

ENGAGING ART APPRECIATION IN K TO 12: AGAMBEN ON THE ORIGINAL UNITY OF ART

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Abstract- Plato in *The Republic* was cognizant of the role of μουσική in realizing his vision of a καλλίπολις. For him, the admixture of music and poetry makes a good curriculum for the education of the citizens. However, the mimetic experience brought about by their mingling encourages variety and multiplicity, and thereby distracts one from participating in the immutable forms. Seen against the backdrop of the animating theme of his opus, i.e. justice, as “doing one’s own work”, Plato banishes art due to its inability to confine itself to an ἔργον despite being a powerful force in the formation of the πόλις. This estrangement of art – which has turned into the prevailing spirit in the history of Western art – from its place of contact with the public makes the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942 -) in *The Man Without Content* (1970) look with melancholy at a time when the artist and his works still held “the wonderful and uncanny power of making the world appear, of producing being and the world in the work”. Inquiring into the nature and function of art after the exclusion of the artists from the luogo comune, Agamben takes the task of throwing light on the “planet that turns toward us only its dark side” hoping to see its return one day.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in the arts provides means to many personal and social ends across regions and lands. Beginning with Plato in *The Republic*, the role of μουσική is deemed central, not only in the education of the citizens, but also in the realization of his vision of a καλλίπολις (401d-e). Plato understands how music can attune the soul after its distinctive properties namely rhythm and harmony. One’s imitation of these properties into his soul, in effect, makes a citizen more attuned to the forms which “are organized and always the same”. He, then, “imitates them and tries to become as like them as he can” (501c). These properties bring order to the soul, organizing its parts and giving them grace. A citizen – a guardian in particular – who has been raised in music and poetry is like an instrument whose strings are “being stretched and relaxed to the appropriate degree” (412a). Moreover, not only does the guardian’s training consist in achieving the good proportion of music – and physical training – but more importantly, in impressing this “finest blend of music and physical training” in his soul (412a). Since this process of assimilation takes a considerably lengthy span of time, the guardian becomes “someone who ... has recognized that injustice is bad by nature, not from his own experience of it, but through knowledge”. Raised in this kind of education, the guardian becomes fully conscious of what harms his soul and of anything that is alien to the soul (409b-c). While he called for imitation of some characteristics of the forms present in music and poetry, Plato also acknowledged the possibility of a mimetic experience consisting of impersonating the characters of tragedies and comedies. Making himself like someone else in voice or appearance, a tragedian or comedian effects his narrative through imitation (393c). Plato’s kind of poetry,

however, was “simple narrative without imitation” (394b); his favor over narrative without imitation is informed by his belief that “a single individual can’t imitate many things as well as he can imitate one” and that tragedians and comedians will “hardly be able to pursue any worthwhile way of life while at the same time imitating many things” (394e-395a). This mimetic experience, for Plato, encouraged variety and multiplicity, and thereby distracts the soul from participating in the immutable forms. In the same way that a πόλις cannot give in to the scores of unruly desires of the οἱ πολλοί, the soul, through the unifying function of reason, must circumvent imitative poetry since it “arouses, nourishes, and strengthens this part of the soul and destroys the better sort of citizens when he strengthens the vicious ones and surrenders the city to them” (605b). Seen against the backdrop of the animating theme of his opus, i.e. justice, as “doing one’s own work” (433b), Plato banished art due to its inability to confine itself to an ἔργον despite being a powerful force in the formation of the community.

Plato’s treatment, however, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942 -) avers in his 1970 opus *The Man Without Content*, stems precisely from his very sensitivity to, or reverence for, art, and not due to a lack of it. For Plato, “the power of art over the soul seemed to him so great that he thought it could by itself destroy the very foundations of his city” (Agamben, 1999, 5). Be that as it may, Agamben’s historical analysis shows that modern audiences are no longer subject to art’s spell and their uncanny experience of the work of art has waned (Ibid., 3-5). The introduction of aesthetics in the Modern period as the field of inquiry devoted to the systematic study of the work of art ushered in the understanding of art *pour l’art* i.e., art exists for its own sake, or for the sake of beauty. Efforts to define the boundaries of human reason and knowledge and establish a secure foundation for metaphysics created significant corollaries in the way aesthetic judgments are formed and notions such as spectator, creator, taste and genius, form and content among others largely defined the contours of the Modern *modus educandi* in the arts. Agamben, nevertheless, looks with nostalgia to the time art played a role “in the production of truth and in the subsequent opening of a world for man’s existence and action” (Ibid., 44) which ceased to be the case upon aesthetics’ coming, bringing about the “cooling of artistic passions” (Durantaye, 2009, 32), “leaving on the one side aesthetic judgment and on the other artistic subjectivity without content” (Agamben 1999, 24). Art’s enlightening role has disappeared and, like a planet of which only its dark side is left visible to us (Ibid., 27-28), its nature and function remains a quandary.

The move to enhance the Basic Education System through K to 12 curriculum has prompted significant changes in the General Education Program in the tertiary level. Although the

number of credit units in the General Education Program has been reduced, Art Appreciation remains to be on the list. Art Appreciation, a course mainly devoted to the understanding of the “nature, function and appreciation of the arts in the contemporary society” (CMO no. 20 s. 2013), is examined in this essay using Agamben’s ontological-historical-programmatic ruminations on art. This examination will proceed in three steps: (1) we will explore the framework and dynamics of the course vis-a-vis the general education outcomes; (2) we will attempt to present Agamben’s investigation on art, most especially his discussions on the original unity of the work of art; and (3) from the perspective of this paradigm, we will try to engage the course.

II. ART APPRECIATION IN THE NEW GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The revision of the general education program is demanded by the need of developing a more integral and less fragmented disciplinary program and by the imperative to understand the world by grounding perspectives in the context of home realities founded on a deep sense of self and nation (CMO no. 20 s. 2013 Appendix B). While the current general education program requires courses already taken up by students in preceding levels, the new general education program strips away these remedial courses, thereby reducing the current requirement of sixty-three/fifty-one units of courses to a minimum of thirty-six units of courses. Moreover, the goals and outcomes of the new program are well articulated, making it outcome-oriented, at the same time providing nine units of elective courses from which students can choose (Ibid., Appendix E). What are these goals and outcomes?

The goal of general education is for every Filipino student “to find her/himself in the community and the world, take pride in and hopefully assert her/his identity and sense of community and nationhood amid the forces of globalization” (Ibid., Article I Section 1). The outcomes, on the other hand, are categorized into three – intellectual competencies, personal and civic responsibilities and practical skills – based on the competencies that need to be developed and enhanced. At the core of the new program are the interdisciplinary nature of the courses and the higher-level reading, research and writing competencies requirement, which, in the old program, are left to major courses (Ibid., Article I Section 2). In other words, by exposing them to a range of areas of knowledge and perspectives of understanding social and natural realities, students learn to navigate the contours of their multilayered everyday existence. One of these different ways of knowing provided by the new program is the Art Appreciation course.

Art Appreciation in K to 12

A subject having to do with art is not a new addition to the general education program. In the previous years, the general education program already included arts or humanities which covered “fields of study like religion and philosophy, literature and language, fine arts and music as areas of knowledge dedicated to the pursuit of discovering, and understanding the nature of man ... as a person, as a human being” (Fernandez 1983, 2). As these fields specialized and differentiated over the years, following the trend in the globalizing world, arts or humanities has focused on visual arts and performing arts among

others. However, having a three-unit course devoted to education in the arts retained in the core curriculum despite the changes it has gone through is an indication of its perennial importance in the education of people. Thus, it is good to ask: What is art, by the way? What important purpose does it serve to have made it in the curriculum despite revisions? Since it has been around since the formalization of education by the Americans (Ordoñez 1998), how different should it be today?

These questions are precisely what Art Appreciation in the new general education program endeavors to reflect on – “nature, function and appreciation of the arts in the contemporary society” (CMO no. 20 s. 2013 Article I Section 3). Isagani Cruz, one of the Education Department’s K to 12 advisers, nevertheless, maintains that the humanities course in the current program is not the same as Art Appreciation in the new program in terms of its focus, i.e. art as art, or aesthetics. Instead of teaching students “how to view a work of art, what to look for, how to tell if an art work is good or bad ... The focus of the new subject,” according to Cruz in a *PhilStar* article on September 5, 2013, “is on the relationship of art to the individual student and his or her milieu.” The two of these questions are some of the most fundamental issues in the field of inquiry called aesthetics. (Graham 2005, 3). While it is clear that the course will be advanced from a wide range of disciplines, aesthetics will still have to play a significant role in terms of methodology.

Since education in the arts has not been accorded due emphasis and importance in the development of learners, art education in the K to 12 curriculum – from Kindergarten to college – takes an active role in addressing the needs of the 21st century learners who are faced with a barrage of images in a highly visual world. (*K to 12 Curriculum Guide: Music and Art* 2012, 4). In this course, the students will be given “the opportunity to observe, participate in, or otherwise experience works of art in order to appreciate their role and purpose in life”. Moreover, students are expected to engage with works of art “from an aesthetic point of view and also as reflections or critiques of the societies that produced them” (CMO no. 20 s. 2013 Appendix A). A student, for instance, is not only supposed to understand the architecture of a mall in terms of its function and form; “the student has to have opinion about how the design of the nearby mall contributes to the history and identity of the city ... how the design incorporates and blends Philippine and foreign architectural trends, what the design says about the Filipino psyche” (*PhilStar* September 5, 2013). In this sense, appreciation of art – valuing, positive or negative – requires an aesthetic response informed by a student’s knowledge of the history and tradition of art. Seen against the backdrop of the new general education program outcomes, understanding of the concepts related to art and art history and traditions, critical appreciation of works of art vis-à-vis their function and self-expression of students manifested in their written appraisal of the meaning and value of the works of art as required by the course are the competencies essential and expected to be honed in this course.

These competencies and outcomes are undeniably noble; improving them will serve well the purpose of the general education – developing well-rounded individuals whose appreciation of knowledge assures them liberalism, firm character as individuals and Filipinos active in building the

nation and the larger community (CMO no. 20 s. 2013 Article I). Nonetheless, setting these outcomes and competencies without question means accepting them at face value. Impelled by the thrust of this essay to engage the course in interaction and critical collaboration with another field of inquiry, in this case philosophy, we will ask questions on some points in need of clarification: (1) How and where do students start in reflecting on the work of art? Considering that graduates of the K to 12 have already taken up the principles, elements and processes of art, should we take these aesthetic competencies as the method in art appreciation? Do these competencies help them articulate their experiences with works of art in a meaningful way? (2) Does the course provide conditions not only for art criticism but also for art creation? Is it not more helpful in achieving the outcomes of the course for art criticism and art creation to go hand in hand? (3) Since the course is fundamentally about art's nature and function, what are the implications of the course's framework and dynamics in the understanding of the function of art? Does the course contribute to the recovery of art's enlightening role or otherwise? It is the contention of this essay that Agamben's effort to theorize on the nature and function of art can shed some light to the questions raised.

III. MAPPING *TERRA AESTHETICA*: AGAMBEN ON THE ORIGINAL UNITY OF THE WORK OF ART

Giorgio Agamben surely understands the seriousness of the obscuring of the nature and function of art in our culture that he dedicated his first book *The Man Without Content* to the inquiry on this alarming state of contemporary situations. With the arresting image created by such an enigmatic title, one cannot but ask who this man is. Agamben identifies this man in the chapter entitled *A Self-Annihilating Nothing*: "The artist is the man without content, who has no other identity than a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression and no other ground than this incomprehensible station on this side of himself" (1999, 35). If the artist is the man without content, "where has his content gone? Does he want it back?" (Durantaye 2009, 26). Although it goes without saying that the artist desires to recover his lost content, an extreme measure has to be done to that which is answerable for the fate of the artist: "destruction of aesthetics" (Agamben 1999, 6). Only in this severe way, Agamben thinks, is it possible "to regain a sense of art's original unity and structure ... to trace the progressive obscuring of this original space that art offered ... to restore art to its former status as a true shaper of actions and beliefs" (Durantaye 2009, 30).

The Hyperborean No-man's-land of Aesthetics

Agamben begins his ruminations on art with a long step backward noting how "Plato and Greek classical antiquity in general, had a very different experience of art, an experience having little to do with disinterest and aesthetic enjoyment" (1999, 5). Art in Plato's mind carried so much power that it could subvert truth and destroy the foundations upon which the *polis* was built. Despite the perils it is capable of sowing, this "pleasure-giving Muse" (607d), as Plato called it, incessantly casted her audience under spell in the subsequent generations. However, in 1829, Hegel recorded a turning point in the history of Western art when he stated that "art no longer provides for the satisfaction of those spiritual and intellectual needs that earlier peoples and times found in art and in art alone". In a manner

similar to Plato, Hegel concluded that "in all of these relations, art, in its highest vocation, is for us a thing in the past" (Hegel 1970, 13.24-13.25). Agamben's full measure of Hegel's remark is worth quoting at length here:

Hegel observes that the work of art does not satisfy the soul's spiritual needs as it did in earlier times, because our tendency toward reflection and toward a critical stance have become so strong that when we are before a work of art we no longer attempt to penetrate its innermost vitality, identifying ourselves with it, but rather attempt to represent it to ourselves according to the critical framework furnished by the aesthetic judgment. What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just our immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another (1999, 26).

Considering the polarity between Plato and Hegel's remarks on art, we now get to what Agamben wants to delve into in his historical investigation, i.e. what occurred between Plato and Hegel that brought art to its present unity? Agamben points to, and consequently brings into question, the barren vastness of the formalizing discipline of aesthetics as the science of the work of art (1999, 6). For Agamben, the discipline of aesthetics embodies the purification of the concept of "beauty" which results in what Kant called *le desinteressement* (Ibid., 3).

The advent of aesthetics made it as an imperative for judgments of works of art to be formed separately of their content. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new faculty was introduced into the experience of the work of art – taste. Kant's definition of taste as "the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest" *The Critique of Judgment* (1987, 53), was groundbreaking and crucial in the advancement of the discipline over the years. In his book's third chapter entitled *The Man of Taste and the Dialectic of the Split*, Agamben, nevertheless, argues that the invention of this faculty opened a division – *laceration* – between art and its public, between the artist and the nonartist. The artist, for Agamben, with the development of taste in the nonartist,

Moves in an increasingly free and rarefied atmosphere and begins the voyage that will take him from the live tissue of society to the hyperborean no-man's-land of aesthetics, in whose desert he will vainly seek nourishment and where he will eventually look like Catoblepas in Flaubert Temptation of St. Anthony, who devours his own extremities without realizing it (Ibid., 11).

This journey has pushed the artist to dispose more and more of the contents of his culture and tools of his craft along the way. Yet, as the notion of taste continued to develop in precision, with it the nativity of an ever more refined aesthetic judgment, the work of art became the sole competence of the artist then on. Thus, conversely, the nonartist, who deems it to be manifestation of bad taste to interfere in what the artist creates, "can only *spectare*, that is, transform himself into a less and less necessary and more and more passive partner, for whom the work of art is merely an occasion to practice his good taste"

(Ibid.). This laceration between the artist and the nonartist – between artistic subjectivity without content and aesthetic judgment – is the consequence of the rise of aesthetics and the introduction of taste underlining disinterested judgment in refining and purifying artistic judgments and isolating a singular form from the traditional body of cultural contents.

Subjected under the scalpel of aesthetic judgment, art, according to Agamben, turned into an “annihilating entity that traverses all its contents without ever being able to attain a positive work, because it cannot identify with any content” (1999, 36). Hence, “every time aesthetic judgment attempts to determine what the beautiful is, it holds in its hands not the beautiful but its shadow, as though its true object were not so much what art is but what is not: not art but non-art” (Ibid., 27). While it was born out of the desire to honor art, aesthetics “is unable to think of art according to its proper statute” and, as Agamben presages, “so long as man is prisoner of an aesthetic perspective, the essence of art remains closed to him” (Ibid., 63). What is this essence of art that remains obscured to man?

Revisiting *Poiesis*, Rethinking Originality

“The crisis of art in our time,” Agamben writes in the beginning of the chapter *Privation Is Like A Face*, “is, in reality, a crisis of poetry ... of man’s doing, of that productive action ... which appears, today, to be unfolding its power on a planetary scale in the operation of technology and industrial production” (1999, 36). This opening statement does not only speak of the alarming state of contemporary affairs but more importantly of art’s original unity. For Agamben, “art is always a work or outcome of the bringing into being of a positivity and not just a copying or representation of a prior content,” and therefore, “is not a theory of aesthetics” (Colebrook 2011, 28-29). Agamben looks back at art’s Greek beginning, when art played a role “in the production of truth and in the subsequent opening of a world for man’s existence and action” (1999, 44). He recounts how

Every time that something is produced, that is, brought from concealment and nonbeing into the light of presence, there is ποίησις, production, poetry. In this broad original sense of the word, every art—not only the verbal kind—is poetry, production into presence, and the activity of the craftsman who makes an object is ποίησις as well. To the extent that in it everything brings itself spontaneously into presence, even nature, φύσις, has the character of ποίησις (Ibid., 37).

Art’s original unity is production of works. This production must not be detached from the formalized practices and skills and, more so, from a larger and political creation of a shared world of expression. In other words, the production must be carried out as an expression among others in a collective domain of world formation and political-social dynamism and contact. Agamben shares the view of his mentor Heidegger on the vocation of art as history “in that it is in the work of art that the space of human experience first finds its terms, forms, and functions ... the origin of the work of art is the origin of experience, the origin of cultural forms and activities (such as history)” (Durantaye, 2009, 38). Turning from Greek antiquity to our times, Agamben has observed that the means of presence of man’s production has become double: “on the one hand there are things that enter into presence according to the statute of aesthetics, that is, the works of art, and on the other hand there

are those that come into being by way of σέχνη, that is, products in the strict sense” (1999, 37). This movement brought about by the alienation of the artist from “the common space in which the personalities of different artists met in a living unity in order then to assume ... their unmistakable physiognomy” (Agamben 1999, 38) has turned into an atomizing dogma called originality.

What does originality mean? For Agamben, to speak of art’s origin is not to consider it as “authentic,” “unique,” or that the work is different from the rest in the world. For him

Originality means proximity to the origin. The work of art is original because it maintains a particular relationship to its origin, to its formal ἀρχή, in the sense that it not only derives from the latter and conforms to it but also remains in a relationship of permanent proximity to it. In other words, originality means that the work of art—which, to the extent that it has the character of ποίησις, is produced into presence in a shape and from a shape—maintains with its formal principle such a relation of proximity as excludes the possibility that its entry into presence may be in some way reproducible, almost as though the shape produced itself into presence in the unrepeatable act of aesthetic creation (Ibid., 38).

Thus, unlike Plato whose conception of origin is nothing else than the immutable forms, Agamben follows Heidegger and Benjamin’s conception of origin not as “dead and monumentalized in past” but that which is a creative and dynamic continuum in the now (Durantaye 2009, 35). Agamben rethinks the notion of originality precisely to combat the contention that, like taste, originality is a recent development of aesthetics. Far from it; Agamben turns to the originality to show that it is “older and more fundamental than the rise of the discipline of aesthetics” (Ibid.). Agamben ends the penultimate chapter of his book with a powerful word on the alienation of art:

At the extreme point of its metaphysical destiny, art, now a nihilistic power, a “self-annihilating nothing,” wanders in the desert of terra aesthetica and eternally circles the split that cuts through it. Its alienation is the fundamental alienation, since it points to the alienation of nothing less than man’s original historical space. In the work of art man risks losing not simply a piece of cultural wealth, however precious, and not even the privileged expression of his creative energy: it is the very space of his world, in which and only in which he can find himself as man and as being capable of action and knowledge (1999, 64).

While Agamben’s antidote to this obscuring of the original unity of art is the destruction of aesthetics since “it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible for the first time” (Ibid., 71), he keeps the conversation going, asking whether the time is opportune for such an extreme move at the same time situating each of us in a privileged site to understand the real importance of the Western aesthetic project (Ibid., 6).

IV. ENGAGING ART APPRECIATION

In our attempt to engage Art Appreciation with Agamben’s ontological-historical-programmatic ruminations on art, we will focus on the questions we have previously raised: (1) How and where do students start in reflecting on the work of art? Considering that graduates of the K to 12 have already taken up the principles, elements and processes of art, should we take

these aesthetic competencies as the method in art appreciation? Do these competencies help them articulate their experiences with works of art in a meaningful way? (2) Does the course provide conditions not only for art criticism but also for art creation? Is it not more helpful in achieving the outcomes of the course for art criticism and art creation to go hand in hand? (3) Since the course is fundamentally about art's nature and function, what are the implications of the course's framework and dynamics in the understanding of the function of art? Does the course contribute to the recovery of art's enlightening role or otherwise? The first question deals with the method by which the critical reflection on the work of art is done. The content is the concern of the second question. The third question, as a sort of postscript, seeks to locate the place of the course in the call for the recovery of art's original unity.

Appreciating Art Through Aesthetics

In the *K to 12 Curriculum Guide: Music and Art*, pupils from Kindergarten to Grade Six are expected to learn the elements of an artwork and develop the basic aesthetics processes and students from Grades Seven to Twelve are expected to apply these knowledge and skills and master chosen genres or forms (2012, 6). Seen in the light of integrated and seamless learning of the K to 12 unified curriculum framework where learning of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes increases in depth and breadth, what facilitates and serves as method in critical reflection on the work of art of the students of Art Appreciation are the aesthetic competencies they acquired across levels. While it can be argued that in this way students will come to terms with the centrality of art to their lives as individuals and as a nation while debating on the nature and function of modern art (PhilStar 2013), at the core of the course emerges a risk of turning students into an audience that only "grants art cultural capital but does not experience it in a fashion that would allow it to play a fundamental and shaping role in their experience of the world" (Durantaye 2009, 37) since the erstwhile uncanny experience that art is capable of affording them has migrated to the artists. "Our modern aesthetic education," Agamben believes, "has accustomed us to finding this attitude normal and to resenting any intrusion into the artist's work as an unwarranted violation of his freedom" (1999, 11).

The written appraisal of the meaning and value of the works of art required of a student at the end of the course (CMO no. 20 s. 2013 Appendix A), is "a privileged occasion to exercise his critical taste" (Agamben 1999, 26) yet looking closely into the working of this critical judgment, "we must admit, even against ourselves, that everything our critical judgment suggests to us before a work of art belongs precisely to this shadow" (Ibid., 27) He says

In the act of judgment that separates art from non-art, we turn nonart into the content of art, and it is only in this negative mold that we are able to rediscover its reality. When we deny that a work is artistic, we mean that it has all the material elements of a work of art with the exception of something essential on which its life depends, just in the same way that we say that a corpse has all the elements of the living body, except that ungraspable something that makes of it a living being. Yet, when we actually find ourselves before a work of art, we behave unconsciously like a medical student who has studied anatomy only on corpses and who, faced with the pulsing organs of the

patient, must mentally refer back to his dead anatomical model in order to orient himself (Ibid.).

"Our appreciation of art," therefore, "begins necessarily with the forgetting of art" (Ibid., 26), an appreciation of a shadow.

Bringing Creation and Reflection Together

Based on the key stage standards in art education in the K to 12 curriculum, from Kindergarten to Grade Three, learners must be able to demonstrate understanding of the fundamental processes by performing, creating and responding. Grades Four to Six learners are expected to understand basic elements and concepts using the same operations. Students of Grade Seven to Ten, in developing the self, celebrating Filipino cultural identity and diversity and expanding one's vision of the world, are expected to demonstrate understanding of salient features of music and art of the Philippines and the world (2012, 8). These competencies are what students have as they enter Art Appreciation course in college. To a certain extent, they have already mastered the processes of art creation before engaging in critical reflection on works of art. While it is reasonable to decongest the curriculum so that learning will not tend to be more focused on fragmented and disintegrated and competencies not repeated unnecessarily, to engage students in art creation on one level and in reflection on another seems to further lacerate the original unity of art. If the curriculum aims to produce holistically developed Filipino graduates, not only do they need skills and competencies in artistic processes but also conscious experience of the world which entices them, as it were, to represent it meaningfully through production. And this is only possible, in the case of Art Appreciation, in bringing art creation and reflection together, be it in the basic education program or in the general education program.

The stress given by the K to 12 curriculum to the development and mastery of skills and competencies, aside from acceding to the labor market requirements, sidesteps the experience of *poiesis*, which is considered by Agamben, following the Greeks, as the essence of work (Ibid., 43). In fixating itself with skills and competencies, the curriculum leaves the students detached from experiences of the world which serve as the raw materials for the productive activity. Agamben takes note of this destruction of experience in his book *Infancy and History*:

Modern man makes his way home in the evening wearied by a jumble of events, but however entertaining or tedious, unusual or commonplace, harrowing or pleasurable they are, none of them will have become experience. It is this non-translatability into experience that now makes everyday existence intolerable – as never before – rather than an alleged poor quality of life or its meaninglessness compared with the past (on the contrary, perhaps everyday existence has never been so replete with meaningful events (2007, 16).

Engaging in works of art should help students represent their everyday experiences in ways meaningful to them and to the community. Instead of imposing formalized principles and standards to the students' diverse experiences of the world, aesthetic skills and competencies should guide them in the productive activity which allows them to achieve the original status of man in history and time (Agamben 1999, 63).

Agamben's aim in his critique of aesthetics, after all, is not to favor creation over reflection, content over form and artist over spectator. Far from it; Agamben puts forward a critique of modern conceptions of rationality, which tends to partition and separate things from one another, in order, eventually, in order to restore them in unity.

Postscript

Over two years ago, our aesthetic sensibilities were tested by the installation of the work of the artist Mideo Cruz called *Poleteismo*, part of the group exhibit entitled *KULÔ* held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines on the occasion of the sesquicentennial birth anniversary of Jose Rizal. Though not the first occasion it was shown for public presentation, the mixed media collage, which featured religious images mashed up with political icons and paraphernalia and popular culture figures, has elicited unconstructive response from various groups. Catholic religious groups, art circles, political and academic personalities expressed their utter disgust and dismay over the work and its creator and the officials of the cultural infrastructure for sanctioning and funding an installation which infringed its obligation to pay tribute to the Filipino soul and creativity and violated the religious feelings of the country's Christian majority. In Cruz's work, viewed from the creative-formal principle of aesthetics, "the sphere of the divine becomes opaque and withdraws" and through the work, man awakens to the event made known by Nietzsche's fool: "God is dead" (Agamben, 1999, 36). These groups called on the senate to investigate on the matter, to review the procedures in allowing exhibits in the cultural venue of the land. Despite his success in provoking critical discourses on contemporary art by raising questions on what he calls in the installation's description "the transformation of the deity ... to an epitome of neoliberal economy" and on the very nature and function of art today, Cruz, however, did not expect the pandemonium – including the lawsuit and closure of the exhibit.

It is impossible to know as early as now how the aesthetic sensibilities of the Filipinos will be shaped by the course we have considered in this essay. The implications of the course's dynamics and frameworks to the understanding and recovery of art's enlightening role remain dim and uncertain, despite the course's articulated outcomes. "What is certain, at any rate," says Agamben, as if answering our question, "is that the work of art is no longer, at this point, the essential measure of man's dwelling on earth" (1999, 21). This dreadful state of affairs, however, needs careful attention since, as Hölderlin wrote in *Patmos*, "where there is danger, also grows that which saves" (1969, 117). In the past century, there has been a decline in the tradition and culture of peoples. Yet, Arendt, in her 1961 essay *Tradition and the Modern Age* averted: "This fact may be deplorable, but implicit in it is the great chance to look upon the past with eyes undistracted by any tradition, with a directness which has disappeared from Occidental reading and hearing" (29). Art Appreciation, and the entire K to 12 curriculum with all the changes and implication it brings with it, face us with both the danger, as we have tried to show, and the means of rescue – the potentiality of a new field of vision and a new possibility of what Arendt calls 'directness'.

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