



Editor's Note

On behalf of the Editorial Team, I am pleased to introduce the maiden issue of *Simbolismo: Signs, Identities, Meanings* (herein referred to as *Simbolismo*). To establish our online journal and finally publish our maiden issue was not an easy feat. From the ideation process in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, to our career movements, to some detours and redirections in order to pursue a niche journal that speaks for ourselves, and to the failed attempts to engage some partners to collaborate with us for this intellectual endeavour, we did not lose courage, faith, and hope to make this happen. We stumbled, but we pursued and persisted all for knowledge building, knowledge sharing, and intellectual growth. We believed in ourselves because we could not afford to put our ideas to waste, and we could not afford to stay silent.

The essence of this journal is embodied by the shared interest and passion of the Editorial Team – to view and understand the world as symbolic, a space and place where symbols and sign systems abound waiting to be deciphered because their meanings matter so much to us and to the bigger world in which we live. We believe that these signs and sign systems have deeper contextual, social, cultural, political, or personal meanings moving beyond the literal meaning. These signs and sign systems reside and are captured in images, texts, narratives or stories, literature, poetry, folk songs, dances, lived experiences, media, visuals, emotions, struggles, and memories and states of mind of individuals, groups, or communities (including ourselves) that represent ideas that stand for something bigger.

We believe that through an exploration of the signs that reside in the world around us, we can locate our identity and galvanize our sense of place and positionality in the communities in which we live, and in the expanding diaspora in which we continue to tread. Signs and symbols summon us to engage in constant reflection and rumination as our way of maintaining a deeper connection with our distant past as a people and a community with rich history, heritage, traditions, and culture so that we can keep living the present and forging ourselves for the future.

The release of the maiden issue of *Simbolismo* is a testament to the enduring passion of the Editorial Team in pursuing semiotic studies as a creative expression of our ideas and lived experiences as academics, researchers, and individuals operating in our own spaces, contexts, or communities. However, the establishment of *Simbolismo* would have not been possible if we had not received the intellectual generosity of esteemed professors, academics, researchers, professionals, scholars, artists, and development workers from various universities and organisations in the Philippines, Singapore, and abroad who graciously agreed to be a part of our International Advisory Board.

Simbolismo embodies the principles and philosophy of semiotics as the intersubjective mediation by signs. It also represents the active engagement of the editors, reviewers, and the international advisory board in ongoing and emergent conversations on thinking qualitatively in research guided by semiotics as a theoretical and methodological lens (macro) entangled within specific fields or disciplines (micro) that we are pursuing such as communication, literature/poetry, English language studies, sociocultural studies, media studies, visual arts, creative writing, folk literature and dance, lived experience, memory and emotions, to name a few. Embedded in these essays, artworks and poems is the immense power of a semiotic interpretant entrenched deep within us provoking us to engage in making sense of our emotions, thoughts, values, and beliefs about ourselves and the world in which we live.

This maiden issue features ten essays coming from undergraduate students at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore who were undertaking an inquiry and communication course tasked at writing a critical op-ed essay. Wong Jing Qing Vanessa argues that when we fear loss, and when we grieve from loss, it is because we want to love and be loved. And when we recognise this, we might be able to teach ourselves to accept loss and move on. Kyaw Zin Thant, on the other hand, believes that even if “breaking” (a particular style of a street dance) has become highly competitive and commercialised due to its introduction *to* and inclusion *in* the Olympic Games, it remains an artful expression of one’s identity and an authentic self because the breaker perceives it to be, and chooses to be.

With the intense desire of the human being to win, Cher Yue Yang posits that winning is so sought after not because we truly desire it, but because we fear the consequences of failure. He, therefore, shares an insight: to shift our perspective to see losses as lessons rather than failures to offer ourselves a sense of liberation from the vicious cycle of chasing victory. Lim

Ray'En develops this further by investigating this human desire to win in the context of arcades and casinos. He argues that if we develop an awareness of what happens to ourselves when we experience the thrill, excitement, and anticipation while manipulating those claw machines in the arcades and casinos, then we could better navigate the fine line between entertainment, experience, and obsessive habits, and we could possibly avoid the vicious cycle of disappointment and loss. This awareness of anticipation as a human reflex will teach us to understand why we are attracted to risks, to engage in the gaming experience thoughtfully, and ensure that excitement enriches rather than diminishes our lives.

On the aspect of seeking constancy and familiarity in the fast-changing world, Lim Kee Boon shares a thought-provoking insight about returning to our favourite food stall and eating the same dish on a regular basis. He asserts that the allure of the familiar is not only about convenience or nostalgia but also about the desire for belonging, the desire for some things to stay the same when everything else around us keeps changing. It is also about the human desire for sensual pleasure - enjoyment of taste, warmth, and feel. That familiar burst of flavour, the satisfaction of a warm, delectable dish, are small pleasures that ground us in the moment and remind us of what it means to feel human, and to be human. On the concept of time, Jayanty Maha Ananya, suggests that the familiarity that we find in the unfamiliar may be a testament to the deep, recurring patterns of human existence; that our souls are experiencing the same frame of time again and again, whether it be due to reincarnation or the actual repetition or cycle of time. Such familiarity in the unfamiliar is a testimony that we are reliving the experiences that our ancestors have gone through because their memories are being passed down to us in time and with time, with or without our notice - an echo of the past in one way or another finding grounding in the present that we are living, and what is to come.

But what about nostalgia? Foo Jing Lui Jonah postulates that places or spaces in which we have created vivid memories have so much impact to human connection, relationships, and the desire of the human spirit to hold on. He adds that places serve as a mirror, reflecting both impermanence and transformation, reminding us not only of what has been lost but also of what endures in our memory. However, he argues that memories forged from those places and spaces do not stop time and ourselves from moving forward. Places reveal the fragile, enduring, yet fleeting nature of human connection; they do not only remind us of the aching nostalgia that we cling to, but also afford us this resolve to let go and carry on.

In art, Wu Chloe argues that art as a free form of expression can be stunted with legalities and policies that have more bearing in terms of how governments manage their socioeconomic affairs; however, to find meaning in street or public art, the artists and their intentions might be pushed to the periphery and fade in the shadows. What emerges is the power of the passersby, the public, the collective making sense of this art in juxtaposition to their beliefs, values, perceptions, and lived experiences. What gives creativity such as art its value and meaning is *us* – the greater audience, the hivemind that seeks to manifest meaning from our volatile environments.

In terms of bravery and heroism, Swetha Sudhakar explores the reasons that firefighters hold as they confront risks in performing a noble profession – to run to danger in order to save lives. She argues that firefighting is effective because of teamwork, camaraderie, and stringent training of firefighters in extinguishing fires to save lives. However, there is more to this than meets the eye. Beyond the call to serve and a sense of fulfilment, fighting fires reveals a deeply complex psychological interplay where fear, ego, narcissism, tolerance of pain, and an almost playful defiance of danger intersect. Firefighters' actions challenge us to reconsider our own perceptions of courage and bravery: not as the absence of fear, but as an intricate rhythm between risk, resilience, ego, narcissism, and the unspoken allure of the human mind in confronting those moments of fighting the fire as a way of affirming self-worth.

Then, there is the concept of happiness. Viewed from the lens of the migrant workers working in massive construction projects in Singapore, Joshua Tan Wei Jun discovers wisdom in the way migrant workers live their lives and how it changed the way he perceives happiness. Facing wage discrimination, deportability, and poor mental health while working under time pressure, these migrant workers find joy in the simplest pleasures of sipping *kopi* before starting an arduous task, and drinking an ice-cold can of beer to end a long day's work. Migrant workers can overcome those difficult sacrifices in a foreign soil for one reason: to provide a better life for their families back in their home country. Such act of selflessness and heroism despite living a life of dearth is an eye-opening experience for Joshua, making him reevaluate how he views the concepts of comfort, privilege, and entitlement against the concepts of joy, happiness, and fulfilment.

This maiden issue also highlights four artworks. John Michael Caneda shares his journey of strength and purpose symbolised by the character of a turtle – slow but is determined to reach

its destination. We can reach our destination if we cultivate a sense of purpose within us, if we hold on to our dreams, and if we persist despite the odds, just like the turtle. We carry on and overcome obstacles despite how difficult they can be, just like the turtle. Jeric P. Lausin, on the other hand, cannot stop reminiscing his nostalgic past in the remote island of Biliran in the Philippines. Despite the dearth of life, he cannot afford to forget the simplicity and tranquillity of life in their rural province, and the memories forged there with his family and cousins will stay with him wherever he goes.

An unknown artist also shares an unfortunate and painful memory from super typhoon Haiyan. Losing two siblings and being a witness to the thousands of deaths from the disaster has been a deeply traumatic experience for her that is certainly difficult to bear. Guilt keeps haunting her for not being able to save her younger siblings from the deluge, and for not being able to contribute to environmental preservation. She is willing to carry such guilt as a way of emotional catharsis. In addition, Esther Wansing Soo's painting illustrates how a life of routine gives us the courage to leave, to travel, to go there and discover not only peoples, places, and cultures, but also ourselves, because it is in these routines and a mundane life that we take time to understand ourselves better, to establish grounding, and find meaning in existence. As Soo (2025) said, "To go there is not simply an escape, but a calling. We are responding to a call that echoes through the ages which allows us to listen to our core, our voice, our humanity, and to keep grounded in who we are, and why we keep living." (p. 65).

Three poems also found a space in this maiden issue. Written in Cebuano or Bisaya, these poems emerge as vehicles of honest expressions of emotions that these artists bravely share in their own rhyme, metre, and form. Steneli D. Oraya honestly and bravely expresses her love and longing for her deceased grandmother. She uses vivid descriptions to foreshadow the interplay of love and pain, depth and suffering, and this constant tug of holding on and letting go of such purity of love for her grandmother. Looking above into the vastness of the skies is her way of maintaining her relationship with her deceased grandmother whose death seemed to have taken a part of her sense of being. Jerlyn May C. Berador, on the other hand, presents a comical account of her relationship with her father. Rich in local colour, she narrates a thrilling experience of collecting coins from her father's pocket only to satisfy her desire for a sweet, fruity candy – a simple joy that a life of dearth can offer. Lastly, Lowella Jane Cabahug Eugenio expresses her admiration to a friend who symbolises integrity, accountability, fairness, strength, and wisdom to fight against the wickedness of the world in his own little ways. "Intoy", an

endearment of a mother or father to a son, or a big sister to a younger brother, signifies something bigger: a David, or an underdog, who is willing to triumph over the bigger evils of society.

Before I end, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the following individuals who remained with me through thick and thin: the Editorial Team, Fraulein Oclarit, Angelo Tubac, and Ali Pinzon, for staying with me despite the challenges we faced; Loudie Suliva for his technical expertise and support making this online journal possible with OJS-PKP as platform and workflow; and my nephew Kurt Zackary Delante Oraya for his youth and optimism, such that when we dream and manifest that dream and work for it, it will eventually come to fruition. Consciously or not, he is a constant reminder of the mantra “Just do it and keep going”. His innocence and purity of soul is worth a thousand attempts to make an online journal possible because, with his words, “Just do it, and believe in yourself”, I found courage and will to carry on.

Here is to more symbolic but valid and meaningful interpretations of the world through the lens of semiotics grounded in our lived experience, and in our existence in this ever-changing world.



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