

Conflict of Perspectives: Politeismo in the Eyes of the Beholder

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BACKGROUND OF THE CONTROVERSY

Mideo Cruz's *Politeismo* is one of the artworks exhibited in the main gallery of Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in time with the nation's celebration of Dr. Jose Rizal's 150th birthday. With the theme "Kulo", a group of artists largely mainly coming from the University of Santo Tomas launched an exhibit last June 17, 2011. The exhibit was supposed to end until August 21, 2011.

Promptly after its launch, a TV network featured the exhibit, and gave much attention to particularly the work of Mideo Cruz. Consequently, its stirred different reactions from various sectors and branded Mideo's work as sacrilegious, blasphemous and malicious. Not for long, different broadsheets featured the news in headline.

August 2, 2011 a group of UST alumni named St. Thomas More Society, and some members of Pro-Life Philippines went to visit CCP and threatened the organizers and administrators to shut the exhibit down or their group will file a case against them.

August 4, 2011 the organizers and directors of CCP received threats and hate mails – threatening that CCP will be burnt down if it will not close the exhibit. A certain Manny Andrada even went as far as vandalizing the installation, and threatened Mideo of making him eat the wooden penis he has placed on Jesus' image.

August 5, a forum (Dakdakan) was called by the CCP administration to discuss the issue on "freedom of expression" versus "religious sensibilities", between the reactors from the public and the organizers and administrators of CCP.

August 9, due to the many threats received by organizers and administrators of CCP, the officials of CCP decided to close the exhibit. And on August 11, Karen Flores, resigned from her post as head of Visual Arts department of CCP.

August 16, a Senate hearing was conducted. The CCP admin and organizers were summoned to attend it together with those who became staunch enemies of the Mideo Cruz's installation as well as those who support the artist and the CCP organizers. Several authorities in the field of art were also invited to enlighten the Senate investigating committee. After hearing the different sides, *Politeismo* was declared an art, and Mideo Cruz's defence of *freedom of speech* was upheld.

THE CONTEXT OF MIDEO CRUZ AND POLITEISMO



Politeismo or translated as many-gods (or many beliefs in many deities), is actually a three-wall canvass installation entirely covered with various images and papers — calendars, bus tickets, old school certificates, photographs, political posters, postcards, advertisements and other printed materials. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are not the only images featured, but also the portraits of Robert Jaworski endorsing Dr. J. Rubbing alcohol; Alma Concepcion smiling over Champion cigarettes; two Thai actors selling Coca-cola, and US President Barack Obama. (Diaz, 2011)

Politeismo is a wall collage; the manner was practically inspired by what we see in common houses where people put pictures of celebrities, politicians, etc. on the wall of their houses.

The Relic (cross), originally titled relic of my nation, done in 2004, (is) the making of the Filipinos after several layers of colonization. Partly inspired by how we got the name of the country in paradigm to the monarchical trend of collecting religious relics.

Poon (Christ the king), deconstructing the sacredness and reconstructing the icon with parallel meaning – Coca cola and mickey mouse as epitome of neo liberalism.

Most of the outcry has been about the phallic object placed on the works. Phalluses have been objects of devotion in many cultures; they use them as amulets, symbolic statues, etc. They might be a symbol of power and patriarchy. (Keng, 2011)

According to Mideo his art intends to stir debate and reflection to his viewers, instead of revulsion, as *Politeismo* showed pictures of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary alongside condoms; plastic piggy banks enclosed in a glass case where statues are normally enshrined in churches; crucifixes and rosaries hanged side by side with wooden phalluses. As he pointed out,

I wanted to provoke people into thinking. I titled my work 'Politeismo' which loosely translates into 'many beliefs' or 'many deities.' Throughout history, humanity has grown to create new gods and these are not always religious figures but concepts and objects. Some have taken to worshipping money; some see politicians as godsend. People create idols and these idols whether or not they're deserving of idolatry or worship affect our lives and how we function and see the world. (Silverio, 2011)

Mideo Cruz, through his Politeismo, believes that Filipinos through time have unconsciously (or consciously), created manifold expressions of idolatrous worship as manifested in his adoration not of religious figures but of money in the form of consumerism; his high esteem for politicians whom he deemed as godsend; his fanaticism to showbiz personalities, and the like. Mideo believes that the different “gods” Filipinos “worship” these days affect his perception of reality and his functionality as a person.

Mideo Cruz through his Politeismo had shown what is actually the sacred or endearing to most Filipinos nowadays. He presented this in the said art by his employment of various sacred articles, i.e. rosaries, sacred Christian portraits and their likes commonly revered by Filipino Catholics. He combined and distorted these with profane images like wooden male phalluses, condoms, portrait cut-outs from magazine ads and old calendars, etc. simulating a wall décor usually found from poor Filipino households. Undoubtedly, Mideo distorted such images Filipinos hold dear, though, not primarily to desecrate but to send out a message; to open the eyes of the people to what seemed subliminal.

When Mideo represented what he observes from many poor Filipino homes, i.e., their wall decorations and altars, through his Politeismo, he created a mirror for his audience; a slice of reality Filipinos valued these days. He showed here new forms of gods Filipinos had installed in their lives – the deification of fame, power and influence, superiority of the male gender, and consumerism. These new gods, for Mideo, unconsciously became the new source of comfort and refuge to most Filipinos trying to compensate the emptiness inside. Such that when socio-cultural alienation becomes unbearable, these new forms of gods serve as new opium for their agonizing souls. This is what Mideo wants to bring about through his Politeismo.

Deducing from this, one could therefore say that Mideo did not intentionally deface the image of Jesus (or any sacred article) by his Politeismo, more than he mocked the Filipino public in their new kind of religiosity now embraced. Or, one could also say that Mideo pounced on the way common Filipinos espoused religion in their lives. In short, Mideo through his Politeismo offered a critique of a religion that is practiced and lived in people's lives.

In a different light, Mideo is said to be informed in cultural history of religious iconography. Unknown to many, Mideo Cruz' *Politeismo* had been exhibited to many galleries and universities, both local and international. Ateneo de Manila University had even awarded him in the Ateneo Art Awards in 2007. Also, *Politeismo* had already been exhibited internationally such as in the USA, Italy, and Switzerland prior to the CCP controversy.

Politeismo, however, recognized in different art galleries, and received awards, many Filipinos became its critique. The following are reactions from prominent individuals who critiqued the work.

THE REACTIONS OF THE CRITIQUES OF POLITEISMO

Retired Archbishop Oscar Cruz judges the work and the artist from the lens of ethics (Christian). He judges the work as immoral, done in bad taste and the artist's view (of reality) as pathological. *"It is a consummate sacrilege. It is sick and sickening and radically insensitive to natural decency, offensive to ethical standards and hideous to moral norms"*, he said. (Diaz, 2011)

While the then Archbishop of Manila Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales remarked, *"Those who are like that, I don't know what he learned from his parents, from his school, from his friends. It's a complete betrayal of what is right and the knowledge of what is wrong."* (Tubeza, 2011)

"Art should enhance life... Freedom of expression has a limit because that freedom involves our duty to respect the stand, the opinion and the culture of others. Who will be happy if an artist plays and desecrates the culture and holiness of faith of a religion? I don't know but if they do that to Muslims, will our Muslim brothers be happy? Freedom of expression has a corresponding responsibility. It should not be abused." Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo said. (Tubeza, 2011)

The self-claimed connoisseur of art, the former first lady who inaugurated the Cultural Center, Rep. Imelda Marcos, remarked, *"After seeing the exhibit I was really shocked because it was not only ugly, it was not true, it was not at all beautiful because there were statues and pictures of saints and Christ with horns and with his penis up and it was really a desecration of a spiritual symbol for Catholics."* (Balana, 2011)

Mrs. Marcos who was known for her usual remark – the good, the beautiful and the truth, expressed once again her famous line only this time as criticism. She noticed the maligning made to the sacred images, particularly observing the piercing (power) character of horns and penises.

In his speech, Cong. Bagatsing, though was not able to see the exhibit said, *"Where in the world can you see the images of Jesus*

Christ with a penis? This is sacrilegious. It is very obscene exhibit. I don't think they can call it art. There is a difference between art and insanity. Only a sick mind can do this. Only a devil can think of that." Bagatsing filed a resolution that called on the CCP board to resign for allowing "the distasteful and sacrilegious" exhibit. (Balana, 2011)

Some senators expressed the need to conduct a Senate inquiry on the matter. At least three of them: Sotto, Enrile and Estrada, called for the resignation of all CCP officials. Senator Tito Sotto threatened the CCP administrators of denying their funding. "*Kung ganito din naman, as majority floor leader I will make sure that the CCP will cease to exist in the General Appropriations Act*". "*Can you do this image to Mohammad? Can this be done to the image of Buddha? Neither should it be done to the image of Jesus,*" he said. (Calonzo, 2011)

Pres. Noynoy Aquino III's comment clarified the duty of CCP administrators' and organizers' to exhibit forms of art that are palatable to the public or at least useful. He said, "*85 percent of Filipinos were Christians and that CCP is being funded by taxpayers. Thus, it should be "of service" to the people. I think I made myself clear to them. You have rights but when you already trample on the rights of others, there's already something wrong.*" (Relos, 2011) He, likewise, reminded the right interpretation of "freedom of expression" as in the case when religious belief is side-swept.

F. Sionil Jose, an acclaimed national artist exclaimed, "*The exhibit should not have been shown at the CCP. If submitted to my old gallery, I would have rejected it. It is not — I repeat — it is not art!*" "*How I wish our artists would stop claiming freedom of expression all the time that they are criticized. To me freedom of expression is not involved with the CCP exhibit. Artistic sensibility and rigid critical values are the norm and they should prevail if our culture is to develop.*" (Jose, 2011) He criticized the work of Mideo Cruz not as a work of art, while reminding him that freedom of expression has to be subordinated by receptivity and ideals for cultural development.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CRITIQUES

Analysing the reactions of those who criticize Politeismo and Mideo, one could sense from their statements a common and glaring ground that made them judge the work and its artist to be sacrilegious, offensive, immoral, and irresponsible. In other words, the judgments made by the critics must have come from a particular perspective or vantage point. Considering the reactions above mentioned, one could infer that the critics are judging from the classical worldview.

The characteristic of this worldview, among many others, that needs to be highlighted for this analysis, is its dualistic treatment of reality.

Accordingly, there is a split between what were regarded as sacred and what were profane. As there is this split, it regards concerns of the flesh, the temporal and the market place as profane, of this world; while those concerns of the church, religion and the after-life as sacred, of the spiritual and the ideal. The classical worldview, likewise, regards the spiritual (i.e., the activities of the church or religion and concerns of the after-life) as more essential, ideal and sometimes treated as the only real. (Mesa, 1995)

Take for instance, the image of Jesus when it was depicted in the work of art during the Medieval times, his divine characteristics more than his human, temporal traits were given much attention. This sacrosanct stature of Jesus could easily be noticed as projections of Jesus, likewise, of Mary and the saints were portrayed in what seems to be "inhuman form", i.e., spirit-like. Paintings and sculptures presented them, during this time, dressed in robes where contours of their bodies were totally fashioned to be inconceivable, suggesting some sort that these personas were body-less beneath their clothes. (Zane Publishing, Inc., 1994-1996) Hagiographies portraying the supernatural life of the saints were also numerous this time.

These depictions of personas as body-less figures, together with the saints' hagiographies, mirror the value-system of the time. In other words, these artworks mark the norm and mores of the people in this time. No wonder the theological belief that God is just appearing to be human in Jesus (Docetism) could only appear or known this time (Another evidence of dualism in the classical worldview).

If we then view Politeismo from the classical perspective, vehement reactions such as those of the critiques, would not be surprising when they say: "*Mideo's art (Politeismo) is offensive to the ethical standards, hideous to the moral norm; sick and sickening and insensitive to the natural decency; a complete betrayal of what is right and the knowledge of what is wrong; a desecration of the Catholic spiritual symbolism; does not speak of truth, goodness and beautiful; not an art, is insanity; (work of) a sick mind and a devil's work; disrespectful to one's stand, opinion or religious belief*". After all, they have seen (or known) the installation to have wooden phalluses placed in the face (image) of Jesus, or rosaries were hung on those wooden penises, or the statue of Christ the King re-figured with the nose and ears of Mickey Mouse, or condoms placed inside a glass-case where usually sacred statues were found, et.al.

Such image of Politeismo polarized the way Catholic Filipinos portray Jesus. For instance the popularly accepted portraits of Jesus: the Hesus Nazareno, the Sto. Nino, and the Last Supper. Undeniably, these portraits of Jesus project his divine character. These also speak of the value system Filipinos hold dear, those sacred to him. To illustrate, the portrait of Hesus Nazareno, for most Filipinos, would be understood as the Jesus who sacrificed and offered himself in behalf of the sinners of the world. While

this may be obvious, this model also describes the Filipino understanding of love as being “pa-martir”, one-way (unreciprocated) and entails sacrificing, characteristics of what Filipinos called *kundiman*-orientation. Another example would be the Sto. Nino, this projects the image of Jesus being once an innocent kid, who was ever loving, obedient, and family-centered. This depiction is a favourite among Filipinos as this image projects the typical value of family-centeredness, and big family size. And, of course, the image of the Last Supper of Jesus in the version of Leonardo Da Vinci, projects the Filipino valuation of fellowship through a meal. (Wostyn, 2004)

These characterizations of the Filipino Jesus through Hesus Nazareno, Sto. Nino, and the Last Supper definitely polarized what Mideo had projected and communicated in *Politeismo*. This must be the context of those who found the art installation unacceptable and scandalous to the Christian faith and Filipino value-system. Clearly, if the classical worldview was at work in the perspective of critiques, Mideo’s *Politeismo* would really be an object of scorn.

STATEMENTS FROM SOME SUPPORTERS OF POLITEISMO

The following are some declarations of the supporters of *Politeismo* and the CCP organizers:

“The latest pronouncement of the CCP Board sets a bad precedent. Our right to freely express ourselves were curtailed. I am shocked and appalled by how our civil liberties were exploited to satiate the sensibilities of a raucous mob. In effect, majority of the participants’ ideas and artistic expressions were neglected and compromised by this decision.” A remark from J. Pacena II, Curator of “Kulo” exhibit in CCP. (Relos, 2011)

“Kaya maaasahan natin sa mga susunod na okasyon na magkakaroon ng paggamit ng sining upang ipakita ang pagsalungat ng mga artista o ng isang artista sa umiiral na kalagayan sa lipunan, maaasahan natin na ang mga obispo, ang mga pinunong mga reaksyonaryong artista, mga tagapagmasid sa lipunan, ay paulit-ulit na maghaharap ng pagtutol tungkol sa ginagawa para sa sining.” A National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera commenting on the negative reactions of the Catholic hierarchy, and conservative public. (Relos, 2011)

Emily Abrera, the chairman of Cultural Center of the Philippines, on the other hand, expressed her disappointment particularly to media where she felt had been partly responsible in creating havoc and animosity from conservative Catholics.

I have tried to analyse the forces at work today versus the social climate from 2002-2007 when this particular work of Mideo apparently did the rounds in UP and Ateneo, without raising a whisper from the hundreds

of young folk who must have visited the exhibits then. It also managed an entire month at the CCP Main gallery in relative peace, before a TV station decided to feature not the full 32-artist "Kulo" exhibit, not even Mideo Cruz's installation as a whole, but selected bits of it, just the special offensive parts, introduced with a reference to the RH Bill. Well, the program achieved its goal: a controversy! And so the protagonists were ranged against each other, Art on one corner and religion on another, Cruz versus Cruz. (Abrera, 2011)

CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUPPORTERS OF MIDEO

The supporters of Mideo, if we analyse their statements, would actually be in their defence not directly of Politeismo but of their position as artists, that is, that artists should freely and creatively be able to express themselves without censorship from any authority. This trait of being free and creative as an artist makes possible for them show life and its makings reflected in their work.

However, this freedom of expression entails with it responsibility. As the artists are initially free to do what they please, they, however, cannot escape the judging eyes of those who would view their work afterwards. Thus, the artists' freedom to express themselves is constrained by socio-cultural fore-structures that they need to satisfy. These are norms, mores, likewise, institutions that protect and promote such values, e.g., Church, State, Academes, etc. Likewise, their work remains incomplete unless it would be received by people.

The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. (Duchamp, 1957)

Beauty Matters in Art

The work of Mideo Cruz, *Politeismo* has brought different concerns too other than the concern how the artwork was received by the public, or the right of the artist which he has to assert. The debate whether beauty still matters in works of art is one of them.

In the past (1750-1930s), art in forms of music, literature, painting, sculpture, and even architecture had only one purpose – to reflect the beautiful. The sole purpose of the artists therefore is to create or re-create what is pleasing to the eyes. (Scruton, 2009) The artists' task was to re-create either the reality of life in a consoling manner, i.e., to show the healing touch that beauty brings, or simply to simulate the natural beauty found in their subjects, as for instance, in people and their everyday life, or in people's relationship with their environment; or in some occasions, artists would show their subject's deepest aspirations. (Collings, 2004)

As art is consoling, on the one hand, in the sense that however ugly, chaotic or depressing reality is, art would always offer that distinctive power and assurance to appease the suffering human spirit. On the other hand, art also suggests a sort of escape. A good example of this was the Impressionists' work of art. The Impressionists mimic the panacea-tic appeal of Mother Nature. The Impressionists bring the beautiful in their work and the healing (or maybe escaping) effects of it. (ibid.)

Since the artist communicates the beautiful, the artist labours in the premise that his artwork is communicable, where he can share it to others. Proofs of the same can be found when we find the artworks (sketches) of children not just wonderful but also recognizable. They simulate the things they see around them. Appreciation of their work truly proves that artworks are not just appreciated and recognized, but primarily communicated. (Scruton, 2009)

Saying this, the artists therefore are responsible in communicating what is beautiful in their art. They do not just produce a piece of work just for artistic expression, but also put in canvas what they perceive to be beautiful.

Because the artists communicate through their artwork, they do not only show what is in reality, but also introduces the beauty in reality. They bring the sacred amidst the profane or the spiritual in the material. A philosopher once said, "When all religions lose its touch of the sacred, art would fill it up." (Nietzsche 1878/2004: 150) This is the reason why artworks are not commercialized and should not be (though this is not the case nowadays) because for one, artists are not just employing materials or techniques from the usual, nor base their artwork from the ordinary, but conceptualize their *obrain* a very "artistic way". This is the reason why not everyone who can do a craft be declared immediately an artist. Put in another way, not all created can be considered an *obra maestra*. As artists touch the divine in their art, they also impart spiritual gifts to others. Their patrons affirm this spirituality through appreciation of their work, as people are moved.

In our present time where most people measure the worth of things by their usage more than beauty, people would just easily dispose things or dispense their cathexis (attachment) to them when they lose their usefulness. It is different when it comes to beauty. Artists display not the usefulness of their artwork but the aesthetic value they carry. In a way the artists produce something "useless". (Scruton, 2009) Those who adhere to art, generally, would find the sustaining affection of the beautiful because however the passage of time makes the artwork useless or *passé*, it just makes it classic. Artworks are not judge by their value in

purpose (materiality) but in their aesthetic worth (spirituality). This is why beauty truly matters in art.

Saying all of this, are we to say now that art only matters if it is beautiful?

Beyond Beauty, the Critical Dimension of Art

In our modern times, with the fast-paced, spontaneous, and random movement in our society, the artist being immersed to the different facets of existence, questions the structures and ways of living of people and the society at large. One art movement that had made itself to the limelight is the Dada. An overview [Credit: Courtesy of Hannah Hoch]:

Dada is a nihilistic movement in the arts that flourished primarily in Zürich, Switzerland; New York City; Berlin, Cologne, and Hannover, Germany; and Paris in the early 20th century.

Several explanations have been given by various members of the movement as to how it received its name. According to the most widely accepted account, the name was adopted at Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, during one of the meetings held in 1916 by a group of young artists and war resisters that included Jean Arp, Richard Hülsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Emmy Hennings. When a paper knife inserted into a French-German dictionary pointed to the French word dada ("hobby-horse"), it was seized upon by the group as appropriate for their anti-aesthetic creations and protest activities, which were engendered by disgust for bourgeois values and despair over World War I. Dada did not constitute an actual artistic style, but its proponents favoured group collaboration, spontaneity, and chance. In the desire to reject traditional modes of artistic creation, many Dadaists worked in collage, photomontage, and found-object construction ("ready-made"), rather than in painting and sculpture. (Britannica, 2012)

The Dada Movement did not just criticize the way society would make up life, but also how the classical artists had depicted and reinforced such way of life in their art. The Dada, in their criticism of what they observed in life, defied the standards of the conventional. This they did by employing the repulsive, obnoxious and even violent depictions of reality in their art. For them, it is by this that they had portrayed the genuine picture of life.

While the Dada seemed to be the most daring affront to the dream-like world of classical visual arts, the avant-garde works of Gustave Courbet, Edward Manet, Claude Monet, and Paul Cezanne,

better known as the early Impressionist Movement, were the very first visual artists who used their work for political critiquing. (Collings, 2004)

While the lives and works of these geniuses could be an interesting study also to look upon, there was a time in their lives that their works were also regarded as anomalous and even blasphemous during the earlier tradition of visual arts. The group beginning with Courbet, had not only introduced a totally unconventional style and technique in his paintings (i.e. rough, blurry suggesting a movement, brightly-coloured, and even sometimes physically illogical and narcissistic), but had also shaken the “establishment” and standards that define art (or for that matter academic beautiful art). We have to understand here also that the establishment, which determines (censors) what can belong to “The Art Salon” (Académie des Beaux-Arts) and what cannot, was regulated by the French monarchy. “Acceptable art” must pass the scrutiny of the powerful, influential and bourgeois ruling class. The Impressionists Courbet and Manet had used their creations as political instrument to attack and critique the existing system run by the elites. This was the reason why Courbet, for instance, created gigantic paintings (for the reason that he was also fighting a big institution), displayed not in “controlled” Art Salon, but in humbled, tent-like gallery erected close to it. He, likewise, defied the conventional pattern of artistry, as he employed the rural-like people and the impoverished (e.g. prostitutes) as his central subjects, instead of the aristocrats who were the usual subjects if not the usual model for their pieces. His reason for all of these was to match and challenge the “big establishments”, and there is no other in power to match the ruling class but the artists. Obviously, the Impressionists did not just introduce a new form and style in art, but also something not known before – art as tool (political) of critique. (Collings, 2004)

More developments in art, both in form and reason for their creation, emerged until the present. One of these is Conceptualism.

On a strict historical reading, the expression ‘conceptual art’ refers to the artistic movement that reached its pinnacle between 1966 and 1972 (Lippard 1973)... Most importantly, perhaps, conceptual art sought to overcome a backdrop against which art’s principal aim is to produce something beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. Art, early conceptual artists held, is redundant if it does not make us think. Yet

most artistic institutions are not conducive to reflection and continue to promote a consumerist conception of art and artists based on beauty and technical skill and this, conceptual artists in the mid-1960s to the early 1970s agreed, must be denounced. The job of conceptual artists is instead to encourage a revisionary understanding of art, artist, and artistic experience. (Italics mine)(Schellekens, 2009)

As this style of art gives much value on the meaning the artist wants to convey more than the aesthetic value it displays, art can be used as a critical statement where the artist would find it suitable. A good example of this is Marcel Duchamp, like Courbet who attacked the bourgeois ruling class of his time. Duchamp critiqued the standards of classical artistry also. Duchamp challenged conventional thought about artistic processes and art marketing, not so much by writing, but through subversive actions such as dubbing a urinal an art and naming it Fountain. (Schellekens, 2009)

Gianni Vattimo (2008) taking the perspective of Bertold Brecht's idea of "epic theatre" stated,

The task of art is not to represent the truth of the world but, rather, to take a stance in the name of a project of transformation. Truth is what changes us, what is happening in the life of the single individual and in that of society at large without leaving things intact as they were – through the denial of catharsis as the meaning of artwork." "It may be indispensable to take cognizance of the order or disorder of the world in order to undertake its transformation, but truth lies in this transformation rather than in the representation of existence as it is – assuming that such an undertaking would be possible for someone living inside the specific order.

Contemporary modern artists, as afore mentioned, seem not just concern in creating works of art that mimic that which is beautiful but they are also committed to reveal the gnawing and painful realities and even absurdities of life. This does not mean however, that artists are not any more concerned with beauty, only this time beauty is not the primary motive of the artists in creating their work. Nevertheless, the artists' product would still be extraordinary, and it is only them who can make such possibility.

Mideo and his Politeismo are now better understood and justified if we place both his motive and the purpose of his work from the exposition above.

PERSPECTIVISM: Assessing Mideo Cruz's Politeismo

Isagani Cruz in his column on Philippine Daily Inquirer commented that what *Politeismo* failed to do is to bring out the artist's true intention. (Cruz, Politeismo is art, not Art, 2011)

Mulling on the controversy of Mideo Cruz's Politeismo, if Isagani Cruz was right, that Mideo failed to communicate his art to his audience; it necessitates us to ask, "What could be the reason for the failure?"

In order to understand where the failure of Politeismo was coming from in the reception-interpretation process, we have to consider the dual tension existing between receiving the presence of the object (Politeismo) and the power of determining/ signifying the meaning of it. (Dagmang, 2013) The capacity (power of reflection) and freewill of the recipient to receive the message "appropriately" has to be well-thought-out. Again, the words of Duchamp make sense,

The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. (Duchamp, 1957)

However, interpretations and judgments can only be made possible if they were made from one's seeing and understanding. Such that there could be no understanding, unless it was "an understanding from"; no seeing unless it was "a seeing of something from", and there could be no evaluation unless it was "an evaluation from".

Thus, the audience (of Politeismo) have to realize that their knowledge (judgment) of the object is predefined by their culture or by other people who came before them and had the privilege of defining, in the past, the meaning of things today. (Dagmang, 2013) Naturally, humans as historical beings would always come from previous experience either from personal manner, or from existing culture the community where he belongs or comes from – a prejudice. (Gadamer, 1975, 245) In the same light, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur understands perspective as part of the fundamental constitution of being human. His philosophical anthropology shows the inherent character of perspectival limitation and mediation in perception, reflection, and action, a "trap" that keeps a person from infinity. (Dagmang, 2013)

If this is the mechanism of perspective, then we can deduce that those critics of Politeismo came from a delimited, finite, partial stance

and vantage point. In the same light, vantage points while consequence of our choice, product of our freedom, are also proofs of our situatedness from particular culture and milieu (Dagmang, 2013). Merleau-Ponty (1989a:3) confirms the primacy of lived experience by saying that the “perceiving mind is an incarnated mind”.

Assessing therefore the source of controversy, in the reception-interpretation of Politeismo, the determining power of the recipient, must be the cause for spawning the controversy. To claim *Politeismo* to be nothing good, nothing true and nothing beautiful (to offer) would prompt us to ponder further, “In what standard did the critiques come from to gauge Politeismo?”

It is imperative in this point that we have to dwell on the dynamics of perceptiveness. According to Dagmang (2013), it is considered as receptivity or passivity where cognitive limitation lies. In Paul Ricœur’s (1986, 23) own words:

This peculiar finitude is identified with the notion of point of view or perspective...it belongs to the essence of perception to be inadequate, to the essence of this inadequacy to refer back to the one-sided character of perception, and to the essence of the one-sidedness of the thing’s profiles to refer back to the otherness of the body’s initial positions from where the thing appears. The fact that the free mobility of my body discloses this law of essence to me does not make the law unnecessary. It is precisely necessary that motor spontaneity originate from a zero origin. To perceive from here is the finitude of perceiving something. The point of view is the ineluctable initial narrowness of my openness to the world.

Furthermore, we have to take note also that human projects pass the preliminary stages of determinations of the will through motivations, which precisely are fired by affectivity/passions. (Dagmang, 2013) As Paul Ricœur (1986, 52) said:

It is no longer the sensory receptivity of seeing and hearing, but the specific receptivity which signifies that I do not create my projects radically from nothing, no more than I produce my objects through creative intuition. I posit actions only by letting myself be influenced by motives.... A human freedom is one that advances by means of motivated projects.

If we apply these considerations to the problem (*Politeismo*), we cannot but ask for the motive of Mideo for creating the installation. As discussed above, *Politeismo*, for Mideo, “is a recreation of what is commonly seen from the walls and altars in the homes of most Filipino poor.” It was through *Politeismo* that Mideo wanted the Filipino public to realize what he believes to be the unconscious, new forms of gods

Filipinos adored. In other words, as an artist he critiques what he personally observes to be what Filipinos regard as sources of comfort and meaning in life, and this he made through Politeismo.

This critical purpose for making art is not new in the history of the arts, as discussed, likewise, above. However, when the viewers of the said artworks see what was displayed, they too do not just view the said work cognitively, at face value, but also affectively. The audience for sure intends to appreciate, or at least, understand the meaning the art was saying. They view it in the eyes of expectation. This intentionality of desire is what Ricoeur calls its clarity of orientation and election, a “drive toward.” However, this intentionality brings with it an opacity that tends to close other views that may speak to me (them). When one is stuck in the feeling of desire and not in the openness, finitude in perspective is displayed. This happens when the “total and undivided experience of my body...is no longer traversed by all its intentions toward the world but turned back into itself, no longer a mediator but feeling itself. (Dagmang, 2013) Ricoeur calls this, “Coenesthesia” (1986, 54).

There is, however, no problem with having a limited perspective of things; this is a trait of being human. The problem, however, arises when we fail to recognize that this limitation that we have is a product of our cultural upbringing, physical finitude-ness, and intentionality, leading us even to do things influenced by the limitedness of our perspectives. Likewise, there is no question of letting go of our finite perspective, if it means trying to understand the perspectives of others, or at least being sensitive to them. (Dagmang, 2013) Had this been the case, Mideo’s Politeismo was treated as how the author intended it to be. On the other hand, had Mideo been sensitive as well to the cultural mindset of the Filipino public, he could have been more considerate as to how he will deliver his message, thru Politeismo – gentler maybe.

CONCLUSION

This exposition on Mideo Cruz’s Politeismo had shown the differing positions and perspectives of those who made themselves be heard in the controversy. First, was the position of the critiques (conservative Catholics, clerical and lay), who found Politeismo offensive and sacrilegious. The study had provided the proper contextualization (background) to understand where (social milieu) the critiques are coming from. Basing from the judgments they had made, one could trace back the cultural influence of the classical worldview to be the likely basis of their perspective and judgment.

Second, was the position of those artists and non-artists, who conveyed their support to Mideo, asserting that the work of artists

should be freely expressed. This position of the artist and those who convey this same view polarized their stance against those critiques who view and lived life differently, i.e., in stability, in conservatism. The different purposes of art were also discussed, with a special attention made to the purpose of art as conveyor of beauty and the tool for politics (the critical purpose of art).

And the third position was that of Mideo Cruz who was motivated to stir a message through his Politeismo, a quality of a modern day (visual) artist, though was not successful in communicating well his intention. However, he had been true to his calling, as artists in the past and present, both local and international, had used their artworks, beyond aesthetics, to critique society and its values.

The principle of Perspectivism was employed to understand the dynamics of reception-interpretation process. And it was from this view that the perspectives and positions of each opposing views, on the installation Politeismo, were understood in the better light. But like any opposing views, a fusion of horizon can be met, a genuine dialogue can take place, that is, if and only if, the beholders of each views would be willing to suspend their judgments against each other and stand on the position where the other sees.

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