Works-in-Progress: Artistic practices and digital communities

Zeny May D. Recidoro

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the characteristics and nuances of presenting or performing identity. It asks questions of how the internet and -web transforms how we view/read and create art and literary works, how it affects the creative process as it becomes not only a period of meditative creation but also an event, and how these digital platforms inform artistic production and consumption, and the negotiations and confluences between the new and the traditional ways of artistic and literary productivity. The study lends its focus on young Filipino artists, ultimately calling into discourse the connections and contentions of cultural production, discussion, and identity in a supposedly neutral space.

A net artist by the name of Rombutan drew flak from Marcos supporters for his poster art based on the play *Ang Mga Maharlika* by novelist and playwright Rogelio Braga. The play, which revolves around the former president’s affair with American starlet Dovie Beams, was staged in various locations in Metro Manila. Rombutan’s poster, which was posted on Facebook and subsequently banned, eventually became the promotional image for Braga’s play. The image, rendered digitally, presents Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, and a woman engaged in a sex act. A version of the poster features the face of current President Rodrigo Duterte floating like confetti. Explanations for the ire of Marcos supporters were drawn from the fact that Rombutan had often made digital works revolving around sentimentality, but recently, he has been making works leaning on social commentary, the latest of which is on depression and mental health, raised by comments made by actor and noontime show host Joey de Leon. Rombutan is one of many internet artists (or net artists) who share their works on social media and often respond to current events and socio-political issues; young artists who relate to the social body digitally.

The current socio-political and cultural atmosphere has given plenty of reconsiderations to this essay, since its presentation at the 2016 International Philippine Studies Conference. Part of this reconsideration is on the civic roles of artists, particularly those artists working with digital mediums and who present their works on digital platforms. While deemed problematic, it is undeniable that many people tend to rely on the internet for learning and discussion. It is convenient and, to an extent, efficient. But how can we make this a tenable space for education and discourse? Beyond pushing the boundaries of form and (re)generation of ideas and concepts, the paper also wishes to explore how the internet is used for cultural and community activism in recent time and how it has gained (or lost) traction.

Imagine virtual horizons, spaces and sites of contention as palpable and important as our physical front where we continue to engage and discuss in the pursuits of informing and educating ourselves and others, and in protesting and creating productive criticism. The internet or -web brings about images of a spider’s web against the sky or the net cast out into the sea, catching or trawling anything and everything; at the same time, breaking and yielding, fueling young sparkling vapor dreams. Conversely, shedding light on things and entities best kept in pitch dark. The interweb, or simply the web, may refer to virtuality whose purpose it is to connect and communicate with separate, distant units; the interweb is the medium and mechanism. “Internet” on the other hand refers to the medium and mechanism as an archive where we gather or solicit and contribute information. The internet and —web as virtual space that contains demarcations and an organization comparable to physical space, the concept of digital citizenship or being a “netizen”, is also an angle that is explored in this paper; specifically on the notions and tensions between identity politics on physical and virtual space. There is also the concept that the internet and -web can be comparable to an inner, highly personal landscape where one can explore and project an identity; whereas the physical landscapes where we move and live, and perceive as “real” is an external reality that dictates or informs
what this identity should be and how it must be projected. In this respect, another point or place of interest in this initial exploration are the tensions between these two places, real and virtual, and the various manners in which they integrate.

The essay “The Mobilized and Virtual Gaze: Flaneur/Flaneuse” by Anne Friedberg (Window Shopping Cinema and the Postmodern, 1993, 15-38) outlines and expounds the history of image and image making, from the camera obscura to cinema (scenes) and panorama (landscapes). Friedberg invokes Focault, by citing the panopticon model as the basis for the “virtual gaze,” particularly in flânerie—the urban spectator who gazes upon arcade or shop windows, and cinema— a transfixed audience watching a film. Friedberg likened the panopticon system to flânerie in that both “relied on the visual register” but she also distinguished the latter from the former by describing its themes and subjects as dynamic and dialectic, in contrast to the panopticon that relied on “restraint and intepellated form.” Cinematic gazes and the panopticon model, in which Focault “find(s) the origins of modernity in the reordering of power and knowledge and the visible,” are facilitated by movie houses. To watch a film or play was virtual in a sense that there is an awareness that the event witnessed is fictional or “not real.”

A postcinematic gaze involves the manner of seeing and looking facilitated by a virtual space and personas. Simulated interactions, the simultaneous seeing and unseeing online, makes for distinct experiences in presenting and receiving one’s work. Some artists, and those who press the “like” button or enter a comment, rely largely on the anonymity to preserve a degree of distance or to do anything they want. Situating contemporary virtuality within the postcinematic gaze, this paper explores the virtual space internet and -web, the negotiations and relationships that fill this space into what can be described as a digital community. Particularly in the way people curate or select what aspects of their person can be seen online, conversely, the lack of control and curation, and in relation to artists, their works, and their audiences, how this virtual space informs the practice of art production and consumption. In a sense, museum, arcade, cinema, library, archive, and department store all exist within and characterize the web-space. The popularity in production and consumption of photography and cinema in the 20th century can be likened to the popularity of digital media and the internet in cultural production and consumption in the 21st century.

Douglas Davis, in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991 – 1995)” (Leonardo, 1995, 381-386), posits that the aura, still going by its definition by Benjamin, resides in the event of creation, the creative process and the experiences of seeing and receiving this work. Furthering these statements, Davis writes: “Here in this realm [the internet], often mislabeled “virtual” (it is actually realer reality, or RR), both originality and traditional truth (symbolized by the unadorned photographic “fact”) are being enhanced, not betrayed.”

In her work Occupation (2015), artist Lesley-Anne Cao finds an “alternative” to painting in a time when she could not paint due to restraints in time and resources. Using SIMS 3, a game in which the player engages in world building and role play, Cao assumes a virtual persona to create art, in turn defining this simulation as the artwork itself. Various aspects of a young artist’s practice are presented in Occupation, from the material reality that every artist faces in a phase of their career to making do with other, more available, media. The work corresponds to Davis’ statements on the enhancement of the aura through digital media. The game which Cao has used is itself an experience and she has furthered this by applying her own experiences, in turn creating another kind of experience or vista for those who viewed her work.

It is in this regard that the virtual space I have spoken of in the previous paragraphs, rather than being an entity or construct detached from human life and endeavor, is actually an extension of us. It is possible and interesting to think of computers and of the internet— what was once developed for scientific and military purposes (Davis, 1995, 381-386) but has since grown into a public sphere and is now composed of and used by such diverse
communities and subcultures. It can be said that we use the internet to explore what we can consider to be the very best and progressive, as well as the worst and regressive aspects of our awareness, the consideration of ourselves and of other people. Within this point of view, the internet is not only a tool for computation, coding, communication, and data analysis. It is also a means for us to further the notion and practice of exploring ourselves and other people—how we design and curate the manner in which we think we should be seen online (or, on the other hand, the lack of this sense of making ourselves fitting enough to traverse and survive the digital landscape). In this respect, Davis’ portrayal and understanding of the internet and web culture is closer to the current generation’s experience of it, as virtual reality, as realer reality.

Net artists can be defined as artists who use digital media to create their works and/or those who post their works online. The artists surveyed in this paper engage in different forms, often intersecting visual and sound art, and hypertext (web based literature). Among them are Mica Agregado, a comix illustrator and writer, video artist, and musician, whose current interests are postmodern design and net art; and Itsos Ledesma a.k.a. Maldoror, whose genres sound deceptively traditional as a poet and musician, shares his experimental and process driven music on soundcloud. It should be noted that these artists do not stay within the boundaries of their genres, rather their interaction with various scenes and the scenes themselves are rather fluid. For example, while Agregado usually makes comics or zines, she also participates in exhibitions initiated by galleries. Apart from inquiries on creative process and identity vis-à-vis the digital landscape, whether having a virtual presence dissolves or enhances cultural, political, and personal identity.

Two other artists whose works are considered in this paper are Adam David’s and should i stay or should i go both posted on blogspot, and Vladimir B. Gonzaties’ Hyper-Kwento, a collection of interactive web-based fiction and fan fiction that combines the experiences of teens and young adults at the beginning of the 21st century. David is a writer, artist, literary critic, graphic designer, and publisher, among other things. Going through his blog OBLIQUE STRATEGIES: an exercise in youthful blasphemy provides a picture of David’s numerous projects, mostly experimental and relatively new, and collaborations with other writers and artists. In his essay Hyperwriting: Isang Walkthrough, published in Likhaan Journal, Vladimir Gonzaties (2009, 206-216) narrates how he met David at the UP National Writers Workshop in 2002, and how their encounter subsequently introduced to him the idea of hyperwriting and David’s collaboration work with fellow writer Indira Endaya, titled Project Crumbs, which eventually paved the way for Gonzaties to study hyperwriting and produce the hypertext-based anthology Hyper-Kwento: Mga Imbestgasyon at Pagdadalawang Isip na Panahon ng Hypertext, completed in 2008. He writes: “Naging napapanahong introdusiyon ang pagbasa ko ng “Project Crumbs” sa pagniyag sa makitid kong pundasyon sa paglikha, na naging mitsa ng maraming mabungang pag-aaral at sariling pagkathata,” (Reading “Project Crumbs” was a timely introduction to disturbing my narrow creative foundation, which led to more productive studies and works.).

Multi-disciplinary, digital and electronic, and experimental artists flourished in the 1990s as a response to the Digital Age (Lebourdais, 2016)—in addition to the political events that defined the era: the end of the Cold War, the
launching of the Hubble Space Telescope, and the Gulf War. In the Philippines, we saw natural disasters that have made a lasting impression upon collective memory, in the struggles of the Aeta people in losing their homeland and surviving beyond memory. Overseas, artists such as Kiki Smith, Mona Hatoum, David Barney, and Shirin Neshat explored blurring or contested socio-political and cultural boundaries. In the local art scene, social realism and political works were finding new expressions in performance and video art to explore lingering issues surrounding poverty and violence in the country-side, and reckless urbanization. Along with these themes came new art forms or the re-emergence of once obscure forms such as video art, electronic and sound art, performance art and forays into art works that draw from or are inspired by concepts in science and technology. The emergence or re-emergence of multi-disciplinary and interpersonal works, as pointed out by Lebourdais, was a response, both direct and indirect, to fragmentation, disparities, and polarities that have been occurring and which persists in the world.

Internet culture, art and its human aspects are further elucidated by artist Mica Agregado. Agregado began her forays into art as early as grade school, where “being creative meant drawing all kinds of characters and stories.” Her idea of being creative, in a sense her early form of poetics, persisted until she reached college, where she spent two to three years making comics and working her way towards illustration. Agregado proved to be good at it, as her works gained appreciation among her peers, her first comic garnered an award, and she was constantly publishing stories. But eventually, her ideas became complex and she slowly realized that drawing had begun to feel like a chore. “...I realized drawing scratched the surface of my ideas. Thesis burned me out and it felt unlikely to see myself becoming a professional illustrator,” (Agregado, 2016).

It was in the last few months of college that Agregado’s interests and practice took a turn. “...I took interest in design in ceramics. Then to postmodern design, net art, and music. It was a complete turnaround from what I was building up for years. Honestly, it’s not getting much flack (recognition) compared to my old comics, but it made me happier than I was before.” Agregado’s turnaround in the progression of her art and creative practice is also reflected in the type of audience that she has, and the reception that she receives from them. Yet, she says, “I was quite insecure of my drawings.” When asked about posting her art and works-in-progress online, she truthfully says, “When the internet started, posting online meant you were looking for instant gratification” (ibid). Agregado started out in dA (deviantArt), where she describes it as a site that contains “10% good art 20% promising art and 70% grade-A shit.” DeviantArt was also the “go to place” for all her friends back in grade school as “It was another platform for friends to keep each other in the loop with their creative process.” It was also in dA, essentially a venue on the internet for creative production and consumption among young people, where Agregado first learned of the standards and procedures in producing art, “On the front page of the website, you see all the trending works. Already you see criteria of acceptable work. Subconsciously, I imitated certain details from the works I like whether it may be the subject or the technique. And I learned to color well, drew proportioned figures, practiced composition, all with having no certainty where it leads to.” When she began making comics, she re-evaluated her work and found obscure artists, “I made the nicest works during that time.” She still worked on paper and invested on a good scanner. She posted finished and finely edited works on a well-curated tumblr page. Agregado, as a “visual consumer,” once saw the artists and art that she follows online on dA, Instagram, and tumblr as standards for her growth as an illustrator but “as inspirational as other people’s works are to my style, it didn’t help me grow, they were hurdles for me to go over. And that wasn’t the right way to do art.”

Agregado’s style and the aesthetic she works with, as seen on her blog and comics, respond to particular groups of people. “As much as one tries to stay from a particular group, it’s impossible not to have any audience in mind. “Cause either way, everybody’s work will fall into a scene,” demonstrating a receptiveness and awareness that has, it seems, helped her gain traction both as an illustrator and now as an artist that works with other media and styles. Further, she states “Note that the internet will debunk all your quirks that make you a special snowflake. There won’t be an exact replica of you but rather traces of you in three different people.” Instead of pining for distinction, Agregado’s statement emphasizes the importance of collaborations and acknowledgment of the flow and exchange of concepts, resources we use to be able to juxtapose different elements and create objects and images with their own visual currency. As silly as memes go, the overlapping of contexts, images, and concepts, as well as
the ability to correlate and effectively juxtapose two seemingly unrelated ideas or media are themselves hallmarks of creativity, and one which was formed and occurs on the internet.

Agregado also recognizes the positive notes as well as the pitfalls of identifying with a particular style and a subculture. Here she cites vaporwave, a genre of net art that revolves around the aesthetic of the late 80s to early 90s. She relates that, “it was enlightening to find like-minded people appreciating my work. No longer [do] I treat them as audience but a part of a subculture. With subcultures you find different outlets of influences from various media... I'm amazed to see people's hidden yet relatable fascination.” Following the development of her patent interest in postmodern design and net art, she started rebuilding her work and would use tags such as “vaporwave” and “net art.” She would post works on the vaporwave reddit, which was, according to her, “vastly used [by] teens who like memes,” citing this as the double-edged sword of identifying with, catering to, or belonging to a subculture. “In a way it’s good to be recognized but there’s a tendency to be marginalized,” she adds. She also states that looking further into the vaporwave culture, she found that the best music and creative work were from those who did not necessarily comply with vaporwave’s “usual aesthetics.” Harking back to my previous statements responding to Agregado’s on originality and the aura, she also writes that she loves “the anonymity of its creators and the overall sense of detachment from reality and world immersion.” Posted in her Youtube account, Vision Interactive, her work AMORE—a video art flash-rippling photographs of cheap trinkets, from Minions to Hello Kitty to AlDub pillows being sold in markets during Valentine’s day, bordered by bright colors and decorative elements reminiscent of postmodernist, pop-futurist design termed “cyberpunk” or “cybertwee”—fully expresses the sense of detachment and immersion in a sense of reality that while based on the “real world,” with the photographs of market trinkets, it has been transformed and is almost alien in its uncanniness. A robotic female voice addresses her amour, but while the words spoken are supposedly intimate and impassioned, they come out as impersonal and devoid of any deep meaning or significance just like the objects that appear on the screen. At the 0:44-second mark, the robotic female voice says, “It is only on the screen, I can be with you,” also, perhaps, alluding to virtual romances or even the possibility of A.I.-human relationships, “lost memories to the time of Never. My cursor moves to click it.” And towards the 2:00-minute mark, the voice and video experiences a glitch, and is unable to finish its message. AMORE can be considered informed by the sort of fantasies that pervade our reality—romance as prescribed by noontime and primetime shows on local TV, the often contentious and maligned relationships between people, and between human beings and non-human animals. How these are regenerated as fantasies that tackles violence and human life in the internet age and post-truth with the humor of memes or sparkly cuteness as the languages with which to discuss issues. Rather than perceive this as an indication of weakness or ignorance, these languages born on the internet further emphasize our warped sense of what is natural and “real” at present and how divorced we have become with what constitutes our humanity. On the other end of the thread, I imagine, is nature writing and it’s concern with the irrevocable changes happening in the world beyond the human body and mind. On both ends of the thread, net-scape and landscape define human existence.

It is also a point of interest that through the internet, certain art genres, such as pop art, are permeating popular consciousness, and how it is being informed by popular culture itself seems to be a cycle of continuous transformation, even refinement. That something like the Minions or AlDub could appear in a video work, appear in a gallery as “art,” is in itself mind-boggling yet fascinating, seeing how art does not have to further simplify or debase (for lack of a better term) its language, or popular culture to put on a pretense of being “cultured,” but rather that both can be and are within and informing each other through technology and new media.

Itos Ledesma, also known as Maldoror, elucidates the point of being an artist on the internet and negotiating identity or identities online. Ledesma as Maldoror began as his attempt to express influences that he felt weren’t being expressed by his band, Yürei, “so I decided to take things in my own hands. I wanted something to make music that was generally darker than what we were doing... and incorporate the influence of dada and surrealism into the process of sound design/music-making,” (Ledesma/Maldoror, 2016). This intent also eventually informed Maldoror’s process, “the music is a result of imposing a rigid conceptual framework that scaffold the entire project: the imposition of almost arbitrary constraints (for example: I once tried to make something in under 10
minutes... composing in a convenience store with the sound turned off, and sometimes the inclusion of certain notes is determined by flips of a coin or tarot, sampling from more than one source per track, and using software, that I do not actually know how to manipulate, to my advantage. The entire process is automatic, determined by accidents.”

The music of Maldoror can be described as an aural pastiche. Ledesma uses various samples, from voices of a crowd to a reading of Hugo Ball’s Gadji beri bimba. The music itself—some marked by repetition, others by irregularities in texture and pace, or a combination of both, in a sense functioning as a variation (one example would be MIASMA APPARITION SKETCH) —employs beats, electronic sounds, futuristic or dystopic twangs, classical, tribal drum beats, jarring and oddly soothing industrial sounds, and a type of sounds which can be identified with advertisements or elevator music. The music of Maldoror is colorful and wildly varied. His arrangement, reminiscent of a psycho-geographical exercise: the action of wandering streets without a formal guide but rather propelled by intuition or imagination, elevates these series or assemblages of sounds to create evocative music.

Beyond describing Maldoror’s music as a patchwork of sounds or as evocative, the pieces have their own identities and which, by extension, can be the type of music that appeals to different identities or personalities, in all its quirks and darkness. A point of interest and counterpoint to the music is also the accompanying track images or covers on Maldoror’s music, for example the track TULISAN TULISAN TULISAN has John Arcilla, of Heneral Luna fame, for its track cover or IN FAVOR OF A LESS DEFINITION OF GLORY with Justice Friends as its track cover. Others are references to classical art, such as the corrupted “conservation” of Ecce Homo. Album covers and thumbnail images are generally understood to be art forms in themselves, just as books need good covers to complement their stories (or provide the reader-to-be with the right sense of bad-read-dread), an album cover or thumbnail is the first indication of whether a piece of music is worth listening to or not. It is also perhaps worth noting that the album cover for Maldoror is the one used for MIASMA APPARITION SKETCH and, according to Ledesma, was specifically designed to “offend graphic designers.”

Aside from being wildly varied, the music of Maldoror, as a work of sound and vision, is also decidedly unconventional. Ledesma does not, as will be more apparent in the succeeding paragraphs, actively seek out popularity but rather focuses more on the process and craft that goes into creating his music. Of online identities, Maldoror, or Ledesma, posits that “the construction of an identity of a certain musical venture has changed radically from the days of internet yore. Soundcloud, unlike platforms like the late Myspace music, cannot be customized (apart from the profile picture and the header).” He states that “I guess it’s the hashtag and the description that actively shapes how the listener experiences the song/sound/whatever, and I think this limits the range of the horizon of experience... I guess it’s difficult to carve out an online identity without being limited by the algorithm that certain sites provide for easier navigation/ categorization.” Algorithms function as arbiters, where an administrator feeds information that a program follows. If the administrator of a site deems a certain topic popular, related content will keep cropping up as advertisement or as suggested content. This is also often personalized, because websites can sell information to companies and in turn these companies use algorithm to sell individuals particular products or services. If a person is known to love fast food (because Facebook sold his information to the highest bidder which happens to be McDonald’s), this person will be bombarded by fast food ads until they grow obese, keel over, and die. At which point, the person’s next of kin will be offered ads for funeral services and e-burol. These are, of course, extreme examples made to drive a point; if a person is able to prove to the almighty algorithm that they are a person of culture, they might only be subjected to a few gallery or scholarship ads in their e-mails.

Ledesma explains the use and experience of using a hashtag as a suggestion, and one that he does not fully take up as suitable for the type of work that he does. This raises the question of why people readily and somewhat uncritically use hashtags, unless they are being sarcastic (i.e., using kilometric hashtags or hashtags that are so personal no one else but one person can identify and use it). Is it about trends and marketing, becoming viral? Perhaps. Is it about advertising? As Ledesma attests, that seems to be the case. This brings us to, as with the previous artists, an exchange on how Ledesma perceives his audience and what he thinks they are like. He writes, “I
think that it’s quite difficult to describe an audience; any effort to do so would be the fruit of imagination... I don’t think I have an audience apart from a few friends. My followers on Soundcloud are mostly fellow musicians with whom I have established some sort of bond (especially since we are part of the same label: Idioterne Inc). I thought it [the music] would have been disseminated into the vast expanse of the internet land, but it seems as though everyone is screaming at the same time and there has been difficulty finding my work because it is buried underneath all the noise.” But rather than view this being “buried underneath all the noise” as a deterrent to his practice, Ledesma looks at it in a different way, “I always imagined Maldoror to exist in something like a niche environment, owing to the fact that the sounds produced under that particular moniker aren’t immediately satisfying or don’t appeal to casual listeners, so I guess my expectations have been proven true.” Following on an off-the-record comment, revealing, among others, my apparent pessimism towards culture at large, Ledesma gives a rather optimistic and edifying off-the-record answer, “I think independent music in the Philippines is at a critical stage; audiences are looking for alternatives to the purported alternative, and I think that it is the internet that functions as the best platforms for the more experimental or avant-garde kind of music being produced in the country, but sites like Soundcloud are still governed by algorithms that recommend new music based on hashtags and hits and the like...”

In the same vein, moving on to hypertext and hyperwriting, these standards (or algorithms) that govern or facilitate art or cultural production and consumption, both “in real life” and on the internet, is what seems to have pushed writers like Adam David and Vladimeir Gonzales to pursue more experimental literature and writing that pushes the boundaries of form and storytelling.

David’s hypertext projects, of which he has several with a list available in his blog OBLIQUE STRATEGIES, are concerned with a number of issues and concepts: *should i stay or should i go* is about changing geographies and urban ennui, while “*snip*” is about body horror. Perhaps the most potently explicit and effectively contentious of his hypertext works is *Hi Ma’am Sir* or HMS, a randomizer generated from the anthology *Fast Food Fiction Delivery* edited by Mookie Katigbak-Lacuesta and Noelle Q. de Jesus. Through HMS, David reveals his own process of doing hypertext in the micro-essay *thirty minutes or less* posted in place of the deleted randomizer: “Here is how HMS worked: I went through the anthology and copied four sentences per story—two random sentences somewhere in between... I typed them all out in four rows and encoded a hypertext machine in Javascript to generate random combinations of what amounted to roughly two hundred and seventy-two sentences, which I predicted would come up with new stories expressing coherence despite their disparate origins.” He continues to provide the political motivation for doing HMS: “HMS was also intended to be a continuation of my critical and creative practice: one of my main branches of critical and creative exploration of the last ten years in what I call *drawing the infinite from the finite*, a development of my interest in Constrained Writing,” (David, 2015). David’s interest in constrained writing can be related to Ledesma’s (Maldoror’s) experiments in creating music. And it seems that the artists’ works and studies cited in this paper, in relation to David’s and, subsequently, Gonzales’ work, all run parallel to each other, and overlap in terms of having to work with some kind of limitation and constraint, or a sense of discontent and need for growth outside of traditional modes.

In *should i stay or should i go*, changing landscapes, geologic time, and geographies are used to propel or create a narrative. When you press “go,” the landscape changes, effecting the idea of movement. The work is simple in a sense that it seems like there is not much happening. The three panels, sometimes occupied by single words, “and” or “or,” also evoke the windows of a bus or train— that the viewer/user/reader is in fact inside a moving vehicle, and the choice and act of pressing “go” does not only signify leaving in the sense that it is the body that moves away, but also staying, making the wilful and conscious choice to stay in a state of impermanence and travel. In the same vein, “*snip*” concerns a persona, a man, who finds himself in a dire predicament and as the story progresses, escape or some sort of clarification seems all the more unlikely. He is inside a room, himself a total mess, with no recollection of where he is and what had happened. He seems to acknowledge the fact that he is covered in his own blood and vomit, and that something has been taken from him the night before. Its hypertext form differs from *should i stay or should i go* in that the words themselves propel the narrative forward and in circles. Each page
contains a short paragraph or single sentences with two to four words. The choice of words or phrases to highlight as gateways or links to new pages concern themselves with the man’s body, or things which immediately bear some effect to his person, words like blood, vomit, food tray and legs; phrases like “he twists, it again” (“twists,” underlined, being the link word), “it snaps,” “his tired body rippling in convulsions,” “he is too sleepy to care,” or, a sentence that struck me as powerful: “What was once a glass of water is now a toilet for flies.”

Despite the specificity and preciseness of the link words used and the way the viewer/user/reader is guided around the room and through the man’s ordeal, requiring a considerable use of imagination, there is space left for speculation: how did he end up in there? Why was he snipped? Will he be able to get out? Is he already undead? (With the proliferation of bluebottle flies and general outpouring of bodily fluids, this piece of speculation is too tempting to ignore.) While these responses and experiences are not new or exclusive to hypertext, it is interesting to consider that one is able to say so much with so little. In should i stay or should i go, David uses a grand total of three words: “and,” “or,” and “go.” In *snip*, he is able to give a compelling story in more or less five hundred words. It is also worth considering that in writing and creating hypertext, how do we define language? Is it what we see on the interface, the words and sentences themselves? Or is the language of hypertext defined by its codes and scripts? If it is the latter, how do we actually read and critique hypertext works? And given that David defines some of his hypertext works as criticism, it is possible to consider the critique of hypertext as critiquing criticism, a meta exercise. Although, of course, it is also possible that the production, definition and use of hypertext, as with hashtags, will change over time.

Working within academia as a professor at the University of the Philippines Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikang Pilipinas, Gonzales began his engagement with hypertext, as previously mentioned, through a meeting with David in 2002 at the UP National Writers Workshop, and subsequently, in immersing himself in Project Crumbs, a hypertext collaboration between Adam David and Indira Endaya. Harking back to Gonzales’ essay Hyperwriting: Isang Walkthrough, his study and immersion in hyperwriting or, what can be described as new writing, stating and recognizing his position as an academic, and concerning himself with questions on how he can look at observations in the contemporary world—a contrary culture of ephemera and obsessions with continuity and being eternal, from a different perspective and how he can translate these observations and experiences into creative work.

Gonzales’ Hyper-Kwento opens on a desk filled with items which seem to be the contents of a college student’s back-pack. Of these items, the viewer/reader is able to manipulate a CD-ROM, a notebook, and a Rubik’s Cube. The CD-Rom opens to a series of animé characters and upon clicking, the viewer/reader will be led into works of fan fiction. In Creative Writing class titled, MPs 110: Isang Tala tungkol sa Palihan hinggil sa Encantadia Fan Fiction, at mga kaugnay na Usapin, he not only relates the act of writing fan fiction in the realm of “new literature” along with hypertext, but also of fan fiction as metadata or metafiction, of having multiple versions and re-telling of one story or source, each one as viable as the original. Of his Card Captor Sakura fan fiction he writes: “…gumagamit ito ng isang popular at kinitikilang tekstong para gumawa ng panibagong aksyon, na maaring basahin iba sang isang walong galang na pangungpoa o kay’T isang pagkuwestiyon at paghamon sa konsepto ng kanon ng paglikho,” (this uses a popular and known text to create a new text, which may be read as rude mimicry or a questioning or challenging of the canon in creative work) (Gonzales, 2009). This is in line with David’s treatment of hypertext and hyperwriting as a means of criticism: Gonzales’ challenge to the notion of canon in creative work is motivated in part by his observations regarding the practice and teaching of writing, in which criticism, points of disagreement or contention, is actively and willfully avoided even if it means helping students improve their writing.

The Rubik’s Cube in Hyper-Kwento opens to AKO ANG DAIGDIG, each word containing its own set of stories, and in which the viewer/reader can also submit their own works. In Hyperwriting: Isang Walkthrough, Gonzales also
expresses some of the fascinating qualities of hyperwriting, “Baka mas may pang-akit na ang anyong nagmumukhang tagaikha na rin ang tatanggap ng teksto...” (That the receiver of the message feels as the creator of the text is perhaps more appealing.) (Gonzales, 2009). And here we go back to the internet, now hyperwriting, as a communal thing. In AKO ANG DAIGDIG, the viewer/reader and eventually contributor is given a multitude of voices and perspectives. In a sense, this viewer/reader/contributor also bears witness to the various personal histories and the development of the site through its stories. These stories in Hyper-Kwento, according to Gonzales, both use and explore the characteristics and cultural implications of hypertext in Philippine society. As with AKO ANG DAIGDIG, viewer/reader involvement is the core of a series of stories found in the notebook. Patayin sa Indak si Anastasha! (Kill Anastasha with Horror!), which functions similar to David’s should i stay or should i go and *snip*, and Lunes, Alas-dyes ng Umaga (Monday, Ten in the Morning), where viewer/readers can manipulate the narrative by pressing a combination of numbers on a fax machine, upon which the machine “prints out” the story. These stories, while not as conceptual or experimental, reimagines and translates Filipino experiences, and even the “voice” of narration, into hypertext. The previous question and the proposition that in hyperwriting, the writer “writes” with two languages, one to scaffold and the other as the form itself that I posited in David’s works, still hold water here. And it is, by itself, an interesting topic for further study. Looking at various aspects of the work, the practice of hyperwriting is also an exercise in self-awareness and self-reflexivity.

Hyperwriting can be considered criticism in itself. David, for instance, created a randomizer to critique a print anthology (which sparked a lengthy online debate on the limits and further possibilities of creative production, among other things). It is wholly independent, communal (in a sense that readers are not only readers but can literally contribute and manipulate the interface), and pushes further or creates new opportunities for discussions and discourse on writing, production, readership and viewership, form and content.

In Jacques Derrida’s essay “The University Without Condition” in Without Alibi (2002, 203-237), he writes of “This principle of unconditional resistance” in which he states that the Humanities are capable of taking on the tasks of deconstruction, “beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and their axioms.” He also refers to “the right to deconstruction as an unconditional right to ask critical questions,” of writing as a single event and giving rise to oeuvres. Derrida’s position on the principle of unconditional resistance, and of deconstruction, that it is the right and, it is perhaps fair to add, the obligation to ask critical questions, as a form of this resistance, is a concept that is in relation to the works cited in this paper. Especially in hyperwriting and hyperwriters who do not only see themselves as artists experimenting on a new form, but also consider themselves in relation to the realities of literacy and technology, the study of history, and the practice of art and literature.

While the works surveyed in this paper are being contrasted to “traditional modes and methods,” it does not wish to refute the existence and validity of literary and artistic tradition at large. Tradition is a part of these works, and, echoing Agregado, traces of it remain within these works, no matter how drastic and vast the departure from its original or traditional form. Local traditions, if we are set to deeply understand what they have to teach and offer, may be reincarnated into digital forms. Pushing the boundaries of what is personal and immediate, it is exciting to think of the transformations a digital practice rooted in traditional local creative practice and thought might look or feel like and, further, how this will converse with everything else found on the internet now.

It is also feasible to look at the internet and webspaces as places of comfort, where artists and writers can also find spaces, alternatives, and resources to develop and create works that are otherwise unviable within traditional modes, methods, and genres. But this freedom and privilege is double-edged, artists can share and post their own works, choose what to share or post, explore how works can be re-imagined and re-appropriated to become newer works, but also there is the responsibility of protecting one’s identity, work, integrity, and privacy, to be aware of existing legalities, boundaries, and all possibilities, both positive and negative. It must be noted that on the internet, a person is both a producer of information, or a re-generator of it, and a consumer — beyond purchase, to consume is to read and attempt to engage, to exchange comments and insights, and ultimately, experiences. With the currency of fake news and trolling, the cultural landscape on the internet is degraded and depleted. It is therefore in light of these things that the importance of civic duty and creative resistance, of putting out works that
not only respond to surface feelings and thoughts, but those which provide substance and meaning, must be encouraged. This is even more imperative as citizens, physical and digital, are called to find new solutions that can respond to issues that are becoming more complex.

The internet is a space and reality where we react and interact, form our own worldviews and visions, and have the opportunity to share it to the world, viewing traditional and innovative works not through binaries or dichotomies, but as two entities and notions that are connected to and are in each other. As a final note, I hark back to what Ledesma has pointed out in his observations in Philippine independent music—how the artists in this paper negotiate, respond, and restructure the popular culture and knowledge that informs their production of works, which in turn are being returned to the populace through digital spaces and landscapes. Cultural production, consumption, and regeneration is at a critical point, as the previous divides and gaps are being closed or filled in by new media, technology, and the internet. A call for responsibility on both ends is called for, from artists to readers and viewers, to maximize these new tools and concepts in order to help further develop cultural literacy in the Philippines.

**Zeny May D. Recidoro** graduated from the University of the Philippines, BA Art Studies, in 2014. She is currently Executive Director for the Museum Foundation of the Philippines, Inc. She also writes poetry.

**References**


**Works Cited**


Cao, Lesley. *Occupation*. Exhibited at Project 20, Maginhawa Street, Teacher’s Village, Diliman, Q.C. 2014.


David, Adam. *should i stay or should i go?* Retrieved from: http://thanthenhan.blogspot.com/ March 2016.


Interviews

Agregado, Mica, e-mail correspondences, 7 March – 4 April 2016
tumblr: Manila Automat
http://manila-automat.tumblr.com

Ledesma, Itos, e-mail correspondences, 9 – 13 April 2016
soundcloud: Maldoror
https://soundcloud.com/maldoror
“Comix” refers to illustrated stories that deal with non-mainstream subjects.

“Zines” are online publications that are styled like magazines but are not commercial. Their articles are often of unconventional topics.

Although video art can be more accurately placed in the late 1980s, with the Korean artist Nam June-Paik purportedly creating the first video art in 1986.

This can be more accurately placed as early as the 1920s, with Dada experimentations.

Another way of saying “shit” by pronouncing it with a Welsh or Scottish accent.