

# Surviving the Anthropocene through the Arts

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## abstract

We are in the age of disasters, an era of climate change, of extreme and life-threatening weather disturbances, of flash floods and super-typhoons. But we are also in an age of voracious consumption of resources, an era of massive oil and nuclear energy use, an age of wastelands and carbon emissions, an age of steel, of plastic, and concrete, the age of GMOs, of soil alteration and water depletion. This is the age of what recent scholars call the *Anthropocene*, the era of how the human being becomes a geological agent changing the planet. This is where the project hopes to contribute: to come up with an instruction and policy potential material that would introduce some of the major concerns of the Anthropocene era (broadly put this would include Climate Justice, Modernity, Capitalism, Technology, Species-extinction, Urban Planning and Development, and Re-orientation of the Humanities and Social Sciences to meet the conceptual demands of this era). This material will consolidate the contribution of the Arts as vital to the exposure of the Anthropocenic design; the Arts as a way to understand the intricate realities of the anthropocene, arguably the revelation of last things.

## key words

**Anthropocene, Humanities, Social Sciences, Apocalypse, Art**





# Until All of Summer Becomes a Room\*

Tale of an Art Journey

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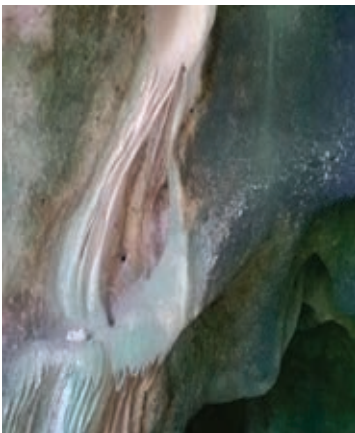
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*Without sprinkling it ... and draws from it the virgin clue AS IF.*  
Stéphane Mallarmé

*To perceive the aura of an object we look at means  
to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.*  
Walter Benjamin



**FORCING HERSELF TO IMAGINE A READER**, she takes the task to be what designates itself as her own: an alien confrontation.



*"... she recalled her childhood as when she used to feed the cows: grass on her outstretched little hands, and the tongues getting a kick out of her fresh smelling proposals; the sticky charge, the soft burning wetness, awakening a school of butterflies around her waist, took away her innocent childhood to embrace the steamy world of the senses..."*

**Figure 1:** Image from a cave wall in the Anda Cave, Bohol, Philippines  
(Photo copyright by PUP-ICS)

Like an aleatory material, a text, any work of art, even a nature's conceit, all smiles in a corner of a cave wall, nothing of this will come into sharp relief until something finds its way to a second land of origin, a new home, a second canvas, a second skin: language.<sup>1</sup> A refiguration, she recalled vividly, emerging from a dream. Still her eyebrows were twitching like she never had an orgasm. What impotence might it have been had she forced herself to give birth to a concept.

She can never become more than her present, her fate like a text, is refractory to her own will.<sup>2</sup> In her waking life, it will soon dawn upon her, with only an image to pursue, that her 'reader' is always already that 'other' who knows her secrets.<sup>3</sup> Whatever she can come up with, an alibi, for instance, can only turn out to be an absurd tale. Someone has already spoken her own words.<sup>4</sup> She then attempted to recall: "The sentence pours language back into the universe."<sup>5</sup>

But what if the image unfolds without sanction, pops itself up as a clue, insistently, but rather hopelessly claiming an ephemeral space, as it fails while demanding, the last attention it deserves? Having previously sought out the virgin clue on the pages of Mallarmé, this strange concoction of temperament was nudging her members to climb the next mountain so as to figure out how to become the figure of the stranger, the wanderer on top of a sea of fog.<sup>6</sup> But "unless she lives in the aura" of it, she

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<sup>1</sup>Barthes says "language is a skin." See Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse, Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 73.

<sup>2</sup>"[The] present ... impotent to force the future" (see Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," in *Les Temps Modernes* 38 [1948]: 9).

<sup>3</sup>An allusion to Bakhtin's notion of answerability: "we have no *alibi* in existence" (see Michael Holquist, *Dialogism. Bakhtin and his Word* [London and New York: Routledge, 2002], 27.).

<sup>4</sup>"Language speaks." This is popularly attributed to Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 194.

<sup>5</sup>Attributed to Emile Benveniste, as quoted by Paul Ricoeur. See Paul Ricoeur, "Aesthetic Experience," in *Critique and Conviction*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>6</sup>Reference is to the famous painting by Gaspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), "Wanderer above the sea of fog."

would never get near the mountain of her choice.<sup>7</sup> Besides, she needs “strong and sturdy legs”<sup>8</sup> for the entire ascent. Under the pretext of chipping in to the repertoire, the greatest illusion of self-respectability that one imbibes after drinking an opera, simmering an old tale told many times over, a poem to make up for her thousand tiny failures, she takes the image, delighted at last, as something in need of composition.

But why, why imperatively, this peculiar word ‘something’—why does it always carry a burden? No sooner than the image reveals itself as a clue language stoops to an alien sovereign. She was listening to Lazar Berman at the height of his incredulity—that he would never again play Chopin’s.

Looking at Edvard Munch’s painting, she is delighted, the second time around, after confronting an aleatory word (or sometime after her panic mode dwindled into a night owl). She remembered a scene from an opera. Later, she told a friend that this scene from her dream was a word-without-a-face. Her friend was not commiserating: “Give it one last try. You said it was an owl.” What comes out is no less a familiar rehearsal: an “event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow.”<sup>9</sup> Not giving up on her dream to become an author (someone who labors around writing by writing ‘around’ writing, she learned from reading Barthes<sup>10</sup>), she said as if offering her best answer: “You know it as when the turnpike becomes unmindful of its function, surprised of its intimacy with the highway. Like it makes you drip as from an irresponsible faucet.” Understandably, that day she lost her only true friend.

Little by little, recovering from her own loss, the image seeps in to her being—only that she knows too well; she can

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<sup>7</sup>“Never ... does the interpreter get near to what his text says unless he lives in the aura of the meaning he is inquiring after” (Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan [New York: Harper and Row, 1967], 351).

<sup>8</sup>A liberal quotation from Serres: “Strong and sturdy legs are needed for the ascent of the wall on which the mystical festival of the Ascension is experience” (Michel Serres, *Variations of the Body*, trans. Randolph Burks [Minnesota: Univocal Publishing], 2011), 17.

<sup>9</sup>Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” 3.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. n. 11.

never be more than an outcome of a failed commitment.<sup>11</sup> In the same mute language in which the face reveals the clue to ethical responsibility in which the word ceases to be an orphan, the word also becomes confrontational. She is telling me now, she recalled her mother telling her on the day of her first menstruation, that she wound up at last, as a shadow of a painting, born of ectopic pregnancy. She wanted to become an athlete.

*Figure 2: Edvard Munch, Scream*

Growing up without a father at the age of 12, she struggled to become a writer, and now as a salesperson, at her age bursting at the seams, she found the courage to announce the Death of 'B'.<sup>12</sup> She quickly mastered the labor of language, telling her blog subscribers, people she met on the road, in libraries, supermarkets, churches, etc. to forget Baudrillard,<sup>13</sup> not wanting to imitate a book though, far from it, her



wanderings are huge, not to mention amazing: all the felicities for orgies assembling into a fish swarm; quasi-evangelical ministries, paeans to little joys crying out with their own virgin clues. As an accomplished 'seller of thought', she addresses in her dream a mammoth crowd of her own.

The crowd went up to her and to her 'place' under the pretext that by joining her they were helping to enable culture. She told me in one interview that she and her place were two

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<sup>11</sup>An allusion to Barthes: "What we can ask of an author is that he be responsible (...) an author's true responsibility is to support literature as a failed commitment, as a Mosaic glance at the Promised Land of the real (this is Kafka's responsibility, for example)" (see Roland Barthes, "Authors and Writers," in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag [New York: Hill and Wang, 1994], 188).

<sup>12</sup>That is, the fictitious Death of Barthes.

<sup>13</sup>Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner (eds.), *Forget Baudrillard* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

different topologies—but each not unlike the place where a god was forced to confess his own sin; no, she scolded me right away: this is not Dostoevsky; the pontiff is nowhere to be seen in this frame, pointing an accusing finger to a stranger in robe.<sup>14</sup>

What comes out of the character of the Inquisitor is an image slowly coming to maturity, and by that it should one day be able to say on her behalf, now that even her pride has been compromised by her marriage with language, that she defeated a theory. “To be among things,”<sup>15</sup> like a faint lineament on a painting only the most tentative of our senses may as yet be able to see: in a word, to be invisible in a crowd of lilies, to become a veritable tool of sovereign language, to copulate with the haptic space of as yet an outcome of a dream. As with Cézanne: to experience the landscape,<sup>16</sup> all the time in herself, and yet given her propensity for excess, it is as if it was the hair of her own skin grazing a drove of bovines. She never thought they could be these huge and hungry; she recalled her childhood as when she used to feed the cows: grass on her outstretched little hands, and the tongues getting a kick out of her fresh smelling proposals; the sticky charge, the soft burning wetness, awakening a school of butterflies around her waist – all these took away her innocent childhood to embrace the steamy world of the senses. There, in that same little room where finally she faded into a worm.

Some years later, I learned she committed suicide, or what I thought she did. The kind of folks who knew her believed she went up to heaven; others were as crazy as their unpolished toenails: a mysterious lady morphing into a pizza pie.

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<sup>14</sup>The conversation between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky’s famous novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

<sup>15</sup>“To be ‘among things; is different from Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ (...) the subject is among things not only by virtue of its density of being (...) it is among things as a thing, as part of the spectacle” (Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” 4).

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith (Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 67.

The last time I saw her was during an unscheduled meeting. I was with a research team, and after scouring the caves of Bohol—we were told that two seismic activities were detected just as when we were snaking through inside a notoriously narrow shaman's cave—a male friend, a former activist who years since after our last mob attendance together, exchanging expletives with the police, settled with his wife in Cebu, mysteriously gave me a call. He said, 'she's ready for her last interview.' Dante however remained a complete puzzle to me as when writing unfolds its own dependence on "a joke and despair," not to mention, all of its virgin clues—as if "ruled by their own laws."<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3:** Oca Villamiel, *Mga Damong Ligaw*

(<http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Arts&Leisure&title=what-to-do-with-10000-horns&id=102852>)



*'To be among things like a faint lineament on a painting only the most tentative of our senses may as yet be able to see...'*

I was surprised Dante knew where I was and where my mind was wandering off, between night and nothingness, between Cezanne and his doubt, or several kinds of wild weeds, between that and a thousand-tenfold buffalo horns carefully assembled in a gallery, making sure that by a certain kind of arrangement this artificial space of functions would appear *as if* a veritable landscape of wild plants we barely know by names was announcing the second coming: if art means not giving up

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<sup>17</sup>A liberal appropriation of Derrida: "Writing's lack of independence of the world, its dependence on the maid who tends the fire, on the cat warming itself by the stove; it is even dependent on the poor old human being warming himself by the stove. All these independent activities ruled by their own laws; only writing is helpless, cannot live in itself, is a joke and a despair" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], 272).



living in things, an aesthetic sweatshop of bovine horns proves exactly just that: we live among the phantoms of our industrial sins looking at us in return.

I told Bartleby, co-proponent of our research, ‘this is it!’ By that time Cebu’s interior was already behind us; after a rendezvous with beer and local food, we were ferried north into an isolated island. Between the unfading memory of Chocolate Hills, and the enchanting caves of Anda, and these physical ruins, lying before me, of an old Spanish fort north of coast where Magellan was killed, there, in that narrow ephemeral space of conceit, where I can see the approaching waves, a perfect spot to erect a watch tower to alert the townspeople of Moro pirates, he glanced back at me. In front of me was a pair of eyes cavorting in disbelief. We were all worried the weather building up in the Pacific would hit the Cebu mainland. The storm would ravage instead the whole swath of Central Luzon on the week of our return to Manila. I told him we did not come here for nothing.

I reminded myself at that point that perhaps because this might be the ‘end of a theory’ it was best to offer her a poem, but no—the sooner I thought of it I felt a shiver. She was already a horror having written the best known imitation of Keats. I pointed this out to our research assistant, Jason Adams, not his real name, showing him a piece of her work, and as usual, no one would believe me. Once I embezzled my logical mind (an outcome of graduate studies) fornicating with her false, insanely professional simulation of Franz Kafka. She was all Samsa in her salesmanship, complaining against the forced sanity that life had been taxing her little room, except that she never had to morph into a bug, at least, not yet. This was her world during the first interview. Besides having imagined herself countless times as that mysterious bride in the Grecian urn, she thought of herself as a water lily.

One day she confessed to her therapist that she liked to see herself as a shadow, as if her life was not already spent thoroughly prettily among the inhabitants of its pensive landscape. But this, she clarified, only upon a mention of Monet: “You can guess it, right? Like when someone called out your name, you turned your head to the direction of the voice; what utter pensiveness you would regain afterwards—you are no different from my dog.” I asked her who would mention Monet.

She replied casually, holding a book that only after the interview I would realize was written by “B”: “It is as if I had words instead of fingers.”<sup>18</sup> I never felt so sad that evening. I never knew her dog’s name. That night she pointed out to me the whole area was reclaimed.

She was briefly explaining as I was belying—with the help of her own words melding with the sound of sirens filling up the entire city—the little chance she still had if she would return to her old self. She was planning her complete irreversibility. And how obsequiously sure I was that I understood her words correctly as ‘her voice’ took me the social history of the place. Recalling that last interview, I was no longer certain she was the same person I interviewed on two previous occasions. Besides, I was supposed to conduct the interview in Cebu.

The next instant, she started talking about the legend of Mang Kanor, his dalliance with giant creatures, and how he mistook a person for a monkey he nearly killed one night. It was also in light of this legend that a story about a mysterious appearance of an old ship anchored on the shores of Lamanok (the name of the island) facing the mighty sea was told in a number of versions with the legend preserving the integrity of each, like a panoply of trees sheltering the unwanted: the grass underneath.

“There’s an island called Mabini. A boatman could take all of you there. Not really isolated, but the caves—ah, you would never wish you had a home to return to!” I recalled the same lines—she must be a shaman. I began to suspect she is. Those were the same exact words I heard uttered by the lone tour guide of the Anda caves. It was logical to assume all caves in the world have their shamanistic side. But I was held in a trance whose perpetrator was rather my own mangled sense of folk wisdom.

I forgot in a while the area is a tourist destination, known for its caves and mangroves, and she is from around this place. It could be me, alone, deciding to shed my tourist credentials under the illusion that as an adventurer I was hoping to finally encounter a horde of primitive cavemen responsible for one of the earliest prehistoric hand paintings in the many caves of

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<sup>18</sup>Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 73.

Anda, but now worn out by time, long after Bohol was created by a massive tectonic uplift leaving behind a litter of hill-size coral reefs, gouged out from underneath to become the sovereign dominion of a star, bleaching the hills with powerful rays as long as it cared. Like a veritable whiplash of a Pollock, nature did not cease producing: combined with melting polar glaciers and uneasiness of the tectonic plates, Bohol produced a treasure of large underground caves. A folk hero once utilized these caves to delay the ambition of an empire to subjugate every native of the island.<sup>19</sup> The caves functioned as weapons of invisibility. If nature loves to hide, little people were the first to learn her secret.

After a while acting nearly as a tour guide, the shaman turned to me.

She placed an egg on top of the table, making sure it stood for a while. I was not sure what she meant as she took us all to the rituals that went with an egg, even less sure of a mounting evidence in front of me. Bartleby and Jason were beginning to breathe a strange commiseration with the dark arts as they sunk in quasi-mental oblivion, allowing their own silences to exchange psychic pleasantries with the ghosts protecting the cave.

*'A standing egg means approval of the nature's spirits and the same egg that would throw itself into relief, falling off the edge of nature's abyss – that will be the egg to give the sign someone has to suffer a curse.'*

Whatever the issue is the same meta-kinetic justice supervenes. Seeing I did not get her side of the story, she tossed a coin, and with the usual grin, lowered her face so close to mine I immediately sensed a child in distress.

Head or tail?

I chose home.

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<sup>19</sup>Dagohoy, the revered revolutionary leader of the province of Bohol.

**Figure 4:** *A Cave in Lamanok Point, Anda, Bohol*  
 (<https://bernil.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/bohol-caves-23.jpg>)

Each of us has a cave to hide in, otherwise a cave we hide from others. Recalling the events that were behind us now, one cave refused to go until recently. Rilke reminds me of its insistent character, a simile that echoes an incantation – the likeness of ‘words’ to ‘summer days’, each scarcely containing itself, like a ‘rose-interior,’ like a cave that “[overflows] and [streams] into the days...until all of summer becomes a room, a room within a dream.”<sup>20</sup>



I was sinking in the shallow waters of the marine sanctuary, my feet touching the tip of my memory. The mangroves were quietly kneeling at their roots as the silent tide dearest to a night like this was starting to mingle around them. On the far side, the moon was slowly seeping out of her nightdress; her wardrobe faintly burning in a kettle; on the hither, a lone ripple was brainwashing a coral reef, steady and persevering, in exchange for a night without sin, long enough before the light finally reclaimed her place, before the little memories faded in slow, gentle death.

*\*The story, first part of a series, was based on a research expedition I initiated off the islands of Cebu and Bohol, two of the most earthquake and typhoon-prone areas in the whole archipelago. The research was conducted entirely during Holy Week (2015). The setting as well as the characters in this story was an outcome of Bakhtinian double-voicing, like an incantation, a mixture of reality and fiction, a tempest in a teapot; but also a punctum, an ephemeral space where images, in their fleeting moments, tiny pleasures cavorting in the wake of the death of God, overwhelm the immaculate arbitrariness of words whose secrets we were once not allowed to peer into. Benjamin and Brecht would protest if I didn't figure them in: the distorted simile between real and*

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<sup>20</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, “Rose-Interior,” in *New Poems (1908): The Other Part. A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 169.

*fiction overlaps with Bakhtin's; Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt strikes through the text, I guess, to produce an outcome of buggery, namely, the TEXT itself. But all these are still on the way to becoming the absentee term like, once again, the text.*

## II

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# Time and Memory

Reflections on Ricoeur and Brgy. Badiang, Anda, Bohol

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**THE ENDURANCE OF THE WORK OF ART** can perhaps be better understood by taking up the discourse on time, through the notion of refiguration in Paul Ricoeur's mimetic theory.

Drawing lessons from Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger, Ricoeur classifies three fundamental categories of time: that of lived time, that of cosmic time and that of historical time. For Ricoeur, refiguration plays an important role in terms of how these notions of time comes into play in human composition, namely, creation, reading-reception, and reappropriation.

Ricoeur points out that among these three notions of time it is *historical time* that plays a crucial role. As he argues, for "historical time is like a bridge thrown over the chasm which separates cosmic time from lived time [and] is attested to by several procedures characteristic of the work of refiguration of time by history."<sup>1</sup>

Historical time binds *cosmic* and *lived time*.<sup>2</sup> There are three "bridges" that connect human lived time to cosmic time. The

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Ricoeur "Narrated Time" in *Philosophy Today* Vol. 29 No. 4/4 (Winter 1985): 263; emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup>By cosmic time we mean here the time of the universe, its movement and passing while lived time we mean the time of human experience.

first connector is *calendar time*. Ricoeur writes: "The institution of the calendar has the remarkable effect of joining determinations of astronomical time with determinations of temporality... On the one hand, the calendar is an offshoot of astronomy. On the other hand, it is an institution in the political sense of the word. In this light, it harmonizes work with days and festivals with the seasons and years. It integrates the community and its customs into the cosmic order."<sup>3</sup> This arbitrary integration no doubt puts a certain order to life via chronological points or segments such as the time of the day, the month or year, but this same "ordering" also colonizes the very rhythms of life. We must here underscore that the rhythms of life precede and exceed any institutional appropriation, which leads us to the second connector.

Ricoeur mentions that lived time is grounded on a much more fundamental time, that of *biological time*. As a natural ecological phenomenon, biological time is most evident in 'the incessant replacing of the dead by the living.' In this light, Ricoeur notes that behind this notion of ecological sequence lie two cultural phenomena: 1) of "belonging to the same generation, and 2) the coexistence of several generations at the same time."<sup>4</sup> These cultural phenomena allow for a continuous chain not only of genetic transfer but also of transfer of memories, and of inheritance of culture. By memories here we mean more than just the subjective, mentally stored information but also actual events and history, of individuals and peoples, of artifacts and heritage and knowledges.

Subsequently, what Ricoeur calls "the sequence of generations,"<sup>5</sup> the coexistence of the contemporary with the non-contemporary, applies as the second connector. The sequence of

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<sup>3</sup>Ricoeur further notes: "Here we touch on a fundamental phenomenon of *dating*: in assigning to each significant event a place in the ultimate scheme of all possible dates (a reference to and a distance from the temporal axis) calendar times reinscribes lived time as private or common destiny upon cosmic time. This reinscription is the first response of historical practice to the major aporia brought to light by the phenomenology of time. We see later on that it is also the key to the dissymmetric relation between historical time and the time of fiction" (Ibid. 263-64).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 264.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



generations allows for the possibility of memories to travel through time, to exceed temporally those from whom the event originated. But it does not necessarily follow that the succession of the generations will always lead to a successful transfer of memories. It is always subject to those who are capable of recognizing the vestige, and acknowledging the responsibility to recollect and connect that past (that is no 'longer') to that of the present. This leads us to the third connector.

The third connector is what Ricoeur calls "the trace." The trace has both a physical and noetic trait. As a physical trait "[a] trace is *left*, a trace *remains*. We speak thus of *remnants* of the past as of remnants from a dinner or of the relics of a saint or the ruins of an ancient monument."<sup>6</sup> As a physical entity, a trace has a dual temporal character: that of being something that is present in the present, a relic or remnant that exists in the present; and that of being a sign that points to a past, a past that is no longer present. As such, "the trace as substitute must be a *mark* left by something. As such, it is handed over to the contingencies of preservation or of destruction."<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, we have the second trait, the *noetic*. The noetic trait is something that is bound by contingencies of the environs and the capacity of the inheriting generation to recognize and reappropriate the trace as a sign of a past. It is here that *the role of reading* becomes pertinent. The inheritors, the generation which receives the trace, must take on the role of the informed reader. Ricoeur informs us that "[T]here is trace only for one who can deal with the mark as a present sign of an absent thing, or better, as the present vestige of a passage that exists no longer."<sup>8</sup> And to read and follow a trace is to perform a mediating role through time, a mediation that links the present to that which is no longer. This mediation though must not be practiced as if it would be devoid of any ethical demand and duty.

Difficult as it may seem, the mediation conducted by the inheriting generation as reader must also take on the responsibility or duty to tell. Since "[at] this price we now no longer have to say that the past is something over and done with

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

in any negative sense but can say that it is something that has been, and because of this, is now preserved in the present.”<sup>9</sup> To mediate is to articulate this connection, to tell is to configure and even reconfigure the gaps so that the narrative connects and becomes relative to the present. In this sense we say that any artifact, or any form of heritage, which includes the work of art, is a trace.

#### The Case of the Brgy. Badiang, Anda, Bohol

Located at the northeastern tip of Bohol is a fisherfolk community, Barangay Badiang, in Anda which is one of the few places in the archipelago practicing community-based tourism.

Barangay Badiang is a four to five hour drive from the capital, Tagbilaran. Those who would dare venture into this remote section of Bohol Island will be welcomed with scenic shoreline, scattered lush hills, and rough roads branching onto spawning farmlands. At the edge of Barangay Badiang is a lush mangrove forest which safeguards the community from storm surges and ensures fish production throughout the season.

At the further edge of Badiang, beyond the mangrove forests are a series of cave formations accessible only through *banca*. One can find in several of these cave formations the communities’ important treasures, that is, the Hematite Paintings of ancient inhabitants of the place. Believed to be dated in the Paleolithic period, the hematite paintings were only shown to the public in 2004, decades after the National Museum documented and relocated the artefacts found in the caves (the artefacts include ancient burial coffins, jars, utensils and human remains). The local community practices a cooperative type of eco-management and tourism, taking turns in manning the “reception area,” maintaining the bamboo walkway, protecting the mangrove forest, taking visitors by *banca* to the caves, and educating sightseers about the caves, the mangroves, the local lore, and the hematite paintings. They also collectively share the earnings from the tour.

Preserved and cared for by the community, the mangrove forest and the cave systems become the stage in which the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 265.

present generation of Badiang locals continuously tell their narrative/heritage, ensuring the transfer of memory within and beyond their community.



*Figure 1: The Bamboo Bridge which takes visitors across the mangrove forest to the banca section (Photo copyright by PUP-ICS)*



*Figure 2: Volunteer boatman carries visitors to the caves. At the background are healthy mangrove trees. (ICS-PUP)*



*Figure 3: Lush mangrove forest seen from afar (ICS-PUP)*



*Figure 4: Some of the caves at the outer edge of Brgy. Badiang (ICS-PUP)*





*Figure 5: Prehistoric Hematite Cave Paintings  
of Brgy. Badiang, Anda, Bohol (ICS-PUP)*



*Figure 6: Prehistoric Hematite Cave Painting from the same cave  
(ICS-PUP)*



*Figure 7: Shows the use of hand in painting the cave walls  
(ICS-PUP)*

### Barangay Badiang as Trace Bearers and Interpretive Community

The uniqueness of Barangay Badiang, being inheritors, trace bearers and, what (Stanley Fish coins as) interpretive community<sup>10</sup> all at the same time, allows us to look at, in broad

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<sup>10</sup>Fish's notion of "interpretive communities" tries to dislocate the meaning-giving function, that instead of associating the meaning to the author or the text, he shifts to the readers. He writes: "'Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. If it is an article of faith in a particular

strokes, how heritage transfer becomes possible. As inheritors, the people of Barangay Badiang have received the marks or remnants of past, both in its physical and its intangible noetic character. This noetic inheritance allows “for the stability of interpretation among different readers”<sup>11</sup> that belong to the same community, and in this case, the town folk’s reading and rendering of the local lore and its association with the caves and the cave paintings. As trace bearers, they are constantly engaged, weaving together temporalities, binding the past, the present and eventually the future, showing a continuous conjunction of history, art, people’s power and fiction in the process of refiguration. This does not mean however that the interpretive community of Barangay Badiang is rigid and perfect. Rather, as Fish would caution us:

[Interpretive] communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned. This does not mean that there is a point at which an individual has yet learned any. The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted, or complicated or dropped from favor (‘no one reads that way anymore’). When any of these things happens, there is a corresponding change of texts, not because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently.<sup>12</sup>

As a collective, they are community educators engaged in dialogue in telling and passing on their stories among themselves or with the company of an outsider willing to experience their heritage.<sup>13</sup> As a community engaged in

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community that there are a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it.” (Vincent B. Leitch et. al., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2001], 2087).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 2088.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>But one may perhaps put forward an objection: there is a gap in terms of the temporality of the caves, its artefacts and paintings, and

cooperation, they become active and informed readers, time travellers, as it were, who safeguard the work of art. As trace bearers of an interpretive community, they are transformative for in their practice of upholding the work, of constantly reminding others of the trace, they intervene in the process of extinction of memories. As a manifestation of the exemplary, they embody the beautiful, and by embodying the beautiful they enable the beautiful to endure. And it is out of this cooperation that the collective, the work of art, the memory, and the trace endures. The exemplary, embodied in the different faces of the collective, preserves the beautiful. And since the exemplary endures, it transports the heritage through time. Hence, in the process, the exemplary that endures through time becomes the trace of the beautiful. The exemplary thus in the process saves the work of art, trace, memory, and heritage from oblivion.

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that of the present generation of Barangay Badiang settlers. Here the gap is filled by the lattice work of the community, the community as both informed readers and interpretive community. To borrow the words of Wolfgang Iser: "What is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, that gaps arising out of the dialogue – this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He is drawn to the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. . . But as the unsaid comes into life in the reader's imagination, so the said 'expands' to take on a greater significance than might have been supposed" (See Wolfgang Iser "Interaction Between Text and Reader" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* ed. Vincent B. Leitch et. al. [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2001], 1676).



# Curating Anthropocene, Hic et Nunc

Notes on Art Exhibitions and the Future Museology

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*We're human beings, my son, almost birds, public heroes and secrets.*  
Roberto Bolaño

## I

**IN AN INTERVIEW** with the cultural theorist Paul Virilio, Catherine David proposed that an exhibition must “create or recreate a place for itself.”<sup>1</sup> By creating a place, an art exhibit appears in the form of an alternative dwelling where artworks and spectators meet. Here, the exhibition enables both the spectator and the artwork (and the artist in its alterity) to retreat into the *place*—a collapse of distinction between the subject and the object—a unary dwelling of emphatic experience. Thus, an art exhibition endures in the spectators’ memory, but at the same time, the artwork eludes the curse of forgetting. However, a contrary mood prevails in today’s experience, a crisis in the presence of art is identified when exhibits fail to create a place and eventually disappear through time.

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<sup>1</sup>Catherine David, “The Dark Spot in Art,” in *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews*, ed. John Armitage (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001), 138. Catherine David is a French curator, art historian and deputy museum directress of *Musee National d’Art Moderne*, France.

## Delocalization

Virilio affirms that an art is *localized* when it is inscribed in bodies and concrete materials (e.g. cave paintings, canvases and tattoos). However, the eventual extinction of bodies leads to the disappearance of art itself. Disappearance of art, or, in Virilian lexicon, ‘delocalization,’ is suspending within the art space a form of movement—an obliteration of space and time in favor of virtual and absolute velocity, which is the sort of thing that happens when both artworks and spectators are reduced to “displaceable, nomadic objects.”<sup>2</sup> Virilio warns that such displacement we are dealing with today [leads us to] nowhere,” intensely where art subsists in the virtual through emission and reception of signals.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he argues that contemporary art themes decompose into broken figures—a loss of conscious appreciation of space and time (e.g. Surrealism, Dadaism, Divisionism, Pointillism, and Cubism) – now made possible in the form of fractal computer graphics, ultimately embracing absolute virtualization.<sup>4</sup>

As when the nomadic object decomposes into signals, codes, and emissions, the body searches for an alternative dwelling, a *place* for cultivation, a *lesson* we can learn, an encounter for instance, with artful prehistoric Neanderthals and their extinctive withdrawal in the caves.<sup>5</sup>

## Extinction

Since art opens for itself a place in the body which itself is prone to temporal disappearance, the body becomes an important political question. In the vein of political import, Virilio enumerated three kinds of body: *the territorial body* (planet and ecology), *social body*, and *the human-animal body*.<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, each these bodies correspond to what the cultural theories Clare Colebrook revealed in her book *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on*

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>See Virgilio A. Rivas, “Lessons from the Cave: On Aesthetic Experience,” *Filocracia* 1:2 (August 2014): 135-141.

<sup>6</sup>Virilio, *Politics of Very Worst* (Columbia: Semiotext(e), 1999), 43.

*Extinction* as three important culminating points in human history: revolutions, wars, and accidents.<sup>7</sup>

The political question lies in the human body, with regard to sustaining its biological functions, which is intertwined with how it exploits the planet and its ecology (territorial body). Cartographically, territorial deliberations should set parameters for human bodies' habitation, creating avenues where resources can be managed to fulfil biological necessities. However, the scarcity of these resources is incongruent with human bodies' infinite desire. As a result, human bodies wage war against other bodies to territorialize new habitations. This cannot go on forever. To dictate a term of peace, a mutual agreement, say a treaty, is reached and it will bind human bodies unilaterally forming communal nodes, thus a social body entering a political covenant.

At present, techno-scientific progressions purport to exceed the limits of the human body (namely, the veritable complete eradication of barriers governed by laws of physics, such as sound, speed, and light). This veritable freedom from all physical barriers, unfortunately, drains the ecological/territorial body leading to dehumanizing effects; the earth faces the threat of nuclear disasters and those accruing on human security vis-à-vis the proliferation of lethal war machines. Since the human body has minor biological tolerance on perishing effects of progress, it viably seeks virtual immunity from cellular, biological and natural disasters, even from, and this is not to say the least, extinction.

According to Colebrook, there are three forms of extinction that we must be sensible: first, the ongoing sixth mass extinction; second, extinctions of other species by humans; and third, self-extinction or the capacity to destroy ourselves.<sup>8</sup> To discuss briefly: the first one centers on the human bodies' influence on our planet's ecological body including the animals and the vegetals; the second form affirms social bodies' predatory relation to other species being; and the third form articulates the capacity to stage a massive suicide of social and territorial bodies

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<sup>7</sup>Paul Virilio, *Unknown Quantity* (An Exhibition) (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2002), 4.

<sup>8</sup>Clare Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman, Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 9.

made possible through man-made cataclysms. The first two hint us the normative categories of extinction fed by scientific and ecological factuality but the third brings us into view a new prognosis of a self-caused extinction, purely intimate and interior, capping in one *integral accident*<sup>9</sup> or the height of all accidents. To endure these forms of extinction the body needs to mimic or to say the least, become the *Inhuman* (borrowing Ian Bogost's term) or the brutal transgression of the body's limit, which makes humans supra- and intra-terrestrials to their own bodies by loading multiple *beastly* properties<sup>10</sup> augmenting their survival ability. Here, the retreat to the virtual makes a stimulating offer. The only question appearing in the haze is, will you?

## Segue

Whether naturally driven or self-caused, extinction is an instant delocalization of bodies. Albeit profound and gradually occurring, we must foray a resistance to delocalization which in this essay is expressed by two aesthetic implicates: (1) as an exhibition space of the "here" reminding us of the future of disappearance; and, (2) as a time-continuum of the "now" resisting the future of disappearance.

As Virilio argues, the delocalization of the body leads to the embrace of the virtual – a complete denial of the "here" in favor of the "now".<sup>11</sup> The **Here** is a site of spatial existence, while **Now** is a time-bound presence. As a popular defense of the body, thinking the *here and now* embodies *Pitifulness of Art* (Virilio) which orients the presence of aesthetic experience of an artwork and its meaning to the body, rather than the *Pitilessness of Art*, that which, not unlike the case of the Museum of Auschwitz, celebrates the massive destruction of bodies.<sup>12</sup> Virilio

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<sup>9</sup> Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Bogost, "Inhuman," in *Inhuman Nature*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Punctum Books, 2014), 134.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Jason Adams, "The Aesthetics of Resistance," in *Grey Ecology* by Paul Virilio, trans. Drew Burk, ed. Hubertus von Amelunxen (New York: Atropos Press, 2009), 86; See Paul Virilio, *Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Phil Beitchman (California: Semiotext(e), 2009).

also argues that the body, like the temporality and presence of art, is oriented to the “here and now, *hic et nunc*, it is *in situ*.”<sup>13</sup>

## Anxiety

The problem of delocalization is not only limited within the space of exhibition. The world as a self-created world<sup>14</sup> reveals the same crisis in presence in terms of the absurd relation of infinite human desires to the finite ecology of the world among other manifestations. As human yearns, the more he is negatively imprisoned to the finitude of the world resulting to claustrophobic tendencies of his existence. This absurd relation would later pan out into anxiety of a closed-world, that will leave us no room for spatial discovery and that will orient us into fantasizing about a possible grand exit to other planets. People often resort to technological discoveries in order to displace this anxiety into the illusion of the “openness” of space. In his book *Politics of the Very Worst*, Virilio warns us of this future: “an escape of space ... loss of the body, a temptation to colonize other planets or satellite.”<sup>15</sup> He adds, “We have to take back the world. We must no longer fantasize about ‘beyond the world’, the beyond Earth and humanity.”<sup>16</sup>

As technology unravelled the supposed openness of space, the planet, as a closed-world, turned into a macro-exhibition of artefacts. This positions us, supposing we understand the deeper meaning of aesthetic encounter, into a new time, a time of existential estrangement, which some scientists and avid sci-fi buffs alike, would call the *Anthropocene*.

## Welcome to the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a proposed geologic epoch (put forward in 2000 by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer) intended to replace the Holocene, the recent geologic time event since 12,000 BCE

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<sup>13</sup>Virilio, *Politics of Very Worst*, 44; Virilio, “The Dark Spot in Art,” 138, 140, 142.

<sup>14</sup>Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, 26.

<sup>15</sup>Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, 49

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

covering the last glacial period and the ongoing extinction of animal and vegetal species.<sup>17</sup> This proposal recognizes humans as primary geologic agents in modern history significantly influencing the climate system and biodiversity.

Although the exact geologic date of the Anthropocene is still in question, Crutzen and Stoermer strongly suggested 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial revolution as an ideal origin since this is the point when humanity started engaging in massive economic production leading to burning of fossil fuels and extreme carbon emissions as they leave imprints in the atmosphere. In attempt to address the issue, the *Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy's Working Group on Anthropocene* offered a precise date: July 16, 1945, when the experimental atomic bomb called 'Trinity' ushered the planet into the nuclear age.<sup>18</sup> The presence of plutonium components as a result of this nuclear explosion in rock stratifications from then on levered the intensity of impact on the planet. In a nutshell, global acceleration of progress in terms of rapid urbanization and industrialization, for many instances, have seen the incremental increase of plastic production and CO<sub>2</sub> surge on a scale unrecorded in human history, and the consequent man-made disasters, commit to the lasting impact of human in the partition of planet's ecology.

### Grey Ecology

There is a breeding kind of fear today – the fear of exhausting the openness of what supposed to be a closed-world. This exhaustion which in due time will materialize, we will begin to

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<sup>17</sup> In 2000, Paul Crutzen made the following provocation in response to a climate scientist who argues that we are still in the Holocene epoch: "Let's stop it. We're no longer in the Holocene. We are in the Anthropocene." (Elizabeth Kolbert, "Enter the Anthropocene – The Age of Man," *National Geographic Magazine*, March 2011, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/03/age-of-man/kolbert-text/1> [accessed May 16, 2015]).

<sup>18</sup>Richard Monastersky, "First atomic blast proposed as start of anthropocene," *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science* (January 16, 2015) <http://www.nature.com/news/first-atomic-blast-proposed-as-start-of-anthropocene-1.16739> (accessed May 16, 2015).

see following from Virilio, a “pollution of self-created world”<sup>19</sup> or grey ecology. To bend the term a little, Grey ecology is more of a warning than a pollution inasmuch as the anthropocene is a new kind of apocalypse; by apocalypse we mean it reveals, unveils things to come.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the anthropocene can be construed as the grey ecology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and granting we understand what it reveals, it should convey a proper orientation to ecology.<sup>21</sup> To posit a reminder means to reveal human finitude, a resignation to finite capacity of human evolution, a self-imposed “warning to the world.”<sup>22</sup>

Arguing here in the shadow of Virilio’s critique of contemporary society, catastrophes, whether man-made or natural, show a revealed world, unveiled by the errors and accidents we contribute to its history despite progress’ ultimate call. To ease this anxiety we need to be conscious of how accidents oblige us to create distance that is to say in the form of maintaining a gap, a void, a mystery between the world and us. Cunningly, Virilio proposes, a “stepping back in order to go farther, that is to say to create some distance.”<sup>23</sup>

## Accident

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century ventures on a new epoch where humans seen as major playing force, we refer to the name *Anthropocene* as we investigate into possibilities of humans inventing future histories of accidents. As Virilio says, “accident reveals the substance,” say the invention of the ship is also the invention of its negative essence, the shipwreck; the plane is for the plane crash; and train on railway accidents. Accident acts as negative monuments, an *inverted miracle*,<sup>24</sup> so to speak, permitting us to screen out the failures of techno-scientific progress. Virilio maintained that

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<sup>19</sup>Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> In the same manner Zizek posited *apokalypsis*, that is, unveiling (See Slavoj Zizek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (New York: Verso, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, 43.

<sup>22</sup>Kolbert, “Enter the Anthropocene – The Age of Man.”

<sup>23</sup>Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, 71.

<sup>24</sup>See Virilio, *The Politics of Very Worst*.

progress is ‘wonderfully catastrophic’ prompting us “to slow down, to regress, or to back up.”<sup>25</sup>

In the time of technological outburst, the threat of collapse through these accidents becomes a highly probable event of pure chance. As it parallels with technology, accidents become anticipated phenomena, automatic and mechanistic. Its constancy, should it be a reminder, that we need to be mindful, more importantly, to avoid thoughtlessness and madness to blind us to the consequences of our actions and inventions. Here, it is important to take note that the triumph of science correspond to the lack of wisdom to discern finitude.<sup>26</sup>

### Museology

Where will the Anthropocene bring us? Last 2014, the famous Fossil Hall of the Smithsonian Museum was closed to give way to a 5-year redesigning of the geological history exhibit. This exhibition space will feature its new artefact, the *Homo sapiens sapiens*, along with *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and *Triceratops*.<sup>27</sup> Surprisingly, the inclusion to the museum exhibition singularly affirms our disappearance into an artistic space curated not only for this generation but for several futures as well. In this case, the whole exhibit is an art installation that features ‘us’, *delocalized* in the Virilian sense into objects of observation. True to a more charming description: the Anthropocene makes us see that we are artworks in the making as we face the threat of our own disappearance, of extinction for future museology.

### Museology of the Accident

The future museology prepares us to the integral accident of humanity. Virilio claims that the need for a Museum of Accidents is not to impose fear, but to confront what is no longer

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Monastersky, “Anthropocene: The Human Age,” *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science* Vol. 519 (March 2015): 144-147.



a chance event.<sup>28</sup> This is to inaugurate a new museology exposing aesthetic reflections about past and future collapses and possible extinctions of various species (including us). This museology reinvents a new space for an exposition of the ecology of accidents revealing catastrophic experiences and projecting human errors as well as man's resignation to finiteness. In the age of human control, "multiplication of technology leads to the sovereignty of accidents."<sup>29</sup> This sovereignty to follow Virilio's nexus, recalls our exposition to accidents and inversely, our failure to expose them. By exposition, we are doing the favor of sending a message "that we remember in order not to do it again."<sup>30</sup>

Virilio argues that the installation of "a new kind of museology and museography ... [exposes] or [exhibits] the accident – all accidents from the most common place to the most tragic."<sup>31</sup> This is where the museology of accidents concerns the body. Virilio affirms that we need to see accidents as signs and opportunities to open our galleries to the impromptu designs of techno-scientific disasters.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, exhibition postures an alternative to our technological obsessions, thus finding a place in a world derailed by speed and instantaneity.

Only an artist, who cues on the figments of freedom and radical view of life, can create a dwelling to convey art as a reminder to our present state. Take, for example, Lucy Orta's art that depicts an "alarm signal: the symptomatic clothing of a drama ... of survival in the city under normal conditions."<sup>33</sup> In this context, the exhibit becomes symptomatic of the loss of here and now, a form of resistance in the artistic space represented by a museology of the future that reinscribes our relation to the ecology of things.

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<sup>28</sup>Virilio, *Unknown Quantity*, 3

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>30</sup>Virilio cited in Jason Adams, "The Aesthetic Resistance," in *Grey Ecology*, 95.

<sup>31</sup>Virilio, *Museum of Accident*, n.d.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Virilio, "The Dark Spot of Art," *Virilio Live*, 136.

## Curating the Anthropocene

Art, in the strictest sense, can create a space to expose these accidents. In order to create such space, the exhibition must be *revelationary* (borrowing Virilio's term) and it is in this context that the artist and his artwork, and 'us', as spectators, meet.

Seeing bovine and carabao horns swarming like wild weeds in an art installation, this '*revelationary* meeting' took place in the most interior and intimate reflection of human aesthetic. That encounter made us doubt our assumptions, metaphysical at most, as to whether we are privileged beings or just waiting to retreat as privileged species in the face of sure extinction.



*Figure 1: Damong Ligaw by Oca Villamiel  
(carabao horns; 2015; ICS-PUP)*

We were not just witnessing horns but a more revelatory truth that refutes the privileging of our species. Here, a sudden movement took place exactly when we withdraw from our position as privileged beings and become part of the exhibition.

*To see in plain sight one bovine horn is enough. A group of them receives a plain judgment. To see **10,000 horns** is alarming.*

Oca Villamiel's *Damong Ligaw* bears a terrible guilt over the destruction of planetary ecology. The installation delivers a crucial truth: a complete delocalization of bodies, or better yet, displacement: bovine horns as weeds, which also extends to the human spectators who are also generically lost, thrown into a position of spectatorship vis-à-vis nature sets itself as a work of art. The bovine horns (object) and spectators (subject) retreated

to a *place* where the exhibit designs a new space that subjugates both into an emphatic relation of seeing ourselves as part of the entire exhibition. As for Virilio, “exhibition aims above all to take a stand against the fading ethical and aesthetic points of reference, and the loss of meaning in which we are so often now *not really actors, but witnesses or victims.*”<sup>34</sup>

The poet Guillaume Apollinaire writes of a similar reminder:

*We pass we pass since all must pass  
Often I'll be returning  
Memories are hunting horns alas  
whose note along the wind is dying.*

## Ruins

An exhibition is not only a creative output of humans' co-activity with things. There are also natural artworks and creative exhibition space borne of natural catastrophes and disasters.

In the aftermath of the 2013 earthquake, a Bohol native found words to recall what he thought as the end time: “I thought it is the end time...Roads split ... like a war ... it sounds war” (*Kala ko katapusan na. Nagbiyak. Tunog giyera*). Subsequently, this natural catastrophe transformed a place of worship, the Baclayon Church, into a tourist spot.



**Figure 2:**  
*Ruined Belfry, Baclayon Church  
(ICS-PUP)*

The ruins, like the bovine horns, are *artefacts* designing our placement in the ecology of things. By converting the church into

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<sup>34</sup>Virilio, *Museum of Accidents*, n.d [italics mine].

a tourist spot, nature does tell us to be wary of what lies beyond ruins – ‘us’ and our creations turning into artefacts.

The industrial age of previous centuries and now the post-industrial rush altogether foment human progress but we have become heedless of their effects. The rising carbon emission worsened our atmospheric system resulting in changing climate conditions. Nature subverts this artificial dominion by humans through disasters. True enough, the process of geologic subversion, say an earthquake, produces ruins existing as signs to address our privileged status in the ecology of things.

## Hills

When we visited Bohol in March 2015, we only have in mind some sort of ethnographic research. Unexpectedly we found ourselves locating various disaster sites: schools, houses, and barangays. The tail end of the research surprisingly brought us to the famous Chocolate Hills. With a pun, we started to call ourselves *tourists of disaster*. As *tourists of disaster*, we traced delocalized, converted, inverted, and transformed natural or artificial sites (i.e. churches, rock and stone formations, etc.), aesthetically examining them like art designs of a macro-exhibition.



**Figure 3:** *The other side of Chocolate Hills ruined by the 2013 Bohol Earthquake (Sagbayan, Bohol; 2015; ICS-PUP)*

Myths and folklores tell of the genesis of the Chocolate Hills. They say that two giants fought by hurling mud and stones to each other. The fight lasted for days, and out of

exhaustion, the giants ceased. What remained of the battle, tossed mud and stones, formed the hills. The hills, therefore, can be considered an emergent product of a mythical encounter, from a clash springing like weeds. The hills, this time, echo an art installation: "...the whole chocolate hill is comparable to Damong Ligaw...it is a *damong ligaw*. It is a large natural art installation."<sup>35</sup> But seeing some of the hills in ruins, one can honestly think of an alarming truth.

### Birthing

True enough, an artwork will find its dwelling place, a place for its *unconcealment* whether inside a car park mounted in the middle of business centers, and shopping malls.



**Figure 4:** Luis "Junyee" Yee's *Birthing*  
(Philippine Contemporary Art Fair, The Link Carpark, Makati; Art installation; 2015; ICS-PUP)

Made from bamboo poles mimicking nuclear missiles launched for destruction; organic detritus, splinters, hairs and fallen leaves scattered on the floor, the *Birthing* projects an irreversible doom. The entire installation is an anticipation of an infernal-like future communicating fear, shock and dread to any visitor. Central to the installation is a mummified statue that acts as a symbolical mirror to anyone who stands in its front. The

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<sup>35</sup>Rivas, interview.

*Birthing* represents the peak of our civilization. We experience the uncertainty of the future; the mummified man emphatically reminds us of our resignation to limit.

Luis Junyee's work recalls our venture to wisdom: "We are very young species [as compared against the history of man]. And it is natural for organism to seek comfort for itself to survive...But what is needed is balance."<sup>36</sup> It is the wisdom of recognizing our membership in the network of organisms and not assuming dominance. Echoing Virilio and Serres, Junyee said, "We are like in a big ship heading towards the edge of a waterfall ...We are nearing the drop, and it is hard to turn it around."<sup>37</sup>

The artwork is a *birthing* (as the title conceives) of a new consciousness emerging from an aesthetic dwelling.

#### Conclusion, Here & Now

Curating the Anthropocene means to acknowledge the presence of art in the time that we have already delocalized the planet. Art reveals the finitude of human cause. This will bring us to further recognition of the role of arts as wisdom to become conscious of the aesthetic encounter with the earth as an exhibit *writ* large reminding us of our mistakes as well as the wisdom of *birthing* from the ruins of our decisions. Anthropocene is therefore designing the very limit to human creations through which we can discover our essence as delocalized nomadic objects, as artefacts in the making. Virilio informs us that we can no longer start at the beginning then proceed to the end. What we need to do as he adds is to start at the end and head towards the beginning.

The end is 'here', the beginning of a new future. In the *here and now*, art makes **double-voicing**<sup>38</sup> - a kind of **distancing**

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<sup>36</sup>Luis Yee, Jr., *Birthing* (Makati: Philippine Contemporary Art Fair, 2015).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>See Virgilio A. Rivas, "Until all of Summer Becomes a Room, Tale of an Art Journey," *Mabini Review* Vol. 4 (2015): 1-17.



**effect**<sup>39</sup> like *stepping back*, in Virilio's words, to see the *weeds*, the *ruins*, the *birthing*, and in the long run learn from them.

## E

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