Humanities Diliman (July-December 2016) 13:2, 127-162

# The Possibilities and Problems of Entanglement in Contemporary Manila Theater: *Pista* as Model, *Rizal X* as Exemplar

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**ABSTRACT**

In this essay, entanglement is proposed as a conceptual idiom for the understanding of contemporary Manila theater where *pista* (fiesta) is used as model and *Rizal X* as example. Contemporary Manila theater via *Rizal X* is argued to be part of an intricate entanglement: representations, shared histories, relationships and genres, which are all activated during a pista. *Rizal X* is used as an example because it strategically puts entanglement in an affirmative position. More specifically, *Rizal X* is treated as a microcosm of the pista because it has entangled representations, histories, relationships, and genres in the same way that the pista performs such entanglement. Nonetheless, the idea of entanglement often carries a negative connotation. Despite the promise of entanglement as a possible idiom towards the identification of an ontology of contemporary Manila theater, entanglement has its own limitations, especially since many artists unintentionally overuse entanglement (i.e., pastiche, fragments) in their theater. Because of such complication, there is a tendency for theater works to unintentionally editorialize their chosen subjects. In conducting a close reading of *Rizal X*, it is envisioned to illustrate the limitations of entanglement as a discursive concept for the understanding of contemporary Manila theater.

*Keywords*: Theater and the city, theatre studies, Dulaang UP, Jose Rizal, contemporary performance practice, social drama

In 2011, the Philippines celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Jose P. Rizal, its national hero. Both private and public institutions such as the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the National Historical Institute, the National Museum and the University of the Philippines (UP) worked hand in hand to celebrate Rizal's contribution to Philippine culture and society. Many of the programs

ISSN 1655-1532 Print / ISSN 2012-0788 Online

constituted were academic in nature such as the international conference billed as "Rizal in the 21st Century" held at the GT Toyota Auditorium in UP in July. In October 2011, a lecture series at the Yuchengco Museum at the RCBC Towers in Makati was also held with scholars and cultural commentators Emmanuel Miñana, Lorenzo Tañada III and Ramon Guillermo as guest speakers. Book launches were also sporadically held in this yearlong celebration. For instance, Edwin Agustin Lozada's edited anthology titled *Remembering Rizal: Voices from the Diaspora* had a launching at the Asian Center in July 2011. There was also a film showing at the Rizal Open Air Auditorium on 17 – 19 June 2011. Featured films were Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Rizal* (1998), Tikoy Aguiluz's *Rizal sa Dapitan* (1997), Mario O'Hara's *Sisa* (2008), and a short documentary film *Lolo Jose: The Family Carries On* produced by the Vibal Foundation for the sesquicentennial celebrations. A Rock Concert billed as "Rock Rizal 2011" was staged and performed by popular artists such as Jett Pangan, Ely Buendia, Radioactive Sago, Sandwich, and Gloc 9.

Theater companies in Manila were also active in celebrating the hero's sesquicentennial. Tanghalang Pilipino of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) partnered with the NCCA in a new musical rendition of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (Noli) staged at its Little Theater. Through the privately managed Intramuros Administration, Anton Juan Jr. staged a short musical revue about Josephine Bracken, Jose Rizal's lover during his last days in Dapitan and before his execution at Bagumbayan (now Luneta). This piece was staged at Fort Bonifacio in Intramuros, where Rizal spent his last days before his execution on 30 December 1896 for subversion. Gantimpala Theater Foundation staged an adaptation of *Noli*, billed as *Kanser*. The UP Repertory Company staged Anril Tiatco's *Miss Dulce Extranjera o ang Paghahanap kay Miss B* at the Aldaba Hall in Quezon City with La Verne Lacap directing the piece. In the Southern Tagalog region, Jose Rizal's *Junto al Pasig* was staged by the students of Communication Arts of the UP Los Baños. The Office for Initiative in Culture and the Arts in UP Diliman sponsored art exhibits and co-presented cultural performances like the opera based on Rizal's *Noli*, with libretto and music by National Artist for Music Felipe de Leon under the direction of Alexander Cortez.

One way of understanding the diversity of all Rizal-related activities is looking at the entanglements of the *pista* (fiesta). The pista in many Catholic communities in the Philippines is a condition of overlapping occurrences. It is the only occasion in every Catholic town in the archipelago where several diverse performance events happen simultaneously. Outside the pista, often, there is collision between the Church and the townspeople; but ironically, everything seems to run smoothly

during the pista. For instance, there are some towns where the perya (fair) is erected in the nearby Church. Even if the atmosphere of the perya is somewhat chaotic, the Church authorities do not see the perya as interfering in their liturgical services. Concerts are also prevalent during fiesta celebrations. Sometimes, the Church officials volunteer the yard of their parishes as venues of concerts. In the liturgical services, opposing parties of the local government are often seen sitting side-by-side. Strangers or visitors become friends. Catholic communities celebrate the pista to honor the town's patron. Like any pista celebration in a Philippine Catholic community, Rizal was the celebrated patron or the venerated icon during his sesquicentennial.

In this essay, I aim to establish entanglement as a possible conceptual idiom for the understanding of contemporary theater in Manila. In the proposal of entanglement, I use the performance and celebration of the pista as a model. The concept of entanglement may be understood as a condition of overlaps and a condition of blending or mixing together. Other key concepts that often define entanglement in discourse include associations, linkages, relations, proximity, affinity, amalgam, collation, syncretism, hybridity, and assemblage. These are the common concepts used in discussing the aestheticized effects of intermingling elements in an entangled phenomenon.

In *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance,* Chris Salter reflects on the interrelations between humans (performers) and inanimate objects. More specifically, he is interested in answering "how can we understand the construction of artistic processes and events in which the human may no longer be the sole locus of enactment but performs in tandem with other kinds of beings: a tangle of circuits, an array of sensors, shape-changing materials?" (xxxii). Salter argues that the entanglement between technical objects (or "machines" such as the screen, the computer, the Internet) and the human actor has made it difficult to separate or tease out the distinguishing markers between these figures due to their intimate relationship. He writes, "human and technical beings and processes are so intimately bound up in a conglomeration of relations that makes it difficult, if not impossible to tease out separate essences for each" (xxxxii).

Examples of such argument may be found in his discussions of "performing machines" where he talks about the "performances" of multimedia artists in the United States and in Europe. Salter argues that in the works of these artists, the animistic power of inanimate beings is combined within the technological mise-en-scène, contributing to "a co-productive understanding of what machine autonomy actually

signified" (302). Thus, he suggests that in this sense of entanglement—"co-production" or collaboration between machines and human beings—artists are attempting to transcend the limitations of the dichotomy of humans/non-humans (machines) in theater and performance. Generally, Salter reflects on the relationship of technology and humans (live bodies in performance) to negate the "supposedly modern tension between the *humanistic* body and the *dehumanized* machine" (276).

Salter's conception of theater entanglement is more manifest in the materiality or the "objects" of performances: wires, screens, computers, and other technological elements in the performance combined with the human actors. My use of entanglement is discursive, which is envisioned as a way of affirming and critiquing the current state of Manila theater.

In the light of the preceding discussion, it is argued that the theater scene in Manila is part of an intricate entanglement: representations, shared histories, relationships, and genres. As will be explored later, the pista is a good analogy to this proposal of entanglement because the pista is arguably a complex phenomenon, thought of as solemn yet at the same time secular; a festivity where neither the state nor the Church is in the ultimate position of authority; a parade of holiness; and a procession of spectacle. Pista celebrations in the Philippines are celebrated as a community gathering (with the municipal or local government working at hand) and most importantly as a commemoration of either the birthday or martyrdom or simply the Roman Catholic mandated feast day of a community's patron saint. With this as background, two important presentations and representations are working in constant negotiation: the secular (often profane) and the sacred. Also, looking closely at the different performances or activities in the pista, the celebration becomes an intervening space of shared histories between the community and the colonizers. The entanglement of relationships is also a performed encounter during the pista. The pista may be seen as an occasion where various opposing political parties literally sit side-by-side. Finally, pista in the Philippines is filled with excesses. Often, these excesses are derived from the different performance activities such as the procession, beauty pageants, parades, concerts, and sports festival. In short, festive dancing, singing and other performance are combined together in a pista—making the religious occasion extravagantly spectacular.

However, it should be noted that this is not to point out that theater artists in Manila are intentionally captivated by poetics and aesthetics of mixing and matching as part of their creative strategies in creating theater. But looking at the works of many theater artists in Manila, there seems to be a degree of comfort with entanglement, even if artists do not intentionally recognize it as part of their

artistic endeavors. Nonetheless, the complexity of entanglement possesses a danger of being entrapped in a muddled situation, often producing a sense of disorder and even chaos. With this, the idea of entanglement often carries a negative connotation. Despite the promise of entanglement as a possible idiom toward the identification of an ontology of contemporary Manila theater, entanglement has its own limitations, especially since many artists unintentionally overuse entanglement (i.e., pastiche, fragments) in their theater making.

Because of such complications, there is a tendency for theater works to unintentionally editorialize their chosen subjects. Many contemporary theater works in Manila are social dramas touching social issues and realistic in approach. In *Palabas,* Doreen Fernandez provides an overview of what she considers the state of Philippine [Manila] theater today. She writes, "it is Philippine life that fires our playwrights. They do not need to hear of the latest trends in writing techniques in order to want to write a play in like manner. Instead, their themes invade their craft—and they reach for techniques to fit" (223). Fernandez is reinforcing the fact that the dramatic tradition dominates the theater scene in the metropolis or anywhere else in the country. Following this line of inquiry, the primary conditions in doing theater are coherent narrative and representations of social life. Fernandez also adds that in the thematic concern of Filipino playwrights and players (directors and actors) "the vitality of theatre is in its urgency" (223). By urgency, Fernandez notes that Philippine theater such as the general theater scene in Manila is used to represent social concerns of the time and therefore provides a commentary on the state of things at that time. On a more discursive reading of such plays, these productions may easily be identified with television shows because they present topical issues (such as migrant workers, poverty, homosexuality, the disintegrating family, to name but a few) and such issues are editorialized.

In this analysis of pista as a model of entanglement, Dulaang UP's *Rizal X* under the direction of Dexter Santos is used as example because it strategically puts entanglement in an affirmative position. But more specifically, the choice of *Rizal X* is conditioned by three fundamental reasons. First, *Rizal X* is a microcosm of the entanglement because the play has entangled representations, histories, relationships, and genres in the same way that the pista performs such entanglement. Second, the production is intended to be a fragment. As stated in the program notes, it is composed of vignettes created by different artists. In short, the entanglement is physically manifested in the devising of the artists behind *Rizal X*. Third and finally, *Rizal X* presents entangled social issues, which may be articulated as social problems within the context of the Philippines. In conducting a close reading of the

performance, I reflect on its shortcomings in dealing with the proposed social issues vis-à-vis this problematization of entanglement. The analysis is not to put down *Rizal X* as cheap, of low value, and without any merit. Rather, I take the play to be valuable both in its attempt to critique how the Philippines is currently entangled with the politics of everyday life, cultural history, colonialism, and even the global world via transnational relations, and for what its shortcomings further reveal about these issues.

## PISTA AND THE PERFORMANCE OF ENTANGLEMENT

Pista may literally mean "celebration" or "party" but, as observed in various celebrations in Filipino Catholic communities, it is more than a conventional party because it is the time when "the whole community joins together to celebrate the feast day of the town's patron saint. A fiesta showcases the best of the town has to offer: warm hospitality, talented and friendly people, the best fruits and vegetables of the season, the famous sweets, biscuits, crafts, and the most delicious cuisine" (Pineda 74). Josefa Cagoco and Florentino Hornedo explain that since a pista is believed to be a quintessential performance of the Filipino Catholics who dominate the archipelago, the government likes to project the nation as a "Fiesta Island." Cagoco adds that to be a Filipino is to be immersed in this "fiesta culture" (s3/3). According to anthropologist Felipe Landa Jocano, a fiesta is "used to mark sacred times such as the feast days of saints in the Roman Catholic calendar. But the religious activities, such as processions and fluvial parades, are only part of the entire practice because in the Filipino setting, variety shows, talent competitions, beauty pageants and sports tournament are staple" (qtd. in Cagoco s3/3).

Shirley Guevara, Corazon Gatchalian, and Sir Anril Tiatco explain that a Philippine Catholic pista is a complex phenomenon as it is expected to be solemn yet at the same time secular, a festivity where neither the state nor the Church is in ultimate position of authority, a parade of holiness and a procession of spectacle. With this, the performativity of pista is arguably an entangled phenomenon, since the solemnity observed by the Church intermingles with the secular vision of the state. The sacred image of the town's patron combines with a spectacular personification in the procession. It is during the pista that orthodox Catholicism is negotiated with everyday Catholicism.

Pista celebrations in the Philippines are celebrated as a community gathering (with the municipal or local government working at hand) and most importantly as a commemoration of either the birth date, martyrdom or simply the Roman Catholic

mandated feast day of a community's patron saint. With this as background, two important presentations and representations are working in constant negotiation: the secular (often profane) and the sacred. By virtue of how the secular and sacred are commonly perceived, the secular belongs to the municipal government and the sacred to the Roman Catholic institution. Both institutions provide avenues of presentation for the festivity. But nevertheless, during this time these institutions do not necessarily see each other as opposing forces despite contentious encounters between the two (especially at the national level) at other times of the year.[1]

At times, the government consults with the Church, as in the case of the Kalibo pista in the Visayan province of Aklan, where the culminating celebration is *ati-atihan,* a street-dance performance honoring the black-skinned ancestors of the islanders called the *ati* and a performance-devotion to the Santo Niño (The Holy Child). William Peterson describes the performance as the juxtaposition of the "sacred and the profane as devotees of the Santo Niño (The Holy Child) mingle in the streets with drunken merrymakers and spectacularly attired dancers day and night for seven days" (508). Organized by both the local Roman Catholic Church and the municipal government of Kalibo, this festivity has interesting spaces where representations of the Divine (in the figure of the Holy Child) are performed in colorful varieties. More particularly, the representations become more complex when locals begin to strip off the Divine attributes of the image such as configuring Him as a "mischievous boy, who surreptitiously leaves his altar night after night" (Alcedo 110), while others think of Him as a "naughty boy, who secretly steps down at night to gallivant around Kalibo's deserted streets to tease and play harmless tricks on the residents" (111). In this representation of the Holy Child, there is mixing and matching between the mandated Roman Catholic dogma (the attribution of the Santo Niño as a Divine figure) and the narratives of everyday Catholicism. As Peterson explains, "this combination of the Santo Niño playful spirit with his spiritual potency constitutes a powerful grafting of the spiritual onto the celebratory" (509).

The combination of contradictory perspectives makes the representation ambiguous, but does not defer the fluidity of the performance. Ambiguity also resides in the modes of presentations where this representation is manifested. For instance, Peterson explains that the ati-atihan is used in Philippine tourism as the "Philippine Mardi Gras" because colorful costumes are donned during the weeklong showdown, mimicking the mytho-historical events in this region of the Visayas: "the displacement of the darker skinned indigenous *Ati* population by their seafaring Malay cousins, who sought refuge from a despotic sultan in Borneo, and mass

conversions to Christianity a number of years later" (505-06). The congregation celebrates the pista not only as veneration of the Holy Child but at the same time is an acknowledgment of the ancestors of the Filipinos (or the locals in that region). As the celebration also marks this acknowledgement of ancestry, participants commonly apply "soot on their faces and extremities to appear like the putative first inhabitants of the Philippines" (Alcedo 111) while these dancers carry with them a figure of the Holy Child.

In addition to this complex picture of the sacred and secular, Alcedo observes another "performance" adding to the complexity of the ati-atihan. There is a group of active participants known in the Visayas as *agi* (or the *bakla* in Tagalog) who complicate the presentational structure of the ati-atihan. While many devotees cover themselves with black ink and don costumes made of natural straw or fibers from pineapple, coconut leaves, and abaca, these devotees dance in the streets as Folies Bergère chorus girls. In Alcedo's ethnography, then leader *Tay* (Old Man) Augus explains that he and his friends would take pains to whiten up to distance themselves from the black-painted performers (Alcedo 111).[2] Outside the fiesta celebration, this cross-dressing, especially if associated with homosexuality, is not officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has a strong stand against homosexuality: according to Manila Auxiliary Bishop Socrates Villegas, its, "goes against Filipino sensibilities" (qtd. in Alcedo 114). During my visit to Kalibo for the ati-atihan in 2005, I observed that there were more agi participants. In addition to the Folies Bergère costumes, others wore can-can costumes, and some flamboyant costumes similar to those of the Rio mardi gras in Brazil.

There is also entanglement of shared histories in celebrating the pista. Here, I am particularly interested in addressing colonial histories, which are often dismissed as trivial and deceitful because of the destructive forces many colonial masters exhibited during colonialism. Looking closely at the different performances or activities in the fiesta, the celebration becomes an intervening space of shared histories between the community and the colonizers. In *Power and Intimacy,* Fenella Cannell explains: "if the legacy of Spanish Catholicism continues to dominate popular religiosity, it is the legacy of the American colonial period and its schooling system which has made the most obvious impression on public secular life" (203). Following the arguments regarding the first web of entanglement of the sacred and the secular, the logic that Cannell underscores is a reference to how various histories of colonialism (beginning with Spain who colonized the islands from 1521 to 1898 and followed by the United States who bought the Philippines from Spain for USD 20,000 with the Treaty of Paris in 1898) are performed and implicated in

fiesta celebrations. As in the example of the ati-atihan, the community narrative about the ati may be invoked as personal history (in deference to pre-Hispanic history) mixed with the divinity of the Holy Child as a reference to colonial history of Spain and finally attached to the colorful pageantry of street performances of contemporary choreographies and other innovative dance movements like Brazilian and French showgirls, and hip-hop, to name a few, as indicators of the American colonial impact. During my visit in 2005, I also observed that a group of young devotees clad in the usual straw garments and black makeup were dancing to the music of American hip-hop group Black-Eyed Peas while carrying images of the Holy Child. According to one devotee, his participation was a form of gratitude for having passed the Certified Public Accountant board examination, which he took in October 2004.

The pista itself is a colonial concept. In *The Hispanization of the Philippines*, John Leddy Phelan explains that Spaniards thought of fiestas as a means of providing "a splendid opportunity to indoctrinate the Filipinos by performances of religious rituals" (73). Phelan demonstrates that fiesta was one way of encouraging the converts during the Hispanic colonial era to actively engage with the Catholic Church. One of the colorful activities that the Spaniards introduced in the fiestas was the pageants or processions of images, where community patron saints are brought closer to the congregation through these paraded images accompanied by community singing. In today's celebration of pista such as the La Naval in Angeles City and in Quezon City, many women sing the "Ave Maria" while the image of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary is paraded onto the streets during the procession. In addition, the procession wagons are decorated elegantly with wild flowers.

On a more general note, the religious orientation of the pista is Hispanic in origin. Jocano does not deny the Hispanic provenance of Philippine fiestas. Jocano and Phelan note that the veneration of saints and other religious images during fiestas is a product of Christianization by Hispanic conquistadors. Spanish missionaries introduced the concepts of the saints in the archipelago. Jocano and Phelan also add that the introduction of saints eventually led to the way for the pre-Hispanic people replacing their idols (known as *anito*) with these images of Catholicism.

Nonetheless, Phelan asserts that when the Hispanic friars were converting pre-Hispanic peoples of the islands, the missionaries were dismissive of the indigenous religion. In this way, "Christianity was presented to the infidels not as a more perfect expression of their [the islanders] beliefs but as something entirely new. Any resemblance between the two religions was dismissed as diabolical conspiracy

in which the devil deceived the unbelievers by mimicking the rituals and the beliefs of Christianity" (53). Arguably, Christianity (later Catholicism) in the Philippines is a product of shifts and turns based on negotiations between the animistic beliefs of the islanders and the doctrines of the Hispanic friars. In sociological and anthropological studies, Christianization is explored via dynamic contestations. Harvey Whitehouse explains that Christianization during colonialism does not involve "simply the imposition of Western culture onto local traditions but, rather, highly variable processes of local reinterpretation and contestation" (295). What is illustrated here is that the development and appropriation of the Hispanic religion (Catholicism) in the Philippines involved ruptures and irregularities. Hence, what is more crucial in this investigation of appropriation is that both the *native* and the *foreign* are simultaneously contributing toward indigenization.

Discussions of the legacy of the Americans in Philippine culture often focus on popular culture, such as the degrading commentaries of travel commentator Pico Iyer. The celebration of the pista is a good medium where this American dimension is clearly observable. In particular, fiesta celebrations in the Philippines include *perya*, beauty pageants, singing competitions, musical concerts, performance skits, and variety shows like the cabaret and vaudeville (popularly known as *jamboree*). In some areas, fiesta committees of the municipal government organize what locals call *paliga* or inter-barangay basketball tournaments. These forms of spectacles are believed to be imported or influenced by the Americans during the "benevolent program" of the US government that began in 1898. Cannell adds: "local entertainments and celebrations have also been touched by a deference to 'American' standards and values thus understood" (204).

A better way of exemplifying this performance of shared histories is illustrated by Cannell's observation of the Filipino community in the Bicol region, the area of her ethnography. She writes, "the middle classes of each small town organise themselves into prayer-groups for the devotion of the Sacred Heart, but also into groups of Rotarians and Lions. Seminarians training for holy orders play basketball in their spare time. Small primary schools in the barangay field teams of drummers and majorettes in all the major town celebrations" (204). To complete Cannell's analogy, many fiestas also include *palaro* (folk games) such as *palosebo* (a popular game for children where participants aim to climb a slimy bamboo pole and take a small flag from the top), and *habulan ng baboy* (catching a piglet in a muddy lawn). There are also some barrio fiestas where cockfighting (*sabong* in many Filipino languages) is permitted.

The entanglement of relationships is also a performed encounter during pista celebrations. In Jose Rizal's *Noli*, Chapter 26 is a vivid description of this entanglement:

> All over people give orders, they chatter, they shout, they make comments, they make noise and they clamour; all this trouble and fatigue for the benefit of the guests known and unknown, to welcome the ones you know, and the ones you've never seen before – or will ever seen again – with open arms, so that the stranger, the foreigner, the friend, the enemy, the Filipino, the Spaniard, the pauper, the rich man will emerge happy and satisfied. You don't even want thanks, nor is it expected from anyone who does anything short of marring a family's hospitality during, or even after, digestion. (171)

Rizal's description suggests that friends and foes alike can enjoy the merrymaking equally. The pista is seen as a space of "truce," where oppositional personalities such as the friar Damaso and the protagonist Crisostomo Ibarra in Rizal's *Noli* mingle. Familiar and unfamiliar faces are also engaged in this celebration as the pista is perceived to be the occasion where Filipino communities perform hospitality at its finest.

Even earlier than the setting of Rizal's novel, communities celebrating pista created a sort of cosmopolis. In particular, during the early days of fiesta celebrations in the islands in the eighteenth century, *komedya* was part of its celebration, particularly in the colonial capital of Manila. Nicanor Tiongson and Fred Sevilla explain that the komedya performances drew large crowds of people coming not only from within the territories of the city or the town who celebrated the fiesta, but also those coming from other towns and cities, the highlanders, and people from other parts of the archipelago. Even the friar Zuñiga in his *Estadismo de las Islas Filipinas* attested to the grand of scale audience attendance (qtd. in Sevilla 512). In his account, Zuñiga described the swarming of people of different statuses and from various territories including those coming from the galleon ships. Various *loa* (a convention serving as a prologue and a gesture of welcome delivered by a declaimer) of the early komedyas would also attest to this creation of a cosmopolis: the declaimer would greet the multitude of people from all walks of life. Those who came only for the performances were not perceived as strangers or outsiders. They were even engaged in discussion because they were allowed (together with the townsfolk) to contribute to how the performance would go on because, as Nikki Briones notes, the finale of a komedya performance depended on how the audience members wanted it to move along.

In addition, the pista is also an occasion where various opposing political parties literally sit side-by-side. This is especially true when these ruling elites attend the Holy Eucharist. Even if the gestures are artificial, it is notable to see these people exchanging peace-be-with-you's in one of the important parts of the sacrament. And then there is also a sense of truce among conflicting neighbors. The pista is one season where, despite disagreements, neighbors share utensils and cooking materials, and visit each other. It is also a very special occasion in the year where poor members become privileged as politicians and church officials alike take time to visit and participate in their banquet.

With the descriptions illustrated above, it may be inferred that fiestas in the Philippines are filled with excesses. Often, these excesses are derived from the different performance activities presented above (such as the procession, beauty pageants, parades, concerts, sports festivals). In short, festive dancing, singing, and other performances are combined together in a pista—making the religious occasion extravagantly spectacular. Nonetheless, this experience of excess in a pista is mostly encountered in food preparation. Maida Pineda notes that the Philippine fiesta is a season where celebrating communities forget economic difficulties and focus on offering the best dishes for the occasion.

On a final note, the narrative of the pista therefore begins with a template of hospitality or opening up the self to others. The pista calls for a recognition of shared intimacy among community members and between the hosting community members and guests. At the same time, the pista calls for the sharing of power among the stakeholders. Therefore, pista becomes a contrapuntal venue of narratives, where the link is neither completely religious nor secular, neither native nor foreign. It is this complexity that makes the pista a performance of entanglement.

In the next section, I interrogate the production of *Rizal X,* one of the productions staged during the sesquicentennial of the Philippine national hero, as a potential exemplar of this entanglement as manifested in the pista.

## PERFORMING ENTANGLEMENT IN *RIZAL X*

Staged at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater in June 2011, the official blog post (dulaangup.tumblr.com) of its producing company describes *Rizal X* as:

> [a] new work that aims to (re)discover and (re)introduce the relevance of our hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal. Using mixed popular media of today's

> generation, this production aims to compile different points of view towards Rizal, his works and his life, in a collaboration of text, dance, music, animation and film culminating into a performance, which will refresh dreams and aspirations. A reminder for all of us of our childhood restlessness in dreaming and taking risks, an ax to our frozen desires and fantasies that has turned cold because of fears and hesitations caused by time and age. All of these threaded by Rizal's colorful historicity and poetry of courage and burning passion in writing, in fighting for education, in the arts and in love that remains a relevant memoir for every generation of Filipinos all over the world. ("*Rizal X* Playdates")

This description presents the play as a mix and match of performance genres and other art forms based on what the production's director, Dexter Santos, described in the program as "fragments" from Rizal's life and works.

Santos commissioned several artists to construct their versions and images of the hero. Among the artists invited were playwrights Floy Quintos and Layeta Bucoy; audio-visual artists and filmmakers Gerson Abesamis, Aiess Alonso, Jopy Arnaldo, Winter David, Adi Lopez, Malee Matigas, and Joaquin Valdez; emerging poet Vlad Gonzales; songwriters Dong Abay, JM de Guzman, William Manzano, and the independent band Happy Days Ahead; comic illustrator and animator Manix Abrera; installation artist and sculptor Leeroy New; and choreographers Chips Beltran, Deo de la Cruz, and Al Garcia.

Santos asked his assistants and dramaturgs (Katte Sabate and Chic San Agustin) to thread these fragments into a unified theatrical presentation, to look into Rizal's original works—particularly his novels—and to investigate his infamous love letters. Santos mentioned in the program that the piece was composed of different vignettes showcasing different images of Rizal. With this as background, the piece represents an attempt to go against the popular dogma about Rizal. As Sabate and San Agustin wrote in the program, the show aimed at offering a fresh perspective about the hero especially to young audiences. Taking this fragmented form, *Rizal X* suggests that the narrative of history is never complete.

With this mixing and matching, *Rizal X* can be described as the embodiment of a pista onstage. Performance devices used in *Rizal X* resonate with the various performative activities enacted in a pista—singing, dancing, parading, and the procession. The image of Rizal becomes a substitute to the venerated religious icon. And the invitation of audience to participate as interlocutors in historical

narratives is almost similar to the "hospitality" or the welcoming gestures of the host to various guests (familiar or unfamiliar faces) in the pista.

Santos, Sabate, and San Agustin wove the separated vignettes for audiences to experience what may be thought of as a unified whole—a consolidated dramatic narrative. Some reviews online discuss the production in terms akin to those of entanglement, finding this to be a strength of the performance. For instance, an online reviewer Kish says that the production was "a combination of 22 vignettes of the life of Rizal, our motherland, of who we are as a nation all interpreted through dialogues, music, dance and video." Another online reviewer, Jhesset Trina Enano states that the show was "imaginative and playful. It is told in a non-linear fashion, as actors portray different characters, shifting from one to another across changing scenes."

The production of *Rizal X* thus offers a way of linking the possibility of pista as a creative strategy of contemporary theater makers in Manila in doing theater. First, *Rizal X* has gathered several artists together in an attempt to perform multiple versions of the national hero. As earlier noted, the production combined different vignettes of performances dealing with Rizal and his works. I illustrated earlier that many Catholic communities stage performative genres during the pista—parade, procession, beauty pageant, concert, perya, palaro, singing competitions, and so on. In this way, the pista is a festival of performances where a gathering of "talented" community members takes place. In these performances, community members exhibit artistry in decorating the *karo* (wagons in the procession) and *karosa* (floats in the parade); showcase sportsmanship in different *palaruan* events; flaunt singing and dancing talents in amateur singing competition or in concerts; grace the stage through the *pasarela* (stylized walk of beauty pageant contestants) in beauty pageants, to name but a few. Like the pista, *Rizal X* can be viewed as a theatrical feast where various performance genres are staged—dance, film, visual arts, puppetry, song, theater, poetry, rap, declamation, oratory, and comic skits. *Rizal X* is a mini-festival of the arts to mark the sesquicentennial celebration of the national hero. At the same time, this gathering of performance genres is a manifestation of how many contemporary theater artists in Manila are commonly staging their plays. Many contemporary works in Manila involve the mixing and matching of dramatic texts with songs and dances. An example is the 2013 staging of Josefina Estrella's *Adarna* where the narrative of this *corrido*, adapted by Vlad Gonzales, combined puppetry, singing, and dancing. Another example is Anton Juan Jr.'s direction of Repertory Philippines production of Susan Kim's *The Joy Luck Club*, staged at Onstage Greenbelt

in February 2011. Juan's rendition combined the *jingju* (Peking Opera) found in the text of the play with Chinese and pop songs (performed in a cabaret style), and dolls used as puppets.

Second, I illustrated earlier that the pista has the character of interlinking colonial histories and the present. *Rizal X* cuts across historical milieus by attempting to juxtapose the *there and then* (Rizal's milieu) to the *here and now*. Literally, the play presented overlapping historical periods. The opening musical number is set in the present—in a palaruan (playground, also the title of the opening song number as indicated in the play transcript). I sensed that this use of playground marked the initial attempt of *Rizal X* to relate Rizal to younger audiences, whereby the lyrics of this number implies that like them, Rizal also played, dreamed, and enjoyed freedom in a palaruan. After this prologue, *Rizal X* brings audience members on a back-and-forth journey between the past and the present.

For instance, one vignette in the performance text (devised by Sabate and San Agustin) begins with Rizal who enters from the main door of the auditorium and walks to the stage while reading a letter written by Leonor Rivera, whom scholars assert to be Rizal's ultimate love. Juxtaposing this dramatic reading of the letter, is a song sung by an actor dressed in a wedding gown (who by implication represents Leonor Rivera) (see Figure 1). She sings:

> Tonight, I break some promises I've made
> Forgive me but these words just cannot wait
> It's true, I found the love I've waited for
> And it's not you
> It's not you. (Sabate and San Agustin 38)

After the singing, another actor dressed in a wedding suit enters (I inferred this was Henry Kipping, Rivera's husband). He offers his hand to Rivera. Rizal bids goodbye to Rivera by waving his hand. Then he continues by speaking as if talking to a dear close friend: "When I heard the news, I thought I would go mad. But I had to smile because I knew she would choose Kipping over Rizal. That Englishman is a free man. I am not. These are my last words about her" (28). The episode ends with a video by Joaqs Valdez. In this video, a woman is drifting away from the shorelines of what I assumed to be Batangas (the hometown of Rivera) while a young man stands and stares—a romanticized image of letting go. This video is set in the present time, with the young man dressed in contemporary clothing: jeans and a polo shirt.

Figure 1. The vignette "Tonight, I Break Some Promises" in *Rizal X* with Maita Ponce as the bride and Reuben Uy as the groom/Jose Rizal (Photo: Vlad Gonzales).

In addition to this intermingling of historical moments, *Rizal X* also juggles sociohistorical and political issues. Perhaps, this is rooted in the popular perception that Rizal himself was a social commentator. This reputation is no doubt derived from his novel *Noli*, which, other than its literal translation of "touch me not" is also popularly translated as *Kanser ng Lipunan* (Social Cancer), a reference to the social diseases of Philippine society. In this novel, Rizal criticized political tyranny, religious hypocrisy, and social inequality, all problems exemplified in the character of the friar Damaso. The friar is a sexual offender and a master manipulator. He has manipulated government officials to go against all the plans of Ibarra in institutionalizing reforms in his hometown (such as educational reform through erecting a community school where Spanish is taught). There is also the character of Doña Victorina, a local of San Diego (where the novel is set), who is so obsessed with becoming Spanish that she dresses like them. She marries a Spanish peasant named Tiburcio to live her dream of becoming Spanish. Domineering, she has

convinced Tiburcio to pretend to be a doctor. This is part of her plan to elevate her status in society. This character is discussed in high school and in the tertiary level as the embodiment of Filipino people who have a distorted perception of their identities as Filipinos. At the same time, in *Noli me Tangere,* identifying Victorina's character as embodying what is more popularly known as colonial mentality that views the indigenous inferior while the foreign is superior.

In the play, contemporary social and political issues are also presented. For example, in the short play by Vlad Gonzales entitled *Ang Kimera at ang Espinghe* (The Chimera and the Sphinx), two important figures of social disease from *Noli* and *El Filibusterismo* are showcased (fig. 2). The *kimera* as stated in the production typescript "symbolizes personal interest of the people who lead the nation, while the *espinghe* mirrors the real needs of the society" (Sabate and San Agustin 4). This is then followed by a contemporized rendition of Chapter 15 in *Noli*. In the novel, the chapter begins with Basilio and Crispin, Sisa being worried after the *sacristan mayor* (head of the altar boys) and the *kura* (the parish priest) accusing Crispin of stealing gold pieces. While Basilio rings the bell of the Church, the sacristan mayor starts to beat Crispin to make him confess his crime. In the contemporized rendition drafted by Sabate, the two boys are *tambays* (out of school youth) from an impoverished slum. Named as Cris and Leo in the vignette, the boys end up addicted to sniffing contact cement or glue, popularly known as rugby in the Philippines, because proper guidance from elders was not provided for them.

Figure 2. The "Ang *kimera* at ang *espinghe*" vignette in *Rizal X* written by Vlad Gonzales; puppets by Leeroy New (Photo: Vlad Gonzales).

And then other contemporary social dilemmas are presented: a maid who has murdered her employer and her employer's entire family; a female massage therapist beaten up by a male customer when she refuses to give "extra service"; a female cashier in a department store raped by a group of male tambays; the death of two kids because of a fire in the slums caused by fighting gangs—references to Rizal's characters Sisa, Basilio, and Crispin. And then a series of Overseas Filipino Workers are sporadically featured to represent Rizal's diasporic condition. There is also a comic interlude after the intermission where Floy Quintos's short piece *Next* features a group of Filipino *ilustrados* (young middle-class Filipino men) in Spain meeting to talk about Rizal's subversive ideas, which they object to.

In relation to these presentations of sociohistorical and political issues of both the *there and then* and the *here and now* in the play, *Rizal X* also addresses questions of nationalism and national identity. This is primarily because many scholars also cite Jose Rizal as an important figure in understanding Philippine nationalism and national identity.

In *A Nation Aborted,* Floro Quibuyen argues that when Rizal was in London, he originally asked his German friend, the social scientist Ferdinand Blumentritt, to rewrite the history of the Philippines. Rizal believed that the history written by the Spaniards was prejudicial against the Filipino people due to colonial ideology. But Blumentritt declined, perhaps "feeling that it was a Filipino's responsibility" (Quibuyen 140). Nonetheless, Rizal initiated the project of rewriting Philippine history from a nationalist perspective by annotating Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* written in 1609. Rizal dedicated his annotation to the "Filipinos" with the following agenda explained in his dedication page: "to awaken in the Filipinos a consciousness of our past, now erased from memory; to correct what has been distorted and falsified concerning the Filipinos; and to better judge the present and assess our movement in three centuries" (qtd. in Quibuyen 141).

Quibuyen is convinced that the annotation is an important descriptive attempt by Rizal to assert a Philippine national identity. He writes, "no other Filipino in the nineteenth century has put the discipline of history to full use in defining and advancing a nationalist project" (141). Quibuyen adds that in the annotation, Rizal counters the different negative descriptions that Morga wrote about the pre-contact peoples of the islands, such as that the islanders were lazy, had no literary tradition or other artistic expressions, and were barbaric and pagan ingrates. In *The Making of a Nation*, John N. Schumacher affirms this nationalist stance in Rizal's rewriting of Philippine history. Schumacher also implies that Rizal's nationalist agenda marked the invocation of an Asian perspective in world historiography:

> rather remarkable for the period in which he wrote, he showed concern not only for a Filipino point of view but for an Asian one. He not only refuted Spanish pretensions to superiority over Filipinos, but asserted Asian rights and an Asian point of view against that of 'Europe, so satisfied with its own morality.' (112-13)

Rizal's other writings, particularly his novels are also claimed as foundations of Philippine nationalism by many local historians such as Gregorio and Sonia Zaide, and Francisco Zulueta. Even foreign scholars find intellectual and philosophical frameworks for nationalism in Rizal's writings, including Benedict Anderson's widely-cited concept of "imagined communities." Today, the study of Philippine nationalism vis-à-vis national identity is included in various syllabi of different Rizal courses taught as a required subject in all universities under Republic Act No. 1425.[3]

In asserting Rizal's nationalism in *Rizal X,* the play presents vignettes showing Rizal's ultimate love for the motherland. For instance, in one vignette written by San Agustin, Rizal is likened to other world "heroes" who sacrificed their lives for the motherland, titled in the transcript as "Pasya" (The Choice). In this vignette, performers deliver lines that either these figures spoke in public or were cited in their biographies. The delivered lines refer to decisions about sacrifice, thereby associating them with the martyrdom of Rizal. Some personalities presented are: the Tagalog heroes Andres and Procopio Bonifacio; Sophie and Hans Scholl who fought against the Nazi regime during World War II; comfort women Nenita and Felicidad who came out recently as having been abused during the Japanese occupation of Manila; Sabina and Richard Wurmbrand, who were detained for accusations of false religion; and Chang Hye Kyong, who decided to leave the North Korean gulag and expose the evils of the North Korean administration to the world despite the threats to his loved ones who were left in the gulag.

A similar juxtaposition is made in a latter episode titled "Death List" in the transcript. Here, performers deliver quotations from historical figures who surrendered and sacrificed themselves for the sake of others. Hence, these individuals are sanctified as heroes or martyrs (of the motherland or of the people they loved). An individual that the audiences may be familiar with in this vignette is the father of the Philippines' current president, former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. Ninoy's statement—"we only ask that freedom be returned, we ask for nothing more but we will accept nothing less"—is delivered side-by-side with other quotations that spoke of freedom and love for the nation. At the end of this vignette, a video presentation is played reenacting Rizal's final steps to his death in Bagumbayan.[4]

Using pista as a model of entanglement, one is reminded that these issues of national identity and nationalism are also addressed in the pista. In particular, many cultural, academic, and political institutions in the Philippines invoke the pista as a distinctive identity marker of the archipelago. The national government for instance promotes the Philippine Archipelago as one huge Fiesta Island in its tourism advertisements. During the administration of Corazon Aquino (1986–1992), the Department of Tourism even launched a program called "The Philippines: Fiesta Islands of Asia." Local commentators Hornedo, Pineda, and Cagoco remark that one way of characterizing the national psyche of the Filipino people is via this use of fiesta as a peculiar marker of being a Filipino.

On the other hand, national identity and nationalism are also broad themes that many contemporary theater artists in Manila use in their theater works. For instance, since its establishment in 1967, the productions of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) have been dominated by the theme of nationalism based on political struggle and anticolonial or anti-imperial agenda. In January 2012, PETA staged an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* billed as *Haring Lear* (adaptation by Bienvenido Lumbera, direction by Nonon Padilla) with an all-male cast in an attempt to denounce the patriarchy, machismo, and tyranny they saw looming all over the archipelago. As stated in the program, these are some of the struggles that Filipinos are still encountering despite the restoration of democracy in 1986.[5] To reinforce this issue of nationalism and national identity, the adaptation ends with all actors in tears singing the Philippine National Anthem. Everyone in the auditorium is invited to sing with the performers.

*Rizal X* was one of the most successful productions of Dulaang UP in terms of box-office results. *Rizal X* was also one of the most successful plays during the sesquicentennial of the national hero. Dulaang UP had to add five more performances during its three-week run in August 2011 at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater. The production was subsequently one of the recipients of the Musikahan Rizal Special Commendation Award during the 2011 Aliw Awards, the award given by the Aliw Foundation dedicated to the performing arts industry in the country. *Rizal X* was also critically recognized by one of the celebrated literary experts in the country, Priscelina Patajo-Legasto. In her view, the play presented the potential for a meta-theater. This, according to Patajo-Legasto, is due to the literal mixing and matching of performance traditions from various historical frames. In her lecture on 26 January 2012 at the Asian Research Institute in Singapore, Legasto drew on Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic meta-narrative to describe *Rizal X* as meta-theater. This is because of the production's attempt to go beyond traditional,

canonical, official, pedagogical, and even "millenarian" interpretations of Jose Rizal in order to make his life, his novels, his poetry, and other accomplishments relatable to the youth of this generation.

In terms of box-office success, the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater was filled to overflowing, with some audience members willing to stand during the entire two-hour performance as reported in the house management report of Dulaang UP. The success of this performance, in my view, lies in the choice of materials that the creative team behind it used in narrating the life and works of Jose Rizal. The play intended "to humanize the hero and to make the hero closer to younger generations" (Dulaang UP "*Rizal X*"). The target audience of this performance was the younger generations (students in particular) as indicated in the use of "X" in the title of the play. Sabate and San Agustin pointed out that the show is titled *Rizal X* because it is *"para sa kabataan na para kay Rizal ay pag-asa ng bayan"* [for the young ones who for Rizal are the future of the nation] (qtd. in Dulaang UP "*Rizal X*"). In other words, the use of "X" is derived from "Generation X," which in the Philippines is linked with contemporary youth.

Most of the devices used in this show were energetic and highly engaging, especially to younger audiences. As stated in the program, the team believes that a better way of bringing Rizal closer to the youth is to make him "similar" to them. More concretely, the team has envisioned a Rizal who listens to the same music as the younger generations, and dances to the same tunes they are grooving to. Santos and his dramaturgical team provided many images of Rizal juxtaposed with contemporary popular cultural icons, assumed to be intimately linked with the youth of today. The team used motifs and sounds of Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, 50 Cent, Rebecca Black, Katy Perry, Madonna, and other popular cultural icons that the younger generations could relate to. With this, Rizal was presented as being more "hip" and exciting, more dynamic, and more enjoyable, even if discourses on nationalism were involved. In my view, this is the reason younger audience members found the performance enjoyable to watch. Various social media were also useful in helping the performance reach out to more audiences. Young audience members who saw the production wrote warm congratulations on the production's Facebook wall and shared photos from the performances. Some audiences even remarked that they had watched the show more than once.

In a pista celebration, members of the households celebrating the fiesta really do appreciate it if their guests enthusiastically consume the dishes they serve. Pineda and Hornedo explain that the pista is an occasion where households prepare the

best dishes they can. Thinking of *Rizal X* as a kind of pista, I can easily see that its audiences are like these guests who in return consume the meal as a sign of appreciating the warm hospitality of the host. This experience of enthusiastic consumption (appreciating the performance and spreading it as a good theatrical experience) is something that, at least with *Rizal X,* Manila theater artists generally wish to foster in their works. This is particularly because the audience, as Christopher Balme explains, "is at the centre of the theatrical event and hence of theatre itself" (34). In *The Theatre Experience,* Edwin Wilson notes that the presence of audience in the theater produces a symbiotic flow of energy, as actors or affects audience and audience affects actors. This is amplified by the fact that theater is commonly believed as a communal art. The experience of the audience as a group or as an organic whole is necessary to theater, as this group reinforces emotions experienced by a person and produces a sort of collective mind. When a collection of individuals respond more or less in unison to what is occurring onstage, their relationship to one another is reaffirmed and strengthened. Nowhere is the exchange between actors and audience more evident than in the creation of illusion in theater. While illusion may be initiated by the creators of theater, it is completed by the audience through the use of the dramatic imagination.

On another note, the role of the critic as a member of the audience is also significant in this argument on enthusiastic consumption I raised earlier. A critic is someone who observes theater and then analyzes and comments on it. Ideally, the critic is a knowledgeable and highly sensitive spectator who has developed a set of critical standards by which to judge any theatrical event. To understand and to appraise are among of the primary functions of the critic. Most of the time a critic is crucial in the audience development and marketing outcome of a theater event. Ran Xia points out in an online magazine, the critics are "powerful because readers depend on them to make choices. Their words can partly decide the life or death of a piece of art." Following this line of exposition, it makes sense that artists behind the staging of *Rizal X* are convinced to have prepared the best meal (best show) they can cook as a gesture of hospitality.

Clearly, *Rizal X* was a play of fragments and intended to be so. Nonetheless, did this staging of fragments succeed in presenting a complex yet unified story about the hero? And did these multiple narratives in the vignettes really provide a multiplicity of images of Rizal? If *Rizal X* performed the juxtapositions of representations, histories, relationships, and genres in the mixing and matching of the different vignettes to create a unified dramatic narrative, is it similar to the grand narrative that a *pista* performs during the day or days of festivity as I proposed earlier? On

the surface level, *Rizal X* did put these various elements together, making it analogous to the pista as entangled. At the same time, the pista makes sense in *Rizal X*, as Jose Rizal was venerated as an icon and a patron of Philippine nationalism (and patriotism). There is a juxtaposition of representations as *Rizal X* invited artists to provide their "personal" images of the national hero. There is an entanglement of histories as the team behind *Rizal X* attempted to intersect the *there and then* (Rizal's milieu) to the *here and now* (such as the contemporized rendition of the novel). There is entanglement of relationships as the play overlapped ideologies behind the representations created by the invited collaborators. Finally, there is entanglement of genres as the play has mixed and matched diverse performance forms.

## *RIZAL X* AND THE LIMITS OF ENTANGLEMENT

The program states that *Rizal X* is aimed to explore Rizal's heroism outside the dogma and at the same time wished to "humanize" him ("Rizal X: Program"). In an online review, Katrina Stuart Santiago writes,

> For the fragments in Rizal X to make sense, they needed to tie neatly – no matter how difficult, or ambiguous – into a whole. And if the goal was for these fragments not to tie together at all, then at the very least these fragments needed to be powerful individually. These needed to explore aspects of Rizal that would have changed our understanding of his heroism, given a sense of contemporary times. I get the fact that the various fragments are sandwiched between two intertwined vignettes on a reminiscence of our childhoods, a going back to the kind of dreaming and possibility of flight that these memories serve. However, what's within those two bookends barely take flight themselves. ("*Rizal X*")

Like Santiago, I am convinced that the intention of the play to be a performance of fragments defeated the purpose of creating a more illuminating understanding about Jose Rizal. More so, the fragments did not succeed in producing Rizal's relevance to contemporary time. In short, the entangled fragments or vignettes were more a dilemma than informed representations about Rizal's heroism and Rizal's humanism. Generally, the play presented *a* representation of Rizal and not multiple representations of him as suggested in the program: the presentation of different perspectives on Rizal by featuring different works by artists who collaborated with Santos. What was presented in the play was an entanglement of genres but not an

entanglement of diverse perspectives on Rizal's heroism and humanism. As asserted earlier, one important concern that the play performed is Rizal's nationalist sentiment. Hence, the play is an extension of this heroic veneration that many students (including the target audience of the play) read in textbooks. Thus, *Rizal X* arguably reaffirmed this historical dogma.

If by humanizing, the artistic team meant the removal of martyrdom that historical dogma attributes to Rizal, then the play did not achieve this objective. From the moment *Rizal X* begins, Rizal is venerated a superhuman. Even in the vignette that dramatizes his romantic engagements, this "humanized" Rizal is not felt by engaging audience members. Historians narrate that Rizal had several romantic engagements with different women. In the vignette "Wo/Men of Rizal," some women linked with Rizal are presented as being heartbroken. In performing this intense emotion of heartbreak, actual letters that these women wrote to Rizal are fragmented into lines. At the end of the vignette, a voice-over is heard delivering Rizal's poem "La Deportacion" while two performers dance to the delivery of the poem. The poem reads:

> I am captive by a thousand strings, like a traitor
> None than I can understand my pain – my sorrow, my sorrow
> Sometimes in my illusion, I see freedom
> But I only see the cage of damnation in truth and in reality
> I will never see the daylight again
> Only gloomy days ahead of me
> I only dream of love for my pain
>
> For this sorrow, I'd love to die. (qtd. in Sabate and San Agustin 22)

In the dance, the performers present movements suggestive of undying love for each other, but in the end the love is not consummated. While one dancer waves his hand to bid goodbye to his lover, the other drifts away while extending her arms, but eventually she lets go.

In trying to make sense of this vignette, I asked a friend what she thought about it. She believed it is an attempt to humanize the hero because the vignette seems to inform audiences that Rizal (like everybody else) also fell in love. But we both realized on a closer reading that the vignette seems to deny Rizal this experience

of romance. Instead, it shows that Rizal was not capable of experiencing joy and exuberance from loving someone because his "heart" belonged to the motherland. This inference was derived from the poem "La Deportacion" and the contemporary jazz dance number, which closes this vignette. It is as if the poem was Rizal's response to the heartbroken women waiting for explanation of why he could not commit to a romantic relationship.

The production also falls short of its stated goals because *Rizal X* actually denies the engagement of the *then and here* and the *here and now*. Jose Rizal is a good starting point in discoursing on the shared histories of the Philippines, which include not only diverse colonial experiences, but also contemporary historical moments often cited as following neocolonial trajectories, establishing the historical contexts of a globalizing world. The performance also gestures toward these historical developments by inscribing Rizal as one of the earliest Filipino diasporic individuals, a gesture that surely resonates with the diasporic Filipinos in today's time (i.e., domestic laborers and other migrant workers abroad). For example, in the episode where Rizal is supposedly likened to other world visionaries and martyrs, it is not clear if these figures are compared to or contrasted to his heroism and his life.


Figure 3. The "Alisbayan Box" vignette in *Rizal X* (Photo: Vlad Gonzales).

*Rizal X* works under the preconceived notion that globalization is primarily only about the economic interests of wealthy nations. Even in conceiving transnational relations, the performance primarily addresses issues of instrumentalization via exploitation of overseas Filipino workers by the receiving countries, particularly domestic helpers. In the vignette titled "Alisbayan Box," the struggles of the OFWs in foreign lands are featured (fig. 3). The concept of the oppressed is a stark image used in *Rizal X* to signify the interrelatedness of the *here and now* to the *there and then*. The metaphor is the *balikbayan* box filled with goods such as foreign groceries, toiletries, accessories, shoes, and clothing, a box which OFWs commonly send to their loved ones back home. In the production, three OFWs—a nurse, an engineer, and a maid or a domestic helper are featured. The actors enter the stage dressed in character. Three boxes are placed down stage. As the actors deliver their lines they step inside the huge box and slowly take off their garments until their ordinary clothes worn back home are revealed. At the end of the piece, ropes fall down from the battens. These actors place the ropes onto their necks, suggesting an act of suicide. Lights are focused on them and the boxes—we see names in the boxes and addresses in the Philippines. The vignette suggests a tragedy. Particularly, it presents the tragic world of Filipinos living abroad.

In another essay on a Filipino musical about the domestic helper, I argued that the popular lore about Filipino migration or the OFWs onstage is framed within the body-politics of those who are in the service industry particularly the domestic helper (DH) or the Foreign Domestic Worker. In *Rizal X*, two of the OFWs are professionals—a nurse and an engineer. The other belongs to the service industry—as indicated by her maid costume. Paying close attention to what is presented here, it seems that OFWs are experiencing one and the same tragedy. At the same time, I felt that OFWs are presented as misfits in this globalizing world, a presentation that degrades them because it is a misperception that easily becomes a reason for the way they are treated unfairly all over the world. In the play, the sorry plight of the OFW is treated as a by-product of globalization. Leaving the auditorium, I wondered if the OFWs did not also experience pleasure in foreign countries? My father and grandfather were OFWs for several years. There were difficulties living alone and away from loved ones in a foreign land. But the most memorable stories that both my father and my grandfather share are experiences of pleasure: stories of opportunities of doing this and having that. At the same time, I wondered if the narratives of contemporary OFWs are really the same as the story of Rizal? Are there no historical specificities that may show apparent disparities? Particularly, if *Rizal X* claims that these OFWs are the misfits and the exploited, does it follow that Rizal himself was a misfit or exploited in Europe? Rizal was displaced but he

found something desirable in living abroad that made him want to go back home: the experience of freedom. He was sad and alienated, but his was not a complete tragedy as suggested by many historians. He felt nostalgic, but there was pleasure. He was consistently hanging out with friends at Fleur d'Madeleine in Paris, as discussed in many of his biographies and even performed in some musicals such as Floy Quintos's *Isang Panaginip na Fili* (2009, also directed by Quintos). In the same way, Martin Manalansan and Stephanie Ng explain that Filipino migrant workers of course experience nostalgia and poignancy but, they also encounter possibilities for fulfillment and a sense of pleasure.

*Rizal X* is an exemplar of excessive theatrical performance for various reasons. The performance attempts to adopt an avant-garde aesthetics by giving audiences fragmented images of Rizal. In these fragments, there is excess of narrations but not of narratives about the hero. On the other hand, *Rizal X* becomes more of a dignified variety show, especially during those moments where Rizal is supposedly popularized (or introduced) to the younger generation.

In the performance of *Rizal X,* there is dancing, singing, dialogue, then rapping and singing, then dancing and dancing again, then video and montage of photographs, then dancing, singing, and reciting poetry. This excessive use of performance genres of songs and dances was a huge hit with audiences, especially younger ones. Maida Pineda says that in a pista*,* the excessive number of dishes in the banquet table are the households' responses to "others" —their way of performing hospitality. In my view, this excessive use of different performance forms is also illustrative of a response to "others," under the assumption that the young ones are those whom the artistic team of *Rizal X* was really responding to.

The day I saw the performance, college students from a university in Central Manila filled the auditorium. During the more serious episodes such as the juxtaposition of Rizal's characters to contemporary stories, the women of Rizal and the Alisbayan box, these audiences exhibited a sense of discomfort. Some were quietly chatting with their seatmates. Someone even fell asleep. Nonetheless, during episodes where popular cultural icons were showcased, the auditorium became highly energized. These audience members became more attentive, active, and involved by singing along, laughing, shouting, and applauding. For instance, the finale of the first act was a discussion of Jose Rizal's biography à la Wikipedia (not surprisingly the vignette is titled "Rikipedia" in the transcript). In this musical number, pieces of trivia about Rizal's life were presented in a huge song and dance number as performed by the entire company.

At the start of this number, the ensemble began singing "I'm here to tell you a little tale / About a male who's a bit pale / Whose body is slender / But short like a dwarf / He was called Pepe." A huge and excitable roar was heard in the auditorium because audience members were familiar with the melody of the song, as was I. The start of this number used the melody of a song popularized by the local band Eraserheads. In this entire musical number, other sounds, tunes and melodies were also performed. These were from various popular cultural icons such the local band Callalily (and the band's song "Star"), Lady Gaga ("Alejandro"), the theme of the noontime show *Eat Bulaga*, the official song of the University of the Philippines Pep Squad, Hanson ("Mmm Bop"), Rebecca Black ("Friday"), and Katy Perry ("Firework").

Perhaps, this was the fulfillment of the play's promise of embodying a more hip, entertaining, and dynamic Jose Rizal. No doubt, this musical number was spectacular. But then again, despite the references to Rizal, I still wonder where exactly was the promise of new perspective about the national hero. The choice of Wikipedia as a motif and this excessive mixing and matching affirm how Frederick Jameson negatively conceives pastiche as leading to triviality and pointlessness. According to Jameson, pastiche is only a "blank parody" (17). This "Rikipedia" musical number was trivial because it was exactly that: trivia about Rizal. This "Wikification" of Rizal was pointless because the trivia performed was a misused of pastiche, producing what Richard Dyer calls an "unmediated reproduction" (22). The play paid homage to Rizal but at the same time, it parodied him via these popular icons of contemporary popular culture.

Also, the information presented in this "Rikipedia" number was the same information that the target audiences already know about Rizal. I mentioned earlier that Rizal's life and works are part of high school and college curricula. The response to "others"—at least in this musical number—was at the level of glamor. On the other hand, I am convinced that these artists also have a responsibility to take good care of their chosen subject, especially since Rizal is relevant in the educational system of the archipelago. Hence, there is another "other" here, which the performance did not respond to—Jose Rizal. Perhaps, the ambiguity of Rizal as a subject in Philippine history, caused these excesses. In other words, I sensed that Santos and his dramaturgical team did not know what to do with these excesses provided by their collaborators in the vignettes. At the same time, they did not know how these vignettes might be able to provide a complex but more comprehensible narrative despite being a derivative of fragments regarding the life and works of the national hero.

*Rizal X* had the potential to be a catch basin for all the fleeting images of Rizal. However, this potency was not actualized in the play. Considering that the artistic team behind *Rizal X* aimed to perform a plurality of perspectives about Rizal, it only presented the dogmatic image (i.e., Rizal as a reformist who wanted the Philippines to be a province of Spain; and Rizal as antirevolution). As a case in point, *Rizal X* did not show other important images of the hero, which are also well known outside academic discussions, such as his being regarded as the second Christ in the Southern Tagalog region by a group of religious people called *Kapatirang Rizalistas*.[5]

This device of mixing and matching could also have served as a neutral ground for the discussion of different political agendas and ideologies about Rizal as a historical figure, a political figure, and a man of the humanities. Under Republic Act No. 1425, the dogma being taught in high school and even in many tertiary schools about Jose Rizal's life, works, and nationalism is based on the works of nationalist historians like Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino. As a high school and college student, I grew up identifying Rizal as a cowardly reformist and not a revolutionary. Renato Constantino, whose essay "Veneration without Understanding" in his book *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* criticizes Rizal's heroism and even implicitly proposed that other Tagalog revolutionists (i.e., Andres Bonifacio) were more deserving of the national hero title. What is common among historians' discussions of Rizal is his framing of nationalism as read through his two novels. Many historians read his two novels to suggest the assimilation of the Philippines into Spain. This is particularly associated with the failure of the revolution planned by the novel's protagonist Simoun (Ibarra in *Noli me Tangere*) in the end of *El Filibusterismo*. When I was a college student taking the Rizal module, he was claimed to be antirevolution, and associated with the novel's concluding chapter as expressing a desire to annex the Philippines to Spain.

On the other hand, Floro Quibuyen (*A Nation Aborted*) argues that the traditional view about Rizal is best explained through various dichotomies: the characters Ibarra and Elias in *Noli*; Rizal and his compatriot Andres Bonifacio; his status as ilustrado (middle class) against the masses; and Reform versus Revolution. Quibuyen asserts that partisan historians interpret these opposing terms in such a way that in Rizal's novels, Ibarra represents Rizal, and Elias represents Bonifacio. The failure of Simoun signifies Rizal's antirevolutionary stance. Being an ilustrado with a bourgeois consciousness, Rizal's goal, in direct contrast to that of Bonifacio, is the desire of assimilation to the Spanish nation. The reform movement only served to delay the inevitable revolution, which was betrayed by the characteristically opportunistic ilustrados.

Quibuyen asserts that Rizal is more radical than any of the forerunners of the Philippine revolution: "a key figure in the construction of this nationalist project was Jose Rizal who attained the singular distinction of both articulating, through his literary and political works, the nationalist ideology and becoming through his martyrdom, the national symbol that embodied the national-popular will" (*A Nation Aborted* 3). Quibuyen adds that the problem in the abovementioned propositions is a view of Rizal and his conception of nationalism in Enlightenment terms or the liberal concept of the nation-state: homogeneity, territoriality and citizenship, which produces the fear of the other (or xenophobia). Quibuyen explicates that Rizal's conception of the nation predates and transcends the liberal concept of the nation-state. His nationalism is "anti-statist, counterposing the nation against the state, in terms of an ethics that transcends the imperatives of the state" (5).

These are two of the most popular contradictory ideological perspectives about Rizal's nationalism. Yet not even Constantino's criticism of Rizal's heroism was significantly featured in the play. It is a bit odd that these contradictory views are not presented on stage, especially since the program claimed that the artistic team of *Rizal X* was trying to present alternative views about Rizal. Yet how could this be established without presenting the normalized views (i.e., Constantino et al.) and without presenting the dissenting views (i.e., Quibuyen)? On a final note, the mix and match devising could have been the alternative middle ground where the possibility of directing a new theatrical practice could be attempted or debated.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In this essay, the pista is reflected as a model in asserting entanglement as a conceptual idiom for the understanding of contemporary Manila theater. Here, the pista is interrogated as a complex phenomenon, which is thought of as solemn yet at the same time secular; a festivity where neither the state nor the Church is in the ultimate position of authority; a parade of holiness; and a procession of spectacle. In relation to the theater in Manila, I illustrated how artists in Manila are generally creating performances via mixing and matching representations, histories, relationships, and genres together similar to how these mixings and matchings are activated during the celebration of the pista. An example in this inquiry is the performance of *Rizal X*, staged at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theatre during the 150th birth anniversary of Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal. Generally, many theater artists in the metropolis put entirely different elements together in their

works as discussed in my analysis of *Rizal X*. I described this performance as an amalgamation of performance genres and other art forms based on what the production's director Dexter Santos described in the play's program as "fragments." As also pointed out, Santos commissioned several artists to construct their versions and images of Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero.

Nonetheless, entanglement should not be solely conceived as a juxtaposition between or among elements, but also a process of enmeshing, muddling, and snaring. The concept of entanglement does not refer to something aesthetically significant per se. To be entangled is not something that many Filipinos (or any individual) would want to experience. Often, there is the suggestion of being victimized connoting a sense of entrapment and at the same time, being part of something awful unintentionally.

Since the idea of entanglement tends to be seen as having negative connotations, Manila theater artists, such as the case of Santos and his artistic team in *Rizal X* have also been involved in disentanglement. And yet, often this attempt at disentanglement causes the plays to become more entangled in contexts of vagueness, denial, and ambiguity. In the case of *Rizal X,* the play had the potential to capture the fleeting images of Rizal. However, this was not successfully actualized. As stated in the essay, the dogma being discussed in high school and even in tertiary institutions about Jose Rizal's life and works are based on the perspectives of nationalist historians who claim that Rizal's nationalism was only associated with reforms. But there are other perspectives opposing the reformist assertion and invoke Rizal's revolutionary aspirations (such as the call for an independent Philippine nation). These are two of the contradictory ideological perspectives about Rizal's nationalism. None of these ideological views were performed in the play even if the artistic team of *Rizal X* claimed that the performance was aimed to feature a pluralistic take on Rizal's life, works and nationalism.

My attempt to critique *Rizal X* is not intended to express antagonism. My goal is to point out that, at least with *Rizal X,* Manila theater stumbles upon extraordinary contradictions. In this sense, my aim is to engage the usefulness of entanglement as a starting point in talking about the Manila theater scene and as to point out it is entanglement that makes the Manila theater complex, and an important subject in the production of knowledge. Finally, I have proposed that this conception of entanglement via the analysis of *Rizal X* both bolsters and hinders the potential of Manila theater for discourse, praxis, and even reception.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay is part of a larger project titled *Buhol-Buhol: Entanglement and Contemporary Theatre in the Metropolitan Manila,* funded by the University of the Philippines Diliman, through the office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Development, through the PhD Incentive Award. In this regard, my sincerest gratitude is extended to the aforementioned institutions.

## ENDNOTES

[1] The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines is popularly known for its active interference in governmental issues. The most popular of which is the ousting of then dictator Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986. In the 1950s, the Roman Catholic Church meddled with state policy when the House of Congress approved Republic Act No. 1421 or the "act to include in the curricula of all public and private schools, colleges and universities courses on the life, works and writings of Jose Rizal." In this interference, the Catholic Church opposition was due to the belief that Rizal was against the Church and teaching his works might jeopardize and confuse Philippine culture and society. The most recent interference of the Church is the controversial proposal of the Reproductive Health Bill or Responsible Parenthood Bill (simply RH Bill) of 2011. The opposing institution counters the RH Bill primarily because they fear that abortion, divorce, and even homosexuality might be normalized.

[2] Alcedo explains that these "performances" of the agi must be conceived as "sacred camp," or a strong devotional act of sacrifice, popularly known as "panata" in Tagalog combined with what Susan Sontag demonstrates as a theatrical seriousness. What is useful noteworthy in the conception of sacred camp is this complex picture of Filipino Catholicism, which is muddled and filled with contradictions. However, this enmeshment makes Catholicism performative in a very peculiar and a very complex way. There are devotions practiced in the archipelago which are mandated by dogma but are subverted by community members by taking ownership of Catholic practice as a personal encounter. Hence, the dogma finds these performances filled with profanity but the performing body becomes an instrument of the sacred such as the agi in the ati-atihan spectacle. What is more important here is this entanglement of performances and representations which makes the fiesta a sort of interstitial entity—an intervening space where authorities and hierarchies are contested, if not inverted.

[3] In the country's *Official Gazette*, Republic Act 1425 is defined as "an act to include in the curricula of all public and private schools, colleges and universities courses on the life, works and writing of Jose Rizal, particularly his novels *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, authorizing the printing and distribution thereof, and for other purposes." This Act was signed by then President Ramon Magsaysay on 12 June 1956.

[4] Other historical figures used in this vignette include Mother Teresa, Marijoy Chiong, Joan of Arc, Sophie Scholl, and Che Guevarra.

[5] In the mountains of Banahaw in Tayabas, Quezon, a group of Tagalog people converged to venerate Jose Rizal as the Filipino Christ or the *Bagong Kristo* (New Christ). In fact, Rizal is not only venerated as the local Christ but as the embodiment of Christ in his second coming. For details about the divinity and the religious organization of the *kapatirang Rizalista,* see Consolacion Alaras, Nilo Ocampo, and Floro Quibuyen ("Gender and History").

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