

**ARTSPEAK POSTSCRIPT 70:
DO CYBORGS DREAM OF PARADISE?**

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**A RESPONSE TO
"YESTERDAY, IN THE YEARS 1886 AND 2017"
STEPHANIE COMILANG**

I CLOSE ONE EYE AND I'M HERE... I CLOSE ONE EYE AND I'M THERE.

I AM SITTING ON A CARPETED FLOOR IN FRONT OF TWO PROJECTIONS OF A WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE FAMILY. I CLOSE ONE EYE AND I'M HERE. I CLOSE THE OTHER EYE AND I'M STANDING IN FRONT OF MY BATHROOM CABINET MIRROR, EXAMINING THE SHAPE OF MY NOSE, THE SHAPE OF MY EYES, THE CURVE OF MY FOREHEAD, THE COAST OF MY HAIRLINE. I PULL MY HAIR BACK AND SEE MY MOTHER—HAIR TIED, LEANING OVER A POT OF CHICKEN SIMMERING IN SAUCE. I RUN MY FINGERS ALONG MY CHEEKS, ALONG MY FATHER'S CHEEKS, FEELING THEIR FULLNESS. THE LONG RIVER OF OUR HISTORY RUNS OVER THE SOFT STONE OF MY FACE, SHAPING IT INTO A COMMEMORATION OF US. THE CABINET MIRROR SWINGS OUTWARDS, AND I MULTIPLY.

YESTERDAY, IN THE YEARS 1886 AND 2017. A DRONE FOLLOWS THE LONG SHAPE OF A RIVER, LICKING STONES SMOOTH INTO SUBMISSION. A DRONE HOVERS OVER A BRONZE STATUE OF JOSE RIZAL LIKE A FLY, A MECHANIC ABOMINATION OF THE INSECT, A SINGLE COMPOUND EYE IN THE MOUTH OF A WOMAN. SHE IS BLOODLESS, BUT ANIMATED. INFORMATION FLOWS AS CURRENTS IN THE LONG WIRES OF HER BODY. HER EYE SEES THE LIFE OF THE STATUE ALL AT ONCE, BEGINNING WHEN THE LONG RIVER OF METAL RUNS OVER THE SOFT SHADOW OF HIS BODY, BEING SHAPED INTO A COMMEMORATION OF US. PARAISO THE DRONE

SAYS, LOOK! THAT'S ME TOO. WE HOVER WITH HER, SEEING HIS STATUE, A MOULD OF HIS LIFE, TOGETHER. WE, WHO LOOK AT THIS STATUE AND THIS WOMAN AND SEE FAMILY, SAY, LOOK! THAT'S ME TOO.

A RIVER FLOWS OUT OF EDEN TO WATER THE GARDEN, AND FROM THERE IT DIVIDES AND BECOMES FOUR BRANCHES.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN WAS A LABORATORY. A STERILE PETRI DISH COLONIZED BY FLORA AND FAUNA. WE KNOW THE STORY OF ORIGINAL SIN AS THE BREAKING APART OF A WHOLE, PURITY SULLIED BY KNOWLEDGE, A GREAT REVELATION THAT SENT TWO BIRDS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS FLYING, HUMANITY FRAGMENTED AND SCATTERED. WE KNOW EVE WAS SEDUCED TO BREAK APART, SOMEONE WHO SPLIT FROM THE PURITY OF YESTERDAY, TO THE INHERITED SINFULNESS OF TODAY, AND THE FUTURE. AS PUNISHMENT, THE SCATTERED FRAGMENTS OF HUMANITY DISSOLVE BACK INTO THE EARTH. BUT, EVE CANNOT RETURN TO DUST BECAUSE SHE WAS NEVER MADE FROM IT. SHE IS THE FIRST CYBORG: NOT BORN FROM THE MUD OF THE EARTH BUT ASSEMBLED FROM VARIOUS PARTS, TO HELP ADAM ORGANIZE THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS INTO DISCRETE CATEGORIES AND KEEP HIM COMPANY. HER FLESH AND HER SEX MAKES HER VULNERABLY HUMAN IN THE GARDEN, BUT HER ORIGINS AS A UTILITARIAN DREAM, AN ASSEMBLAGE RATHER THAN A FETUS, HAVE ALREADY MARKED HER

AS OTHER, AS BANISHED. HER SIN WAS EMBODIMENT, A PRIMORDIAL FACT UNLOCKED BY EATING FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.

ON THE SEVENTH DAY, GOD WENT TO REST AND CYBORG EVE WENT TO WORK. SHE ROAMS AROUND GREEN FIELDS AND RIVERS, A MOON ALREADY TERRAFORMED. HERE IS THE PLACE I ONCE WAS. CYBORG EVE, DRONE MAMA, PARAIISO—WHAT WAS THE SIN THAT BANISHED YOU FROM THIS PLACE? I TRY TO REMEMBER: WAS IT HUNGER, PAIN, FATIGUE AND FEAR. THESE ARE THE PUNISHMENTS OF SOME DISTANT MEMORY OF SIN FROM LONG AGO, A MEMORY THAT MY MOTHER AND HER MOTHERS CARRY IN THEIR BODIES. A MOTHER ONLY REMEMBERS THE SIN SHE HAS INHERITED IN THE GARDEN DURING THE PAIN OF CHILDBIRTH. I CANNOT SEE PARAIISO’S BODY; SHE IS A DISEMBODIED VOICE. SHE ROAMS, AS I DO, AND AS MY MOTHERS DO.

PARAIISO DOES NOT HAVE A WOMAN’S BODY, NO MEMORY OF SIN THAT LIES WITHIN ONE. SHE CANNOT RECALL THE ALIENATION OF NAKED HUMANITY BECAUSE SHE WAS ALWAYS DEEMED AS MONSTROUS. MONSTROUS, MONSTER, MONSTRUM: LATIN FOR A DIVINE DISRUPTION, A MESSENGER OF CATASTROPHE, A MALFUNCTIONING OF NATURE. AN ANIMAL OF HYBRID ORIGINS, PARTS—BOTH LIVING AND NONLIVING SUTURED TOGETHER. I TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT LIES BEYOND HER FIELD OF VISION, WHAT HER BODY LOOKS LIKE. A BLACK SHINY EYE, DANGLING FROM HER CHEST. STIFF LEGS, LIKE A SPIDER, WITH WINGS LIKE RAZORS.

NO EROTIC CURVATURE TO TRACE, NO SKIN TO DRAPE SILK AND FLOWERS OVER. NO SERVILE LOTUS FLOWER, NOT THE EXOTIC-EROTIC SUBJECT OF A WHITE GAZE, BUT A BODY THAT GAZES BACK. TOUCH ME NOT; FOR I AM NOT YET ASCENDED. THE GAZE CANNOT UNDRRESS HER POLYMER SPIDER BODY. PARAIISO’S EYE TURNS TO RIZAL. THE COLONIZERS MADE MY LANGUAGE A SIN, MY EMBODIMENT OF THIS SKIN A SIN. THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE OUR YELLOW MANGOES OR OUR YELLOW PINEAPPLES; THEY RIPPED OUT THE FRUIT THAT THEY MISTOOK FOR WEEDS.

UNTIL THE SINGLE EYE OF THE SUN STOPS GAZING AT ME, THIS YELLOW WILL ALWAYS BE BROWN.

TOUCH ME NOT. I AM A MONSTER. INSTEAD OF THE PINK ANIMATED MESS OF MUSCLE TISSUE, BODY PARTS AND ORGANS UNDULATING TOGETHER IN UNHOLY COMMUNION., MY BODY IS AN ASSEMBLAGE OF SELVES. IN THE TERRAFORMED MOON OF HOME, THERE WAS NO FRUIT TO SUSTAIN ME. THE SIN OF MY LANGUAGE, MY SKIN, AND MY HISTORY STRIPPED ME OF MY AUTONOMY, AT HOME AND ELSEWHERE. WE WERE STARTLED INTO FLIGHT, MADE TO ROAM OUTSIDE THE GARDEN. MANY OF US SETTLE, MAKE HOME, AND MAKE FAMILIES ELSEWHERE. A RIVER FLOWS OUT OF EDEN TO WATER THE GARDEN, AND FROM THERE IT DIVIDES AND BECOMES FOUR BRANCHES.

PARAIISO’S UNWILLINGNESS TO SETTLE, TO KEEP STILL AND TO TOUCH THE GROUND, SPEAKS

TO HER EMBODIMENT AS A MIGRANT ETERNAL. SHE GOES TO PLACES WHERE OTHERS LIKE HER HAVE CHOSEN TO STAY PUT, AT LEAST FOR AWHILE. HER LABOUR IS TO WITNESS AND TO TRANSMIT WHAT SHE SEES. PARAISO HERSELF IS A UTILITARIAN DREAM; HER BODY AN APPARATUS—A PIECE OF TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT, A CAMERA MOUNTED ON A DRONE—WORKING TO CONNECT US TO EACH OTHER, THOSE WHO HAVE SCATTERED FROM THE GARDEN AND SETTLED ELSEWHERE. HER FUNCTION AS A CAMERA-DRONE AND HER POSITION AS A MIGRANT ARE BOUND UP IN THE TERMS OF HER ENGINEERING. CAMERAS ARE MOBILIZED FOR NETWORKS OF SURVEILLANCE, DRONES ARE CONSCRIPTED INTO WAR, AND POOR MIGRANTS ARE ENGINEERED BY THE VIOLENCE OF CAPITAL AND COLONIZATION. THE CAMERA’S GAZE, THE WEAPONIZED DRONE, AND THE MIGRANT KEEP MOVING AND YESTERDAY NOT ONLY TRACKS THESE MOVEMENTS BUT ALSO DOCUMENTS THE VIOLENCE THAT TRIGGERS THESE MOTIONS.

TO BE A MIGRANT IS TO ALSO BE WATCHFUL AND BE WATCHED. THE MIGRANT’S GAZE WATCHES FOR THREATS, REACTIONS, FAMILIAR FACES, HOME. THE MIGRANT IS WATCHED FOR THREATS, COMPLIANCE, THE MUTABLE EXTENT OF THEIR DIFFERENCE—WHETHER EXOTIC OR DANGEROUS. PARAISO’S BODY IS BOUND UP IN THE DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF THE DRONE, AS WELL AS THE CAMERA’S SUBDUING GAZE. THE LOGIC OF HER ENGINEERING IS INFORMED BY THE ANXIETIES OF NAVIGATING WHITENESS AS A BROWN BODY. BROWN

BODIES MOVE THROUGH WHITENESS WITH DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL; THEY ARE UNWELCOME AND FOREIGN, BEARING THE WEIGHT NOT OF THEIR HISTORIES BUT OF ALTERITY.

MEET BERLIN’S FILIPINO GRANDMAMA, LOURDES LAREZA MÜLLER. SHE IS AN ARCHIVIST, WORKING IN ONE OF THE BIGGEST LIBRARIES IN EUROPE. HER LIFE HOLDS STORES OF INFORMATION, AN ORGANIC DATABASE. SHE IS A LIGHTHOUSE FOR RARE DOCUMENTS AND VISITING FILIPINOS, BOTH NEEDING SHELTER FROM THE TRAUMA OF TRANSIT. TO SEE FAMILY IN A FOREIGN PLACE, THEIR FACE AND THEIR TONGUE SAY I HAVE SEEN PARADISE, TOO. I HAVE TASTED THE ABUNDANCE THERE, THE MANGOES, THE PINEAPPLES. SAYOTE AND PUSO NG SAGING. SAYOTE AND PUSO NG SAGING. TWO EUROS AND EIGHTEEN EUROS AT THE DEPARTMENT STORE, RESPECTIVELY. TWENTY EUROS FOR PARADISE.

PINEAPPLE IS NOW A LUXURY. ANYTHING THAT SPOILS SO QUICKLY MUST BE. THE ONLY THING SHE CAN KEEP IS THE MEMORY OF ITS TASTE ON HER TONGUE, A MEMORY SHE CARRIED TO BERLIN FROM PARADISE. THE KNOWLEDGE OF FORBIDDEN FRUIT, THE KNOWLEDGE OF BEING FILIPINO IN A COLONY, THE KNOWLEDGE OF IRREVERSIBLE HYBRIDITY, OF MONSTERS, TOUCH ME NOT. THIS IS THE PUNISHMENT OF SOME DISTANT MEMORY OF SIN FROM LONG AGO, A MEMORY THAT MY MOTHER AND HER MOTHERS CARRY IN THEIR BODIES. THESE MEMORIES ARE ENCRYPTED IN OUR BLOOD. THE TASTE OF MANGO ON MY MOTHER’S TONGUE, SHE ASKS

FOR IT IN THE GROCERY STORE. MANGGA, MUHNGO, MAHNGO, MANGO. SHE BEATS HER TONGUE INTO SAYING IT RIGHT, SAYING IT WITHOUT AN ACCENT, WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF PARADISE. I AM SITTING ON A CARPETED FLOOR, WATCHING A DRONE WATCHING LOURDES SAYING WITH HER FACE, I HAVE SEEN PARADISE, TOO.

LOURDES WORK AND LIFE AT THE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN, HER ACT OF WITNESSING HAS LONG BEEN EVIDENT. AS PART OF A VISIBLE MINORITY OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS IN THE CITY, THE RICHNESS OF HER LIFE IS ALSO MARKED BY SOLITUDE AND A NECESSARY WATCHFULNESS. YESTERDAY ARTICULATES THIS SENSE OF ALIENATION WITH SHOTS OF LOURDES AND RIZAL STANDING ALONE, THE FORMER IN HER BACKYARD AND THE LATTER ATOP A HILL, EYES FIXED TOWARDS SOME PLACE WE CANNOT SEE, OR FOLLOWING PARAIISO HERSELF. LOURDES' HOME HAS ACCUMULATED THE MATERIALS OF HER LABOUR, AS A WITNESS, A MEMORY KEEPER, AN ARCHIVIST, AND A FAMILIAR FACE TO HER COMMUNITY OF IMMIGRANTS. HER RECIPROCAL STUDY OF PARAIISO AND OF US, AS VIEWING SUBJECTS, FEELS LIKE SILENT, OPTICAL DIALOGUES.

PARAIISO'S STUDY OF RIZAL'S STATUE—A SOLITARY FIGURE IN THE PASTORAL LANDSCAPE— AND THE WEAVING TOGETHER OF HIS WRITING WITH HER OWN NARRATIVE REFLECTS ON THE LONELINESS OF A TEXT SUCH AS NOLI ME TANGERE, ITSELF A REFLECTION OF COLONIAL SUBJECTIVITY AND THE

COLONIAL CAPITAL, MANILA. HEAVILY INFORMED BY HIS TRAVELS IN EUROPE, PARTICULARLY BERLIN, RIZAL'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF A NATIONAL, FILIPINO IDENTITY IS MARKED BY A DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS— EL DEMONIO DE LAS COMPARACIONES—OF BERLIN POSSESSED BY MANILA AND MANILA POSSESSED BY BERLIN. YESTERDAY'S DOUBLED SCREENS AND PARAIISO'S DOUBLED GAZE OF RIZAL'S STATUE IN DISCORDANT ANGLES GESTURES TOWARDS THIS DISTINCTLY DOUBLED AND FRACTURED STRUCTURE OF THE FILIPINO AND DIASPORIC SUBJECTIVITY. FILIPINO AND DIASPORIC SUBJECTHOOD BECOMES SPLIT AND HAUNTED BY MEMORIES OF ANOTHER PLACE.

PARAIISO'S DOUBLED GAZE SPEAKS TO HER OWN SUBJECTHOOD, AS AN ENGINEERED PRODUCT OF WAR AND SURVEILLANCE, AND AS A BEING THAT CAME FROM THE SAME ROLLING HILLS AS LOURDES AND RIZAL. HER VISIONS OF BERLIN ARE SPLICED BY VISIONS OF THE PHILIPPINES AND ITS PEOPLE. BEING DOUBLED INVOLVES THE LONELY LABOUR OF ALWAYS ADAPTING, ALWAYS KEEPING UP, ALWAYS LOOKING BACK.

OUR BODIES ARE ARCHIVES OF HISTORY, HOLDING THE LIVES OF LOURDES AND RIZAL, OUR FLESH UNFURLING UNDER MEMORY. LOURDES, ARCHIVING TEXT IN THE LIBRARY, ARCHIVING HER LIFE IN THE HOME, ARCHIVING OUR COLLECTIVE HISTORY AS SCATTERED FRAGMENTS. MY MOTHER, SITTING ON THE CARPETED FLOOR OF OUR LIVING ROOM, SURROUNDED

BY THE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT SHE HAS DILIGENTLY KEPT, HER FLESH UNFURLING UNDER MEMORY. JOSE RIZAL, WHO STUDIED OPTOMETRY, DID HE KNOW THAT AN EYE COULD BE A CAMERA, THAT AN EYE COULD FLY, THAT MEMORY AND SIGHT ARE CYBERNETIC SYSTEMS, THAT EYES CAN OBLITERATE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN HUMAN AND MACHINE? MY FATHER TAKES A PHOTO OF ME ON VACATION WITH A DISPOSABLE AND TELLS ME HE WILL REMEMBER THIS MOMENT FOREVER. SO MUCH WEIGHT TO BEAR, BODIES ENCRYPTED WITHIN HISTORY.

WE ENTER A NEW SPACE WITH SUNBURNED FLESH AND REFUSE TO BE ERASED. CYBORG EVE HAS TAUGHT US HOW TO WELD NEW PARTS ONTO OUR BODIES, A FULL-BODY PROSTHETIC AUGMENTED WITH ALIEN PARTS, A LABOURING MACHINE SPROUTED FROM AN ORGANIC RIB. PARAISO, CYBORG EVE, LOURDES LAREZA MÜLLER, JOSE RIZAL—THEY HAVE LEARNED HOW TO RESIST. THEY WERE NOT BORN IN THE GARDEN AND DO NOT KNOW OF A YESTERDAY BEFORE THE FALL. THEY WERE ASSEMBLED FROM A UTILITARIAN DREAM, THE OFFSPRING OF VIOLENT COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM, BUT AS CYBORGS AND A NATION OF BASTARDS, THEY ARE UNFAITHFUL TO THEIR ORIGINS. WE MIGRATE ALONG THE RIVERS OF TIME, SHAPING HISTORY AND CARRYING ITS SEDIMENT WITH US LIKE MEMORIES. AS CYBORGS AND A NATION OF BASTARDS, THERE IS NO DEATH, ONLY REGENERATION.