

From the Editor

The Rebirth We Seek

The task of the Filipino humanist today is to produce a *Renacimiento* (*Muling Pagsilang*). What are the contours of this rebirth? What would make it possible? Our bold assertion is that at the turn of the century, our culture is on the verge of such a renaissance. In Makati, for example, there is a critical mass of people with a consciousness for design in architecture and fashion, a passion for Filipino heritage and modern art, and an obsession for a diversity of cuisines. This movement is called “Bravo Filipino” (an allusion to Rizal’s circle of *Ilustrados*) and endeavors to showcase the best among the Filipinos, the creative individuals who have made a mark in the world market. How this resurgent economy of design and luxury goods resembles what happened in Florence in the 14th century needs to be formally analyzed. The fact that ordinary shoppers, however, gallivant in a garden of sculptures by Arturo Luz is already *prima facie* evidence that creativity has ceased to be esoteric.

A crucial first step towards this renaissance is a consciousness of the medieval. Historically speaking, a renaissance—symbolized by the phoenix rising from its ashes—is a conscious effort to overcome death. Scholars of medieval studies have sought to demonstrate how the “light of humanism” had not been completely extinguished during the Middle Ages. The first time it shone was during the heyday of the Carolingian Empire; the second was in the 13th century, which would usher in the efflorescence of the Fourteenth. If one really looks at it, the 13th century was a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it was the time of Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, and Dominic de Guzman. Their stone images cloak their radical contribution to the life of the church. Unfortunately, the deficiency of our sense of the medieval has not allowed us to gather the harvest of this age. For this reason, the idea of a renaissance has failed to germinate within us. The transition could happen if we understood what we were trying to overcome. If we are wishing for a renaissance then we must see that medieval studies is an imperative rather than just an option. Many are ignorant of the modes of being medieval (e.g. warlordism), and for this reason, they unwittingly perpetuate them. Nevertheless, the true medieval spirit consists in the radicalness of the Christian point of view. The medieval outlook instigated massive changes in Europe: it was impelled by the Spirit of Christ, which is the true harbinger of regeneration.

Thus, to be medieval is to work for renewal: “for it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” (cf. Kenneth C. Masong, “The Evental Subject: The Concept of the Human Person in Alain Badiou’s Event Metaphysics,” which discusses the non-believing Badiou’s work on St. Paul).

The second step is the privileging of the category of the new (*novae res*). It is uncanny that in our times what is new in the economic sphere is found in a secular society, such as China. Some scholars have argued that the Chinese miracle is comparable to the age of the construction of Gothic cathedrals. Indeed, the Chinese have created an economy that is an alternative to the model that allows the market to take control and to that which puts all control to the State. China has created a birdcage economy, which is large enough for the birds to fly but not to escape. For such an economy to be formulated, their culture had to transcend the idea of change as the “Great Leap Forward” and to understand change as “feeling the stones:” to cross gradually while experimenting and adapting along the way. Our point is that for a rebirth to happen, we have to build a whole culture of change, and in the process intuit and create what is new. China has surprised everyone not only because it has become prosperous, but because it has belied the centrality of democracy in development. China’s bad record in terms of human rights, however, shows that humanism is still very important in this effort of renewal.

Chinese artists themselves will serve as a model for this brand of humanism. Serving both as conscience and memory of the desires of the Revolution, Chinese artists have struggled not only to put China on the map of modern art but also have made their society truly free. Take, for example, the artist Ai Weiwei, whose millions of sunflowers seeds are on display at the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, the first Asian to be commissioned for the hall (the exhibit was entitled “Sunflower Seeds 2010”). His project to make millions of ceramic sunflower seeds has given employment to the villagers of Jingdezhen, a town that used to make ceramic pots. Like other Chinese artists, however, he refused to represent the government and its repressive behavior. For this reason, the Chinese authorities are slowly shutting down his studios. Activism for him is to work towards a greater humanism on the part of the Chinese government. The massive violations of human rights all over the world, especially the Philippines, proves the undeniable relevance of the Humanities. We must break the idea of the Humanities as mere aestheticism and understand it as an activism geared towards establishing the primacy of the value of humans. This is the kind of artistic renaissance that needs to happen in the Philippines. It is not only the global recognition of the Filipino artist, but the

realization of art as a means to social development. This indeed has always been its role in human history, from the Bayeux Tapestry to Picasso's *Guernica*. The crossing of this threshold is what will bring about an artistic renaissance in the Philippines. For this reason, we are publishing in this issue the position paper of Artists for the Second Aquino Government in solidarity with this effort. This is followed by photographs of works by three artists from the Ateneo who have recently exhibited, namely, Frances C. Alcaraz, Christina C. Dy, and Ian L. Jaucian.

Furthermore, this renaissance will be Asian in perspective and rooted in a 21st-century Filipinism. The new can only happen when our humanism articulates fully a Filipinism that is situated within a larger context. This could be the framework set by the Southeast Asian region, or the discourse of the South or, geologically speaking, the clangor of the ring of fire. This project continues the Filipinism by which Roque Ferriols, S. J. has educated the present writer. As a thinker (*Mang-iisip*), Ferriols has never undergone self-doubt (methodic or otherwise) regarding his being Filipino or Asian because he had covered the basics: he conducted his thought in Filipino (not just Tagalog) and specialized in a non-western thinker (Sri Aurobindo). Fiercely representing the idea of the *Bagong Lipunan* [unfortunately], Ferriols' brand of Filipino Philosophy stands in dialectic with that of Leonardo Mercado and Zeus Salazar. It also presents an interesting parallel with and contrast to the Filipinization movement in the literary studies of Reynaldo Ileto, Soledad Reyes, and Nicanor Tiongson. Our renaissance aims to continue this tradition, but perhaps with the impression of the global Filipino: that is, of the overseas workers (cf. Ma. Socorro Q. Perez, "The Imbrication of Patriarchy, Racism, and Transnationalism and the Ensuing Gender Relations in Selected GUMIL Hawaii Short Fiction circa 70's," which discusses works written on "Oldtimers"), of world-class artists such as Lea Salonga and Charisse Pempengco, and of legendary athletes, like Manny Pacquiao. Our Renascent Filipinism, on the other hand, draws from figures whom the world has acclaimed to be part of the pantheon of Great Humans, for they have overcome the limitations of class and gender and have pushed human horizons forward. When we think of Manny Pacquiao we cannot but realize the tremendous potential every Filipino possesses. His story resembles the saga of the Irish immigrants, and is the confluence of everything that is Filipino and the truly "world class." His is a story that requires serious cultural analysis.

Philippine Studies makes sense when it is within the context of understanding the potential of the Philippines, a power that is not imperial (world domination by Filipinos) but instead is participative in the global discourse—in the match, in debate, and on the scene. The renaissance means to recreate the Palazzo Medici—to create an arena where debate, debacle, and dialectic will result in healing and innovation. We believe that all that is Filipino has this potential if understood within a larger context of a theory, a praxis, or a culture. An example, is our lowly “ensaymada.” The last time this writer had traditional ensaymada was in 2002 at Miraflores del Puerco, a mountain city just outside Madrid. As Filipino food scholars have pointed out (and it is part of the mandate of the School of Humanities to continue the food studies initiated by Doreen Fernandez), we have completely transformed the *ensaymada*, making it less sweet and more sour, presenting it no longer as a flat spiral dough but as a billowing cake. Our renaissance seeks to articulate our unique point of view, which is our contribution to Asian discourse.

The next stage, therefore, in this idea of Filipinism is *not* the marriage between popular culture and the fine arts, but the realization that culture is vital and not marginal to socio-economic development. Humanistic Aesthetics is not merely developing one’s taste or aesthetic judgement, but understanding the process of creativity itself. For this reason, as long as the concentrations in the School of Humanities are looked upon as a preparation for Law School and not for entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship, and social development, they will continue to fail to attract an audience. Beyond the pope’s commission of great artists, the Renaissance means to bear in mind that any kind of movement is ineffectual without the arts. For twenty years now educationists have propounded the imperative to shift to Math and Science to propel the country to modernization. The idea of modernization as a shift away from the Humanities has led to greater deterioration of the moral and social fabric, which has exacerbated inequality and corruption. While, concededly, a greater scientific sense is needed in our culture, it must be emphasized that the overcoming of the Humanities has resulted in less development. The Humanities and the Core Curriculum are not the culprit. They are, in fact, the solution. An elite culture without a sense of excellence would produce an oligarchy that had money but no vision or heart. A true humanism does not only make one tasteful, but excellent (*dakila*) as well. A truly excellent person has integrity alone for that which earns trust and credit.

One of the institutions whose integrity is weakening is the Philippine Catholic Church. The renaissance we envision includes a reformation of our church from one that is triumphalistic to one that is more dialogic. Carlos Celdran's raising the sign "DAMASO" at an ecumenical gathering at San Agustin Church might be likened to Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenburg. It is not an accident that this event had to happen in the oldest church in the land. A few weeks later, the first ever "excommunication party" was organized by the Filipino Free Thinkers, who would rather be excommunicated than change their pro-RH Bill position. A single issue has provided the opportunity for a growing number of liberals to expose and revile the deficiencies of the Church. The polarization it is causing may push the legislative amendments required for our society to move forward. What is also needed, however, is the reform of the Filipino church, so she can better evangelize the whole of Asia. A renaissance can only happen if the church realizes that it is in her nature to reform: "ecclesia semper reformanda est." Thus, a 21st-century Filipino humanism requires theological studies that would create a thinking church (*ecclesia cogitans*) that is ready to dialogue with the secular world. For this reason we encourage theological studies that do not impose the truth but rather argue it. This way of philosophizing and theologizing imitates the way Christ addressed the woman at the well. He did not say, "Drink this or that" but "Give me something to drink" (cf. Anton C. Sevilla, "Nikolai Berdyaev's Creative Ethics of Personality and Christian Worldview," and Edilberto C. Jimenez, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? A Proposal on the Role of Theology in the Ateneo de Manila University in the Light of Karl Rahner's Evolutionary Christology." These are examples of how Filipino scholars are re-imagining Christianity).

As such, the progress of the church is a call to take the form of Christ. Here we echo the words of Pedro Arrupe, considered the second founder of the Society of Jesus. Many young Filipinos have found inspiration in his words: "Fall in love and stay in love, and it will decide everything." He is, however, also known for the prayer to have the sense of Christ: "Give me that *sensus Christi* that I may feel with your feelings, with the sentiments of your heart, which is basically love for your Father and love for all men and women." To be Christ can mean to be the change we want to happen in the world. It is to be the fountain of a genuine community in which everyone does not only think in the same way and does the same things, but where he or she dies to himself/herself (cf. Thomas M. Izbicki, "*Christiformitas* in Nicholas of Cusa's

Roman Sermons [1459],” which discusses an early articulation of this idea). Humanistic studies may also look into the idea of the virtual community that technology has formed, which has resulted from the individual’s desire for autonomy and relation.

Because it privileges the category of the new and the desire for reform, it is impossible that the Humanities will become irrelevant in the 21st century. More than ever, the Arts (together with Style and Design) have taken dominance in economy and social development. The Museum of Modern Art, through a project called *Rising Currents*, has spearheaded a redesigning of the city of New York to make it more responsive to global warming. In putting large investments in *musea*, Middle Eastern countries like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are turning to the arts to reconstitute Muslim identity in the 21st century. Many of the changes required in becoming “greener” entail new designs in products and buildings.

Humanists and artists are the voices calling out in the desert, for they are the only ones who advocate the power of language. Moreover, if we are to solve the social ills of our time, we need the skills of being human, which we call *karunungan*. We can solve the problems of poverty, human trafficking, and corruption if we are advocates of what is human. This is the agenda of the journal of the School of Humanities: to participate in becoming divine by becoming truly human: *Ang Magpakatao Para sa Sangkatauhan*. Having said this, we present Volume 1 Number 1 of *The Journal of Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities*. The articles in varying degrees of intensity articulate the Agenda of Change we desire for ourselves as the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila University. They may not embody perfectly the Renaissance we have outlined above, but they already incarnate the Humanist we want to produce: namely, a Filipino scholar writing and teaching the methods of the Humanities towards the renewal and strengthening of this, our *Katipunan*.

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