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The Panel

2 April 2019

Candidacy Portfolio

<div align="center">Going Full Circle</div>

Academic adolescence

<div align="right">this is the oppressor's language
yet I need to talk to you.</div>
<div align="center">ADRIENNE RICH, "THE BURNING OF PAPER INSTEAD OF CHILDREN"</div>

<div align="center">I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor's language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance.
bell hooks, "LANGUAGE: TEACHING NEW WORLDS/NEW WORDS"</div>

Some time between last year's summer and today, I seem to have forgotten how to write "academically." The confluence of (a) physically returning to Asia for a longer term than usual—from December 2018 to April 2019, to be exact—and regularly switching from one language to another; (b) the different decolonization movements occurring all over the world, i.e., the de-centering of dominant narratives in female spaces, people of color spaces, etc. ; and (c) personally wrestling with what it means to be a postcolonial doctoral student has put me in a quandary.

If I did what the academic institution expected of me—for example, submit a candidacy portfolio written in English about what I, a female international student from the Philippines, a third world Southeast Asian nation that had been formerly colonized by the United States, had

done during my graduate studies in America thus far, with everything properly cited in APA—would I be perpetuating certain systemic oppressions?

I probably sound like I'm overthinking things, but bear with me here. For example:

> For the writers who straddle two or more cultures, such as those in the diaspora, the language used for creative purposes is of the utmost importance. The use of one colonial language instead of another in diasporic writings conveys an immediate hierarchical relocation of literature. […] Imperialism has laid the groundwork for globalization by making English the lingua franca for international exchange. (Ponzanesi, 2004, p. 14)

The fact that I'm using English right now implies that there are parts of me that I'm unable to express unless I translate and adjust them to fit the conventional academic frame (which is heavily western). There isn't anything inherently wrong with this per se; after all, any kind of communication relies on different kinds of translation. But now that I'm about to complete my fourth year of graduate studies in the United States and, admittedly, having never deeply grappled with how my identity plays into my scholarship until recently, I now wonder what I might have been suppressing all this time. Am I doing anyone any favors by sticking to what's familiar, what's comfortable, for this so-called institution called "academia"?

In the article "Making the academe matter again," Harvard professor Abraham Loeb (2018) writes about how scholarly work often gives the public the impression that "the truth is revealed through a neat, orderly, and logical process" when "in fact, it resembles a battlefield, littered with miscalculations, failed experiments, and discarded assumptions." Loeb posits that transparency about the research process "might enhance trust and create more space for

innovation, with an informed public accepting that risk is the unavoidable and worthwhile cost of groundbreaking and broadly beneficial discoveries".

This candidacy portfolio is my opportunity to be transparent with you, dear reader, about where I am in my academic journey. I am terrified about the fact that I seem to be in the middle of some kind of rebellious academic adolescence and you are caught in the sandstorm of it. From this point on, I cannot promise a linear narrative that neatly falls into a theoretical framework. I cannot promise that I can compartmentalize myself into separate boxes of academic, artist, citizen, and so on. I cannot promise that I won't contradict myself at some point. (I probably will write "…as an academic" at some point and wince.) I cannot promise beautiful prose. I cannot even promise that I can capture myself in perfect English. I cannot promise that you will like what you see.

Haruki Murakami, in *Kafka on the Shore*, writes, "…this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something inside of you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step."

Let's go then.

How this is going to play out

In American psychologist Jerome Bruner's spiral curriculum, the student is introduced to a concept multiple times throughout their school career, with increasing complexity in each revisit. For example, the teacher presents a new topic, like fact and opinion, in a way that's

grounded in their students' experiences, i.e., how it manifests social media. Together, they learn more about the topic and apply it into action, such as an online collaborative fact-checking project. The students later re-encounter the same topic (with possibly a different teacher), but approach it more deeply; in this case, perhaps, logical fallacies. Students also are encouraged to relate what they're learning with other topics they know. The figure below illustrates the main process:
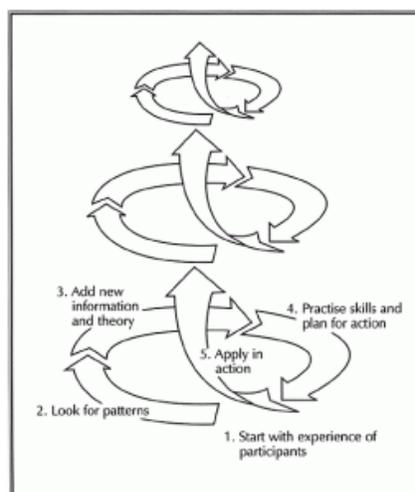

Figure 1. Bruner's Spiral Curriculum
From https://vocalability.com/spiral-learning-and-voice/

Bruner's spiral curriculum reflects Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's praxis. Praxis emphasizes the indivisibility of reflection and action. For Freire (1970), reflection without action is mere verbalism, while action without reflection is shallow activism (p. 87). Critical education can only occur through the interaction between theory (learning a concept), action (embodying the concept), and reflection (examining what happened when the theory was applied and formulating a new theory).

Figure 2. Paulo Freire's Praxis
From https://www.resilience.org/stories/2017-01-11/what-we-need-is-some-culture-part-3/

My own learning journey, to a certain extent, is best represented by these two educational models. I learn best through the combination of reflection (though I usually don't completely understand the theory the first, or even the second or the third time) and action (though the application isn't always successful). I also learn more deeply through repetition (though it isn't ever repeated in exactly the same way). It is a messy journey composed of intersecting spirals of varying sizes and depth, of varying rhythms and meters, of varying clarity and vagueness. If I were to draw this, it would look something like this:
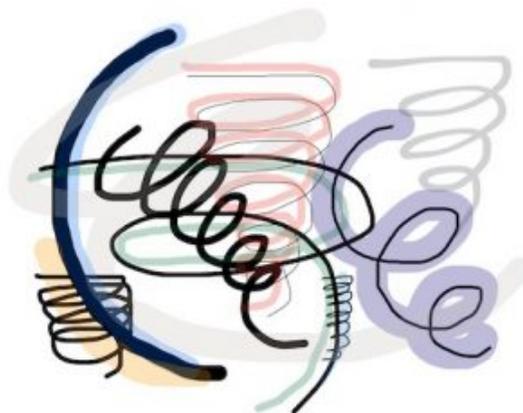

Figure 3. Laura's Learning Journey

In spite of the word "journey" carrying with it an image of linearity, I have "organized" my candidacy statement into the following categories: academic adolescence, civic engagement; youth, education, and theatre-making; creative placemaking; returning home; and gaps. These are the primary themes which I feel have arisen from my studies thus far. Please feel free to engage with them in any order.

Civic engagement

Growing up in Metro Manila as a young Chinese-Filipino, it was inevitable for me to care about politics. All I had to do was look outside the window of my family's car to see the staggering divide between social classes in Metro Manila. Significant political events also marked my formative years. I was in elementary school when Chinese-Filipinos became the primary target of kidnappings. My school, which primarily had Chinese-Filipino students, cancelled all field trips for over a decade. When I was in high school, the second People Power Revolution happened, successfully ousting the corrupt President Joseph Estrada but ushering in the equally corrupt, if not more, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Not long after that, September 11 shook the world and forever changed it.

I can't speak for everyone in my generation, but my much younger self took the charge of being my country's future seriously. In retrospect though, this sense of responsibility was rudimentary: I paid attention to politics, wrote critical papers about society for school, and participated in outreach programs. In other words, while there was nothing inherently wrong with any of these, I saw civic engagement as something apart from my day to day life.
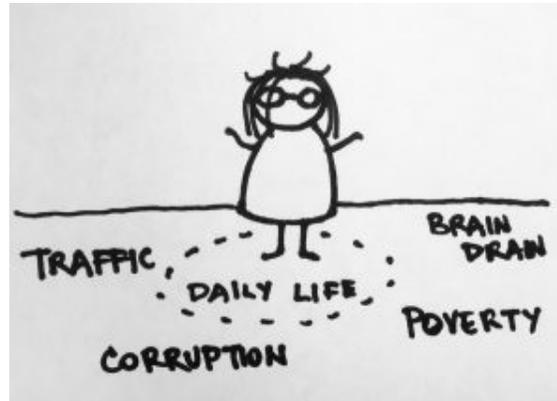
Figure 1. Civic engagement is separate from my daily life

However, a shift occurred the year before I graduated college. A series of suicides occurred among the student and faculty body of Ateneo de Manila University and a number of theatre students, myself included, felt the university wasn't responding to what was clearly a campus mental health crisis. (I didn't know about suicide contagion at that time.) We students mobilized and chose to stage Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*. We earned the support of our faculty and the school administration as well as collaborated with the university guidance office so that we could make as safe a space as possible throughout our run. We incorporated pre- and post-show rituals to ease our audience, mostly college students, in and out of the sensitive material. Overall, it was well-received and we were even given an award by the university at the end of the year, but that wasn't what stayed with me. What struck me was the awe I felt for the entire process of collaboration. I truly felt in my bones that I was part of the university community and that my voice as an artist mattered.

What happened was, although I wasn't able to completely understand this until later in graduate school, my understanding of civic engagement deepened: civic engagement is not only the water we swim in, it is also the boat we are all on. While it's important to engage in dialogue about the systemic issues that plague society, we enact our values on a local level. Darren

O'Donnell (2018), artistic director of Mammalian Diving Reflex, articulates this better than I do. He writes how in analytic sociology, "[i]t doesn't matter how macro the social phenomenon, be it neighbourhood segregation, low scholastic achievement of certain demographics, different mortality rates for people with different income levels, and on and on. All of these phenomena come into being through interactions between individuals" (p.50). This, of course, does not entail that systemic oppression doesn't exist; "what this means for artistic social practice or, indeed, any intervention is that the place to begin is between *individuals*" (p.51, emphasis mine).
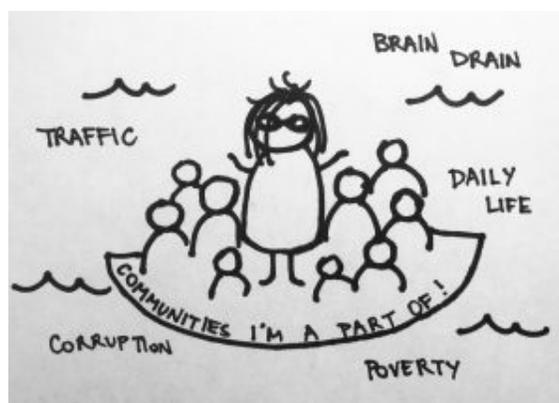

Figure 2. Civic engagement is everything all together

My studies in the United States–in the City University of New York (CUNY) and New York University (NYU)—have given me the opportunity to engage with civic engagement both on the macro and micro level as an artist. I would research about, discuss, and make theatre about systemic oppressions and their manifestations, i.e., racism and gentrification, in my classes and workshops with my colleagues. For instance, for our final project in Joe Salvatore's Ethnodrama course, we had to conduct an ethnodramatic research in groups. My group interviewed a diverse group of women on their thoughts about the #MeToo Movement. On the one hand, we were engaging society on a macro sense because the research was moving towards

a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Yet on the other hand, we were also engaging in a micro sense in multiple ways: (1) we conversed and connected with people about a topic they wanted to talk about and (2) we embodied the research by doing a reading of the ethnodrama to two groups of people and listened to their feedback.

I still have a lot to learn about civic engagement. As someone who has only participated in a march once—and it was the 2017 Women's March in New York City at that, not even one based in the Philippines—I reflect often about what it means to fight for equity and justice. During the Fall of 2018, I took Noelle Damico's Community Organizing course in Wagner. Many of us students were wondering if bringing about social change solely meant protests, strikes, and direct action. I remember a classmate confiding in an embarrassed whisper, "I'm not exactly the activist type." But what exactly is activism? When the Black Panther Party established its "Free Breakfast for Children" Program and Eldridge Cleaver commented, "Aw, that's a sissy program." Bobby Seale took him aside and said, "That's some one-dimensional thinking, man. Voter registration and community programs unify the people, Eldridge" (Shames, S. and Seale, B., 2016, pp. 78). Everything and everyone matters in our collective liberation.

I see civic engagement as the foundation and the goal of my passions for working with youth and creative placemaking.

Youth, education, and theatre-making

I often find myself in international settings, like airports and hostels, and there's a common refrain I hear from people, no matter where they're from, whenever we talk about our educational experiences: there's something wrong with the way we're running our schools. Some

shared about how their school would impose its standards on them, like prioritizing subjects such as maths and sciences, even when their interests were clearly something else (and making them feel inferior for being different). Some would share how their school turned a blind eye on the bullying that was going on among the students. Some had a similar story to mine: being measured through grades destroyed all the fun of learning.

I always had a complicated relationship with school. I was a good student and loved to learn, but I despised being graded. I would have studied just as hard and would have, in fact, probably taken more creative risks if I weren't being numerically measured. Education and creativity expert Sir Ken Robinson, in one of his TED talks, says, "we have a system of education that is modeled on the interests of industrialism and in the image of it…Schools are still pretty much organized on factory lines; ringing bells, separate facilities, specialized into separate subjects" (2010). While this isn't the case in some countries, i.e., Finland, and school systems, i.e., Montessori, in countries like the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, this industrial structure of education is something I have observed in traditional schools.

When I taught freshman courses for Ateneo de Manila's English Department, I saw it as an opportunity to learn how school can be done differently. With only Google as my guide, I read about student-centered learning and contract grading, particularly that of writing teacher Peter Elbow's. My colleagues expressed their skepticism; they warned me that students took advantage of kindness. I decided it was worth the risk.

I shared with my classes my own experience as a student and what I hoped to try with them. My words resonated somehow and we embarked on a learning journey all together. We explored literature through different means: digital technology, visual art, home economics (we made eccentric sandwiches to explore taste-centered writing), and, of course, theatre. We did

theatre games, immersed ourselves in fiction for our mock trials, and made original pieces of theatre. Sometimes things went smoothly. Many times our activities didn't go as planned. But because we've collectively agreed on how assessment was to happen, we were able to set the concern of grades aside and just focus on deeply connecting with one another.

Feedback from a previous student in Ateneo de Manila University:

"Miss Cabochan is a very effective teacher. She is very interesting to listen to and it is definitely a guarantee that you'd learn a lot from her. She also tries her best in introducing different methods of teaching to make the class fun. She played a big role in making the class build a close relationship with each other."

From http://projectblue.me/reg/reviews/cabochan-laura-c

Before I get into how educational theatre enters the picture, I want to highlight my most important take-away from my first few years of teaching: faith. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) believes that "faith is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in others before he even meets them face to face…Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation" (p. 91). Young people tend to be the most common targets of ageism, when one discriminates based on age. I wasn't without my own fears at the beginning, but if I wanted to push back against the current educational system, if I wanted to "dare greatly," in Brene Brown's words, I needed to allow myself to be vulnerable; "[my] willingness to own and engage with [my] vulnerability determines the depth of [my] courage and the clarity of [my] purpose" (2012, p. 2).

I began to read more in earnest about educational theatre when I was teaching English as a New Language in Japanese elementary schools in 2014. I was already using dramatic activities,

like role play, to make classes more engaging and student-centered, but when I facilitated a process drama for the first time about mischievous elves who loved to paint, the experience moved not only the teacher in me, but also the theatre-maker. Designing a fiction and immersing in that fiction with young people enchanted me.

I engaged more deeply with process drama when I moved to New York City. In the City University of New York (CUNY) – School of Professional Studies' MA in Applied Theatre program, I learned about dramatic conventions, the building blocks of process drama, from practitioners Chris Vine and Tony Goode. In addition, my two-year apprenticeship under the mentorship of Helen Wheelock, director of the CUNY Creative Arts Team's (CUNY CAT) Early Learning Program, gave me a strong foundation in interactive storytelling, which is CUNY-CAT's term for a physical and verbal call-and-repeat improvisational style of storytelling with young people. I combined all this for my thesis project, *The Bunny Rocket*, a five-day process drama for English as New Language pre-kindergarteners.

In New York University, particularly through the study abroad trip to the United Kingdom, my engagement with process drama continued. Classes with David Montgomery and William Barlow as well as workshops with Geoffrey Readman and Cecily O'Neill refined my appreciation and understanding of the form. Last winter, in Daito Bunka University in Tokyo, Japan, I facilitated a process drama with college seniors. Unlike my previous process drama work which were heavily structured (because I was working with younger participants), I started with a pre-text and chose dramatic conventions that corresponded to the input the participants gave me as we went along.

As I've mentioned earlier, process drama appeals to the theatre-maker in me. I enjoy making different forms of theatre, but I am most interested in learning more about making

interactive theatre for young audiences. For me, there is only a very thin line between process drama and interactive theatre for young audiences and that is that process drama may serve particular academic goals (but so can theatre for young audiences, actually). But aside from that, they both aspire to engage young people in collective, meaningful experiences in all kinds of spaces, from inside a classroom to a museum.

Learning more about interactivity is the reason I took a Games and Education course with June Ahn in Steinhardt's MA in Educational Communication and Technology program. Apart from the dialogical ways of interaction present in dramatic conventions, I wanted to learn how else one can engage participants in an interactive experience. For the entire spring semester, I developed an educational alternative reality game called *The Haze* with peers that mixed eco-consciousness, digital technology, and embodied, theatrical interactions. I not only learned about game mechanics, but also learned the importance of having numerous playtests.

In addition, my experiences in the United Kingdom also made a deep impression on me. The theatre for young audience shows I watched, both interactive and not, namely *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* at the Lyric Theatre, *A Monster Calls* at the Old Vic, and *For King and Country* at the Colab Factory, inspired me to create. The workshops I attended in Rose Bruford College under the guidance of Jeremy White as well as the artist exchange hosted by Coney HQ, a group of interactive theatre-makers based in London whose work I admire, that I participated in introduced me to ways of interactive theatre-making that I had not encountered before.

Learning how to make interactive theatrical experiences for young audiences is a life-long journey because of its endless possibilities. I am curious to see what kind of interactive theatre for young audiences can be created when informed by creative placemaking. While there are countless workshops I want to attend and internships I want to do, the best way to learn

theatre-making, truly, is through actually making it. This late spring, I will be working with a group of artists in developing a theatre for young audience piece about mythical creatures from all over the world. I've also been commissioned to create an interactive theatrical experience for the Children's Festival of the Philippine National Museum for Children (Museo Pambata) in Manila during the summer of 2020.

To be complete transparent, I do not wax poetic about the youth being the future; after all, I myself want to participate in the making of that future. What I do strongly believe is that the youth is one of the most marginalized groups in any community, along with the elderly. They are part of our present and deserve to be recognized and given an active part in all spaces. In his book *The Great Good Place*, sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) asserts that places that recognize the young and the elderly "will be nice for everybody". I agree.

Creative placemaking

On a whim, I went by myself to Onomichi City, Hiroshima on a scaldingly hot summer's day in 2017 for a day trip. (I hadn't even begun my doctoral studies yet during this time.) I walked its docks, trekked its hills, and visited its temples and shopping street. I noted its retro architecture and thought it charming, but didn't make much of it. After drinking a glass of cold hassaku orange juice in the only department store in the city, I boarded the train back to Hiroshima City.

Figure 1. Onomichi / Photographed by Laura Cabochan

But Onomichi stayed there, deep in my unconscious, and emerged during my Qualitative Research Methods class with Dr. Elizabeth Norman during my first semester in NYU Steinhardt. Our final requirement was to write a research proposal and, because I thought then that I would be doing my dissertation eventually in Japan, I remembered that day in Onomichi City and, for some mysterious reason, unquestioningly chose it to be my topic. I read more about it and designed an ethnographic research proposal about the role the arts is playing in its revitalization efforts. (In spite of the word "city," Onomichi City is seen as the *inaka*, the countryside, and like many of Japan's *inaka*, it's facing a number of problems ranging from a decreasing and greying population to abandoned houses.)

Through that project, while I was searching for a theoretical framework, I came across Anne Gadwa and Ann Markusen's white paper on creative placemaking, a partnership between arts and non-arts organizations that leverages the power of arts and culture. It "animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired"

(Markusen and Gadwa, 2010, p.3). Since learning about the field, it's been one of the main focuses of my doctoral studies.

The following semester, I took a creative placemaking course under Steinhardt's Visual Arts Administration program, taught by Sarah Calderon, the managing director of ArtPlace America, an organization that aims to position the "arts and culture as a core sector of community planning and development" (ArtPlace America). Her class introduced us to the field: its origins, its strengths and challenges, the ethics surrounding it, etc.; we also read different case studies based in the United States. That summer, I took a week-long workshop at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago with Sojourn Theatre and the Center for Performance and Civic Practice. Our time was divided between learning Sojourn Theatre's theatrical devising techniques and reflecting on and dialoguing about the different ways artists and non-arts organizations can collaborate.

I've been pursuing creative placemaking projects, or activities related to it, since then:

That same summer, I returned to Onomichi City and volunteered for a non-profit organization called NPO *Onomichi Akiya Saisei Project* (Onomichi Vacant House Renovation Project). For three weeks, I worked in a building that they have restored into a hostel as well as participated in community activities, like a *machiaruki*, a city walk, and visiting many of the abandoned buildings in the area. Later that fall, along with a group of Filipino and Filipino-American artists, I designed and facilitated a walking tour of Little Manila in Queens, New York City. That winter—which is this winter—I interned for Sengawa Theatre, a public theatre located in Chofu City's Sengawa District. I was an assistant stage manager for their community-based staged reading festival as well as a co-facilitator for some of their community-based theatre workshops.

Given how I intend to return to Asia, I want to deepen my knowledge about creative placemaking in the region and connect more with fellow Asian practitioners. I am applying to the ADAM Artist Lab in Taipei, Taiwan (Asia Discovers Asia Meeting for Contemporary Performance). This July to August 2019, a group of artists from all over Asia will be reflecting on the theme "Performing (with/in) Communities: Relations, Dynamics and Politics;" I believe I'll learn a lot of valuable things from this experience. I acknowledge, however, the possibility that I may not actually be able to attend this because I am in the middle of my doctoral studies. I will consult with my advisor and proceed from there.

The collaborative nature and hyperlocality—focusing on a small, specific geography—of creative placemaking resonates deeply with me. I suspect part of it is because, as an international student, as someone who is an amalgam of different cultures, I don't feel rooted to any place, but long for it (like a romantic). But more than that, I believe engaging in place, in all its materiality, can help strengthen human connections as well as the earth. Applied theatre scholar Helen Nicholson writes, "For applied theatre, sensory attentiveness to different forms of ontological encounters suggests that *affective experience may prompt a disposition towards the political by recognising that human agency and non-human actants are mutually embedded*" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 253; emphasis mine). In this age of great human division and ecological tension, creative placemaking, which is connected to applied theatre, has much to offer.

Returning home

I have never fallen in love with a place before, but I knew I fell in love, hard, with Onomichi. I slept less and less as the day I had to leave drew closer and closer. I would spend the

balmy midnights in this secondhand bookstore called "20 Decibel," which was open from 11PM to 3AM, and would stroll back into my room at around 1:30AM. One of those evenings, a line came to me:

I leave so that I could come back.

During my application interview for New York University, I remember sharing my frustrations with David Montgomery and Nan Smithner about how relatively little applied theatre literature there is written from an Asian perspective in the field's canon, in spite of the fact that applied theatre has long been present in the continent, particularly in the form of theatre for development. I expressed my desire to contribute to this body of knowledge.

Having lived in New York for almost two years by then and outside of the Philippines for roughly three, I should have realized my hubris.

What the hell did I know?

Apart from not having physically lived in the region for a significant period of time, almost everything I knew about applied theatre had come from Western scholarship, so how was I to write from an Asian perspective given how Westernized I was? Could I still write from an Asian perspective? What was an Asian perspective anyway?

Confused and hungry for answers, I intentionally returned to Asia this winter. Overall, I spent three months in Japan and three weeks in the Philippines, involving myself in different arts activities. It confirmed my suspicions: I knew very little about applied theatre in Asia. (What else did I expect, being so immersed in my life in the United States?) The terminologies were different, for example, in Japan, the community-based arts were more often called "art projects"

and were more the domain of performance artists, rather than theatre artists. The underlying

philosophies also varied depending on the artists and/or the arts organization, such as in the

Philippine Educational Theatre Association, the line between applied theatre and drama therapy

was even blurrier than how I knew it to be in the United States. I facilitated workshops in both

countries and realized the limits of translation; speaking in English, unfortunately, just didn't

have the same resonance.

I became concerned not only about my lack of knowledge, but whether or not I even had

a place in Asia if and when I completed my doctoral studies.

Thankfully, my fears were misplaced; there was room for me. The artists I had worked

with, both in Japan and the Philippines, wanted to collaborate in the future. The organizations I

had connected with, like Sengawa Theatre in Tokyo, invited me to return anytime. Ateneo de

Manila University had agreed to support my dissertation project. I attribute these positive

outcomes not only to the knowledge that I had learned from my studies, but also to the values

that have been inculcated in me by this field, such as meeting people where they are at and

deeply listening.

A part of me, however, remained and still remains conflicted. Brazilian philosopher and

educator Paulo Freire (1970) warns against "cultural invasion," wherein people enter and impose

their own culture on a community different from theirs, i.e., colonization, the intent to "civilize"

(p.152) Because white supremacy exists, I am nervous about carelessly using my Western

education. I am nervous to write about Asia in English and possibly exoticize it. In *Paradoxes of*

Postcolonial Cultural, Sandra Ponzanesi (2004) writes, "[s]ome Third World intellectuals have

made postcolonial issues their very own warhorse so as to obtain prominent positions within

Western academia. In so doing they become complicit with the Western establishment they set

out to undermine, and they exploit the cause of truly disenfranchised groups for their own reward" (p. 7).

I do not want to be one of those Third World intellectuals.

During the same interview I mentioned earlier, I declared I would do my dissertation in Asia. While there was a stretch during which I thought I would do my project with the Filipino-American community in New York City, specifically Queens, returning to Asia reminded me of why I pursued further studies in the first place five years ago.

I left so that I could come back.

Gaps

Since last summer, I have been working on pulling myself together, owning what I've learned, and putting myself out there—standing in the front lines, risking, and making mistakes. From initiating a student lab in NYU to interning in a theatre in Tokyo, it's all been very exciting, but it hasn't been easy. The more I engage with different communities, the more I realize that, to quote Socrates, "I know that I know nothing."
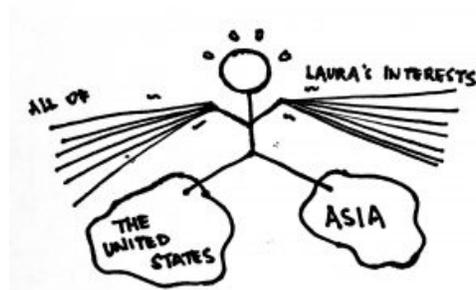

Figure 1. Laura Trying to Pull It Together

In spite being told multiple times to "just get the PhD over with," I must have changed my mind about my dissertation topic three times before finally coming to a decision about it. I didn't do so because I wanted this to be the pinnacle of my graduate student career (or the narrow road that would dictate my future as a theatre-maker forever), far from it; but I did want a meaningful topic that would ring true to where I was in my life's journey: my current strengths and weaknesses, my interests, and, most importantly, my values. Unsurprisingly, it took coming home to Asia to find some clarity. For my dissertation, I am returning to the Philippines to engage in place—Katipunan Avenue, to be exact—through theatre-making, with college students from Ateneo de Manila University.

Pursuing this topic combines my interests and experiences thus far, such as working with youth in school settings, devising theatre, and interacting with a physical locale. It gives me the opportunity to not only pursue my academic curiosities—i.e., Helen Nicholson's "relational ontology of applied theatre," which "suggests that *affective experience may prompt a disposition towards the political by recognising that human agency and non-human actants are mutually embedded*" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 253; emphasis mine)—but to also reflect on, in an embodied manner, what I feel to be is an important question in our era: what does it mean to civically engage as an individual and as a collective? Finally, because this topic will bring me back to Asia, I get to more deeply wrestle with what it means to be an Asian practitioner of applied theatre.

There are challenges ahead:

The biggest hurdle is rediscovering what it means to me, personally, to be in academia. Late last year, I became disenchanted with the entire enterprise. I didn't want to quit, but I had

begun to drag my heels. I didn't speak to anyone about it because I was ashamed. After all, I knew what I was getting into right from the beginning, i.e., publishing in journals, presenting in conferences, etc., so it didn't make sense for me to suddenly be so resistant. Yet when I was confronted with the requirements of the candidacy portfolio, I felt anxious about publishing for publishing's sake and presenting for presenting's sake. I also didn't like how inaccessible and disconnected academia felt from society, i.e., writing in journals that aren't open access, even if our very field espouses inclusivity. Moreover, I became conscious about the fact that I've separated my "academic" voice from my "creative writing" voice; I had bought into the mythical narrative of what an academic should sound like. For the sake of sounding intellectual, I set aside the vulnerable, heart-on-sleeve, tongue-tripping-over-words quality of my writing.

What helps is that I know I'm not alone in this and that there are other emerging researcher-practitioners from various fields looking for different ways to academe. Taking Gary Anderson's Participatory Action Research class in Steinhardt has been particularly helpful in this regard. Through his class, I was able to hear about and from researchers doing research using more community-centered and alternative processes. This 13th of May 2019, I will be part of the pedagogy-focused pre-conference of CUNY Graduate Center's "Screening Performance, Performing Screens: New Projections in Theatre and Media." There I hope to meet and dialogue with more like-minded people.

Another significant challenge is, strangely enough, gathering more information about the Philippines, i.e., documents about Katipunan Avenue, more context about place-based applied theatre practices in the country, etc. These data aren't easily accessible over the internet. While I am more than willing to return to Asia, I can't imagine how this will affect my status as an international student and the dissertation proposal process, assuming I even reach that stage. But

more than that, it isn't as if I hadn't built a life in New York City as well. By choosing Asia, I know that I am foregoing the countless artistic opportunities the city has to offer, not to mention staying close with the colleagues and friends that I care deeply about.

God's garden is huge and my arms can only span so much.

I intend to talk to my academic advisor, David Montgomery, and my mentors about this for guidance.

I expect more gaps in knowledge and experience to appear the further along the doctoral process I get. The time I've spent so far in graduate school has prepared me to address them as they come, either through doing further research or reaching out to others for help. I look forward to these gaps because, if anything, more than growing academically, being in graduate school has been a journey of self-discovery: what are the things that matter to me? How can I connect with others? How are we to meaningfully and equitably live in this planet?

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned in the four years I've been in the United States is that there isn't much value to asking questions I already have an answer for.

So I bend down and tighten the laces on my ratty sneakers. I stretch some while paying attention to how strong the wind is blowing. I breathe in deeply, take a few steps backwards, and begin to run. I have no idea what's on the other side or if I'll even reach it.

But gaps are meant to be leapt through.

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