

Katawán, Satti (Body, Force)*

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In the western practices of soundwalking and soundscape composition, there is the association with the context of sound; in electroacoustic, acousmatic and musique concrète, recorded sounds are taken out of their context. In "Katawán, Satti", we transcend these sound expressions by investigating the corporeal and incorporeal qualities of sound, the body and force elements of sound. "Katawán, Satti" explores both a sense of physical being and sensed space.

The Filipino word "katawán" translates to "tubuh" in Bahasa, "awak" in Bahasa Melayu, "body" in English. "Katawán" refers to the physical body. There are multiple meanings across semantic ranges of the word "katawán." "Katawanín" means "to represent"; "kinatawán" means "representative"; "katawáng-hayop" means "animal body"; "katawáng-lupa" means "earthly body"; "katawáng-tao" specifically refers to the human body; and "magkatawáng-tao" means "to assume human form." In the Philippine languages of Hiligaynon, Cebuano and Bisaya, "katawhan" means "people" and the Ilokano "katataó" means "ancestry."

In a highly westernized society like the Philippines, the sense and meaning of a physical body cross the post-colonial condition and the experience of inter-subjectivity. The sensuality and the imagination of a physical being cross those perspectives of modernity, globalization and indigeneity. Indeed, as one investigates concepts of self, identity, people and ancestry, one could very well begin with the body.

Filipino artists Tad Ermitaño and Jing Garcia, from the group known as "Children of Cathode Ray", share their long experience of experimental sound and video art, and how they are thus able to transgress boundaries of abstract sound and what Ermitaño calls a "visual and aural sensuousness underpinned by a rigorous sequential logic." Such transgressions (and transmissions) remind us of our own bodily incursions and incarcerations in the negotiation for personal, biological and cultural territory.

The word "satti" means "power" or "force" in Myanmar. The Myanmar sound takes inspiration from a seminar on "Perception" by artist U Khin Maung during one of their artist's meetings in 1979. From U Khin Maung's discussions on perception and force, we can take sound to the level of force as an abstract. U Khin Maung asks "Force here is power (satti) or advantage (anisamsa); which is power and how is the advantage used?" Another inspiration for Myanmar sound as force is the struggle of artist U Aung Khin (1921-1996) in exploring abstraction as means to show life after death in Brahmaloaka and Devaloka. "How shall I draw the abode of Man and Deva?" he asks. In "Katawán, Satti", Myanmar artists Than Htike Aung and Khin Zaw Latt share the crossing of media forms and practices, the visual and the aural, the image and the sound, and the spaces in between. Here, the artists ask the same question as U Aung Khin and explores answers by investigating the topology of abstraction between image and sound in the representation of a cosmography.

In a closed society like Myanmar, the sense and meaning of space may be found in the internal; the universe may be found in a single grain of rice that one visits not only in the physical body, but in the mind-made body as well. Thus, the Myanmar sounds are not only

meditations on the cityscape of Yangon, but are also meditations on a cosmography or a "Picture of the Universe" — projecting a sense of place remembered in a city whose name means "End of Strife."

Projected digital images by Filipino social realist Alfredo Manrique serve as visual invaginations in the dynamic "Katawán, Satti" language of sound. Although the image projections are a direct representation of flesh, the symbolism is an internalized abstract fact — the desire for fertility. Manrique's images recall the prehistoric incisions of *pudenda* on boulders near the village of Alab in the Mountain province. As sympathetic magic, visual forms become removed from artifactual realities to a language of symbols associated with behavioral activity.

The projected images and sounds in "Katawán, Satti" are presented in the space as "suspensions" — like bodies floating in space. The light images envelope the sounds like skin and the sounds escape through the cracks of shadows. And because the sounds come from different sound spots and overlap each other at different times, the sound experience is never repeated. In its entirety, "Katawán, Satti" is an evolving phase space and an abstract construction of body and presence.

Bringing the Myanma universe and the Philippine body sonifications together in Singapore, we step into a shared ground of separate, similar, dissimilar and altogether intriguing notions of sensuality. In "Katawán, Satti", our experience of sound is opened into a new possibility, a new situation, a new sense of place and physical being. The challenge is how we respond to this shift in physicality, sense and situation. How do we respond to expressions, adulterations and the confluence of body and force? How do we learn to hear and understand each other across the differences of the spaces and the forces that we have built within and without our bodies? And when does the body ever really begin to feel comfort in foreign space?

References:

"The Body Book, The Geography of the Filipino Body" edited by Gilda Cordero Fernandez, Fe Maria C. Arriola, et al, illustrated by Onib Olmedo. GCF Books 1993.
"Reminiscences of Myanmar Art" by artist U Aung Khin, translated by Dr. Than Tun. 1996.
"The Tinge of Red, Prehistory of Art in the Philippines" by Jesus T. Peralta. National Commission for Culture and the Arts. 2000.

Artists:

Than Htike Aung (b. 1979)

Than Htike Aung holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy. His art and music experiences in Myanmar traditional cultural performing arts include awards in nationwide competitions in piano performance (Third Prize in 1994 and Second Prize in 1995). In 2002, Than Htike Aung attended the International Symposium "Collaboration, Networking and Resource Sharing: Myanmar" organized by the Ayeyarwaddy Art Assembly (AAA) and the International Forum for the Inter-Media Arts (IFIMA).

Tad Ermitaño (b. 1964)

Tad Ermitaño holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of the Philippines and studied film/video making at the Mowelfund Film Institute. He currently produces video for projection in a variety of stage/concert contexts, including several productions of Ballet-Philippines. His single-channel works have been screened at the Yamagata International Film Festival and the Hamburg Short Film Festival. The focus of

his work has since expanded to the use of computers and other technologies in performance and installation contexts.



(Photo: Tad Ermitaño and Jing Garcia as “Children of Cathode Ray”, live video/electronic performance at the Music Museum in Manila.)

Jing Garcia (b. 1965)

Jing Garcia trained as a journalist and started early in his career by writing reviews of vinyl records released by a variety of local and international music artists in the early-80's. With his exposure to the underground music circle of Manila, he went into music production and earned a number of Gold and Platinum awards

as well as several citations including three nominations from Awit Awards as Producer back in the mid-90's. Today, Jing Garcia is a weekly I.T. Columnist for the Manila Standard, PULP, a popular music and lifestyle magazine, and a regular contributor for "Speed: High-performance Technology Magazine". Jing Garcia also runs his own experimental project studio effort under the name Dominguez-Shimata.Colony.

Khin Zaw Latt (b. 1980)

Khin Zaw Latt holds a degree in Painting from the University of Culture in Myanmar, and has exhibited in Yangon, Myanmar and in Hong Kong. Khin Zaw Latt's recognition in art include winning Second Prize at Myanmar Youth Drawing Contest in 2001, and Honourary Mention at Myanmar Contemporary Art Awards in 2004. Khin Zaw Latt is now also part-time student with the Networking and Initiatives for Culture and the Arts, Yangon (NICA).

Alfredo Manrique (b. 1949)

Alfredo Manrique was among the first social realists in the Philippines to consider art as social and political commentary in response to severe economic and social inequality particularly after the imposition of Martial Law in 1972. As painter and printmaker, Manrique uses the human body as landscape for the expression of historical struggle. In the late 80's he shifted to the digital medium. Manrique has served as director of Cyberspace, Inc., and MIS and system integration consultant for both the Manila Standard and the UNDP-PSDN (Philippine Sustainable Development Network).

Curator:

Fatima Lasay (b. 1969)

Fatima Lasay is an artist, independent curator and educator of digital media. Her work emphasizes a cultural definition for, and concepts of knowledge communalism, sovereignty and autonomy in the practice and theory of, art and technologies. Fatima Lasay obtained her degrees in Industrial Design and Master of Fine Arts from the University of the Philippines where she also developed its first digital media art elective courses.

* Catalogue essay for exhibition "Katawán, Satti" at the Art Gallery of the National Institute of Education, Singapore, for the Multimedia Art Asia Pacific (MAAP) festival 2004, October 27-31.