SIMBOLISMO: SIGNS, IDENTITIES, MEANINGS

Volume 1, issue 2

Editor's Note

We welcome you to Issue 2 of Simbolismo!

Underpinned by the theme, "Myth, Perception, and Time", we offer you a research article, a few essays, and a few artwork that explore the world of myths and how our perception of reality, identity and time is entangled with such power of myths to transcend space, place, and time enabling us to achieve a deeper understanding of the world in which we live.

Nimrod Delante presents a semiotic exploration and interpretation of descriptive accounts *of* and *about* aswang in the academic texts. He performed a critical reading of 28 articles on aswang and utilised Peircean semiotics as a lens through which aswang significations are captured in his interpretation. Seven striking themes that stand for something bigger (signs) emerged with their possible interpretations (objects). Nimrod shares thought-provoking insights about how aswang has permeated the Filipino ways of seeing and knowing, and what we can do about this seemingly disturbing phenomenon residing deeply in the Filipino consciousness on the levels of theory or abstraction, state of mind and behaviour, cultural practice, pedagogy, and choice.

Edwin Tuazon explains how *kapre* (a tree-dwelling creature) symbolises the Filipinos' rampant use *of* and engagement *with* prohibited drugs in the Philippines. The wickedness and power of the drug lords have tremendously added societal pressure and intensified the entangled relationship between corruption, drug involvement, and drug addiction. This nonstop sniffing of the *tabako* of the *kapre* symbolises perverse addiction, a human frailty that consumes and destroys the very soul of drug users. Edwin also shares his symbolic interpretation of *sigbin* or *amamayong*. More than *sigbin's* paralysing effect on its target, in which it can attack it with just one sniff, is *sigbin's* symbolic representation of a corrupt government that controls, manipulates, and annihilates people's desires, hopes and dreams. *Sigbin* seems to be a signification of political paralysis that obliterates effective leadership and the courage of the Filipino to make things better and live a good life.

In exploring the cyclical nature of time, **Mehra Prisha** pursues the question, "In a place where land is limited and history is integrated with steel and glass, what happens if we, as a society, keep foregoing history in the name of modernity and progress? What if detachment becomes more palpable than a stronger link to the past?" She argues that maybe modernity doesn't have to erase memory. Maybe forgetting isn't as complete as it seems. The past lingers — in gestures, in objects, in rituals, in musings, in people who remember. And time seems to be cyclical, moving back and forth like a helix. Forgetting isn't neutral; it reveals what a society chooses to value. The question is not whether progress should move forward, but whether it can do so without leaving its past behind, especially if the act of remembering is not only individual, but a collective of consciousness, boldness and being courageous enough to refuse to forget.

Similarly, **Celeste Ruth Chia Yu Xuan** explores how the erosion of collective memory mirrors the gradual decay of natural landmarks like the Pengerang Volcanics—and why time seems to dull society's urgency to preserve the stories of suffering that forged the liberty they now inherit. She is saddened by how we, as a people, can seem to forget the past and history so easily. She argues that memory, though at times eroded, can endure as geological testaments to time's passage, earth's history, and human consciousness. Singapore's history, no matter how unpleasant, must be made more vivid in its streets and shores. Without more plaques and gravestones to acknowledge the sacrifices made by its ancestors, the nation's achievements might become morally and ethically shallow. Hence, Singapore must gain the courage to remember and not to easily forget. Not only will preserving the nation's darkest past and stories impel Singapore to honour the sacrifices made to shape its liberty, but it will also ensure that its future is rooted in more than concrete and pixels.

In an effort to capture tradition and heritage on paper, **Nimrod Delante** tried his best to connect with a lone family of women in his hometown of Bool in Culaba, Biliran, the Philippines, to witness and document an ancient tradition of breadmaking popularly known as *pahan*, the local equivalent of the *pandesal* that is common in cities. Nimrod has been mesmerised by how these women are confronting the odds just so they can keep a tradition alive. In an interview, Inay Violeta shared, "This is what we learned from our mother, and I promised her that I would keep this baking tradition for as long as I live. This makes me excited every day. This makes me keep breathing, living, hoping. This is our life.

This is who we are." Nimrod was humbled with the realisation that Inay Violeta, her sister, Tiya Manding, and her daughter, Mary Grace, are a living symbol of someone who holds on to an ancient tradition, someone who exudes not only strength of spirit and character but also reverence for the wisdom of her parents and ancestors. Frail and old, they symbolise the courage to hold on to the past and make it alive, to keep a heritage that is on the brink of collapse, and carry it forward with conviction, dignity and grace. They also symbolise the purity of the soul and the authenticity of the self. They are people who try to persist and carry on even if things have changed drastically, and even if the remaining option is to let go. After all, in this world of chaos, disruption, and fear, "perhaps what we need is to stick to a tradition that defines us and draws us together as one big family, a tradition that compels us toward our honest, authentic, and humble selves, a tradition that makes us feel safe, and a tradition in which we feel we belong", Nimrod proclaims.

Driven by his devotion to accept and celebrate the tremendous influence of his parents over time as esteemed academics, **Jesus Rafael Jarata** declares that he is the unwilling next generation in service, who follows in his parents' footsteps with a blend of piety and intransigence, asking himself: What does it mean to teach in a place where your own becoming is buried beneath someone else's legacy? In a college in which his parents served all their lives, Jesus argues that this is where his father gave his heart, and where his mother found her voice. This is where he keeps returning, hoping, believing —not out of nostalgia— but in continuity. He persists not because he has to, but because he is able. After all, there is meaning in persisting. And there is so much meaning to carry on the legacy that our parents have started for the future generation.

Mabel Tan Jia Wei, on the other hand, has been torn between the past and her future, and how the forces of nostalgia bring back a mixture of emotions that envelope her senses – some light, some heavy. Her persistent interrogation about nostalgia has led her to the question: Why are we so drawn to revisit the past and hold on to what once was, despite knowing what lies ahead with the relentless tide of modernisation? She argues that nostalgia is not simply a back-and-forth motion, but instead, a dynamic relationship of tension; one that holds on, even as it implores us to let go. It is a rhythmic movement, a tug towards the past, followed by a release into the present. It is not a linear movement, but a dance of motion and memory that we are caught in, oscillating between revisiting our unattainable past and imagining an unforeseen future.

Consequently, in his attempt to paint a picture about freedom, **Rithvik Ravikumar** ignites our imagination about how freedom is viewed by those people who are serving time in prison, and what happens to this view of freedom when they go out, as well as their perception of their identity. Rithvik uncovers a myth that prison release promises freedom and emotional restoration because those frequent encounters with freedom through family visits make it feel more like an illusion rather than a reality. Freedom becomes psychologically unachievable, and people in prison will decide to ease the pain by emotionally detaching from the concept of freedom altogether. An unfortunate irony continues because upon their release, many ex-inmates feel alienated from a world that pushes them away. When freedom is stigmatised, it turns into a disabling force. Freedom gives movement without purpose; it provides presence but refuses space and place. It also worsens alienation instead of reinstating identity, courage and will. Rithvik asserts that rehabilitation does not start at the prison entrance, but in a society that is determined to help reintegrate those who were once cast out. In a city where freedom catches flight daily, freedom is a real test that lies not in departure but in return.

Back to exploring identity and becoming, **Keeley Canama** proclaims the value of looking people in the eye. As a famous saying goes, "The eyes are a mirror to one's soul", Keeley confesses that it does not pain us if we could slow down a bit in life, if we could cherish those moments we spend with our friends and loved ones, and if we could "see" them more as human beings with emotions, stories, and struggles. Perhaps this is our way of saying, "I feel you. I see you. You are not alone."

In the same vein, **Mike Ethan Florentino** admonishes the adults of this generation to examine the masks that people around us wear, especially children, because they have so much impact on their identity and becoming. He retorts that children wear invisible masks because they could be hiding strong or vulnerable emotions growing inside of them because of fear of being misunderstood, excluded, or cast out. Sometimes, this mask acts as a disguise, a deceiving veil that we, adults, seem to ignore most of the time, perhaps because we don't try enough to notice. Navigating a difficult world around them, wearing a mask will help conceal the anxiety growing deep inside them. This mask allows them to navigate the boundaries of fear and bravery, of rejection and acceptance, of make-believe and reality. They use the mask as a survival tool, yet, at times, they are drawn into the tension of

keeping this make-believe self from the real, inner self that longs to be seen, heard, and understood.

And in a world of chaos and disruption, these tough times in which we somehow lose grounding and positionality in the world in which we live, **Kaithe Izhabel Montilla** impels us to go back to our humble beginnings and appreciate the serenity of a simple house surrounded by trees and flowers. A small, airy bungalow built with a balanced combination of native and modern materials is perhaps what we need. With a roof of red clay tiles or nipa leaves to cool the house all day long, huge windows with shell panels or sliding glass to let the cool breeze from the mountains in, and a patio and backyard lushed with orchids, bougainvillaea, daisies, roses, and other flowers and fruit trees, what else could we ask for? Isn't this the kind of life worth living? A bucolic life that we often desire so that we can regain our balance in this chaotic world?

Enjoy reading!

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