loomweavers Multi-Purpose Cooperative, for whom Balaguer had previously organized a natural dye and four-harness loomweaving workshop led by Rhode Island School of Design students Lyza Baum and Emilie Jehng. A film showing and follow-up session with the carpenters was held one month after Diskarte workshop, in the kitchen and hangout space created for the loomweavers, in collaboration with the Tito and Tita film collective from Manila.

HWGL titles: *Hunt and Gather*, *Terraria* by Wawi Navarroza, *In Darkness* Anarcho-Archive by Kevin and Kristian Henson, *An Auto-Corrected Journal...* by Disclab Research and Criticism, and *Filipino Folk Foundry* by The OCD Designers: Kristian Henson, Stefan Kruse Jørgensen, Dante Carlos and Balaguer.

Figure 5. Flier design by Kristian Henson.

Figure 11. Flier design by Kristian Henson.

Figure 17. Photographs by Wawi Navarroza and Balaguer.

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